

THE SCARLET
PIMPERNEL
Baroness Orczy



THE
SCARLET
PIMPERNEL
CLARKE

Introduction and Notes by David J. Gifford

Baroness Orczy

Scarlet Pimpernel Vol 6

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Forward

By the Baroness Orczy

My dear John Blakeney,

It is with great interest that I have read your book which, as you tell me, purports to be a biography of Sir Percy Blakeney known as the Scarlet Pimpernel.

You do not tell me if you claim to be an actual descendant of the famous Sir Percy, but you certainly seem to have collected a great deal of information, not only about him, but also about his ancestors: you clearly trace his descent from the first Sir Percy to the English Blakes and from them to the Scarlet Pimpernel, the subject of this memoir. As far as I can judge, your deductions are pretty accurate.

My own searchings after Sir Percy and his doings end with the French Revolution, the period of his most romantic exploits: the subsequent transformation of his yacht, *The Daydream*, into a privateer corvette, his acquaintance with Lord Nelson and his seafaring adventures during the Napoleonic wars come as news to me, but I can quite well understand that with his adventurous disposition, he found the enforced calm after the end of the Terror irksome and turned his attention and unfailing energy into a new channel. His destroying the two temporarily abandoned French frigates, single-handed, by a stratagem which seems almost miraculous but which is quite feasible, is perfectly consistent with his character and methods.

I feel a certain degree of regret that I did not follow Sir Percy's career after the end of the Terror, but I abandoned him and the story of his doings after the end of the French Revolution, thinking that the fall of Robespierre and the establishment of the Consulate was the

natural conclusion of his activities.

I certainly feel a sense of gratitude to you for your persevering research into the antecedents of Sir Percy Blakeney, and also into his subsequent adventures, for you have certainly succeeded in filling up many gaps in the life history of that most remarkable man. Of course, I cannot vouch for the authenticity or accuracy of your information anent these adventures, but they seem to me to be quite consistent with the many fragments of his life history already known to me.

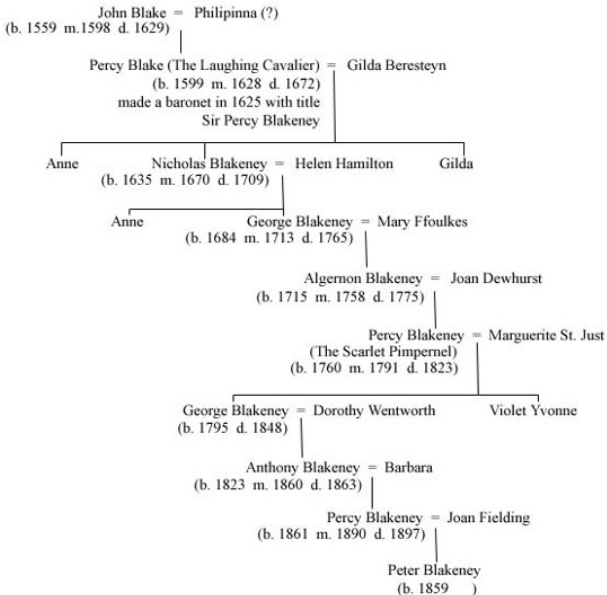
In any case, please accept my best thanks for this most interesting biography of my favorite hero of romance.

Yours v. sincerely,

Emmuska Orczy

Monte Carlo.

Blakeney Family Tree



Introduction ~ 1559-1766

Chapter One ~ The Laughing Cavalier

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Chapter One ~ The Laughing Cavalier

I

The first pages of this man's book of life, whose name is chronicled in history in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, are almost blank. Whence he came, who was his sire, only he and a poor artist know, and they kept their secret for over thirty years. There is his portrait in the Wallace Collection in London, but from it nothing can be guessed. Records are scant and documents not always reliable. Gaps can only be bridged over by stray reminiscences, a promissory note yellow with age, a faded doublet in an old chest, a rusty sword hanging over a mirror. But in Haarlem, where he undoubtedly lived, the Grootemarkt had heard his spurs clanking on the cobbles, the Dam Straat had listened to his mighty laugh, the waters of the Spaarne had shuddered at his furious oaths and the Fishmarkt had echoed to the clash of his sword.

The burghers of Haarlem spoke of him under the nickname of Diogenes, there being a blessing and a warm welcome for the nameless adventurer wherever he should happen to be. And the name was a fitting one; for Diogenes, when some adventure had filled his purse, would dispense philosophy and wine with equal largesse. Unfortunately, those happy occasions were rare. The open air was his usual bedroom and the hedgerows his dining-table. During those early years the only certainty is his friendship with Frans Hals: his only settled occupation we know anything about is that of artist's model. Between two mad escapades or when in hiding from revengeful pursuit, Diogenes found food and shelter in the artist's attic until it was safe enough for him to venture forth again in quest of money or adventure.

That this man -- Diogenes, the Laughing Cavalier, call him what you

will -- was a vagabond, no one could deny; that he sold his sword to the highest bidder, everybody could condone; that he drank and swore and swaggered and discoursed, no one cared; that he was a very gallant gentleman, everyone must affirm. But wherever the steps of Destiny led this soldier of fortune, whether it was into a dungeon or a beggar's hovel, or into a palace or the council chamber of kings, a laugh reverberates at his passing.

II

From the picture by Frans Hals, his features are familiar to the world. Change the hat for a powdered wig; replace the doublet with a satin coat and the ruff for a filmy neck-tie; then raze the arrogant moustache and you have the portrait of the Scarlet Pimpernel, every feature faithfully reproduced and, on comparison with the painting by Gainsborough of Sir Percy Blakeney, the two men might be twin brothers. The ancestry is patent to all eyes. Both were men of exceptional personality, possessing exceptional characteristics which their friends pronounced sublime and their detractors arrogant, possessing qualities which called forth the devotion of friends and the rancor of enemies. There is no doubt but that the Laughing Cavalier--Diogenes--possessed the same sunny disposition, the same careless insouciance, the same infectious laughter and adventurous spirit which is to be observed, transmitted to his descendants in the personality of the Scarlet Pimpernel himself.

These are proofs enough for those who admire and love Sir Percy Blakeney. The romantic events of the lives of the two men seem to be too parallel to admit of mere coincidence; the personalities are too akin not to be based on heredity. But for the biographer, the gap of nearly two hundred years must be accounted for, and when the search for evidence began, the connecting links were piled one on top of the other, turning doubt into certitude. The Dutch vagabond

was seen to be the great-great-grandfather of the English gentleman in direct line from father to son without break or bar sinister. Nor is there the slightest inconsistency in the known chronicles of the family fortunes to make one pause or consider whether the facts and documents are specious enough to be believed.

Clotho had drawn the thread of this man's life from the same distaff as that of John Blake of Blakeney, in the county of Sussex, Diogenes' father, and this is the thread which joins the vagabond who swaggered and fought in Holland in 1625 to the dandy who adventured in France in 1792.

Chapter Two ~ Blake of Blakeney

I

In England, the religious revolution had become an accomplished fact. The rebellion of the earls had failed -- Norfolk and Howard had been beheaded. A new social system had been happily secured. The virgin Elizabeth -- against whom the Pope had hurled his Bull of illegitimacy -- was proclaimed Queen. The new times -- that of Marlowe and Shakespeare, of Bacon and Drake -- had raised England to a golden age; an age of mystery, of art and horrible brutality, of fervent piety and abnormal lust. Spain was humbled to the dust and Rome crushed to powder. And over all towered that flamboyant, grotesque, marvelous woman, Elizabeth.

To have lived during those exciting years must have been a great privilege. Fame and fortune were easily wooed and won by any man with sufficient contempt of life and enough impudence to carve out his own fortune. Noble birth could not fail to attract recognition in high places, a cunning brain did not lack opportunities of furthering intrigue, a handsome face had no need to beg for fair favours. It is therefore strange and somewhat anomalous to find a man endowed with all these attributes and yet practically unknown to history, a man who cared neither for the pomp and glitter of court, nor for the favouritism of the Queen; a man who sought neither honour nor glory either in adventure or in war; a man who did not use his good looks and fine physique in order to promote some influential love affair or aristocratic alliance, and yet who prospered according to his own lights, who lived contentedly in this manner, who did not bother about politics or foreign diplomacy, who was happy with the little his industry and learning had procured for him.

Such a one was John Blake, of the village of Blakeney, in the county

of Sussex, close to the Kentish border.

Born in the year of grace, 1559, of humble and honest parents, young John passed his childhood in comparative security from the religious troubles which were fermenting the drama of the Armada. He lived with his parents in the depths of the Kentish country, his home a cottage on Primrose Hill, near Boxley Wood. Here, on the Kentish downlands, boyhood fled through the years in terms of the seasons. At the age of ten he knew the rotation of crops, the intricacies of cattle breeding and the arts of the dairy. Little else had been inculcated into his eager mind. Of education, a smattering of English grammar, the use of a quill and the capacity to count up to ten were his only accomplishments, taught to him by a father who was totally ignorant of book learning. What more was needed for a farmer's lad?

But John Blake was infused with an overmastering ambition. Often, of a summer's evening, had he climbed Primrose Hill and gazed out over Chatham and the sea. His eyes had seen Dutch frigates at anchor in the mouth of the Medway; his ears had heard the clattering of the coach horses as they pulled up and down the hill. Those sights and sounds brought longing to his soul and eventually inspired him with a dream -- a dream to be realized.

A merchant adventurer! He had listened to stories of strange and rare stones brought by "sea-dogs" from mysterious far-off lands. So, when his fifteenth birthday had dawned, he climbed to the top of Boxley Heath, but scrambled resolutely down on the other side, and from that hour the sea claimed him.

From 1574 to 1580, John Blake journeyed on the seven seas. During those years he visited nearly every country in the world, drifting from port to port. He started as clerk to a ship's chandler, rose to be an agent for a timber merchant, but finally abandoned this

steady, though modest employment in order to pursue his ambition into the remote places of India. All the time that he was plying the quill in the stuffy cabins or bargaining for wood in the warehouses, he was busily planning his future career.

The study of gems fascinated him to the exclusion of all else, and he spent all his spare time in this pursuit until he deemed that he had imbibed sufficient knowledge to start out on his own quest for fortune. After many adventures, after frequent vicissitudes of good fortune and ill luck, he acquired the requisite acumen necessary to avoid bad bargains. He contrived to assemble a goodly collection of gems with which he laid the foundations of his wealth. He had learnt to distinguish fake from real at a touch, to estimate a price at a glance. This consummate knowledge brought him renown amongst dealers and jewelers.

Soon he gave up travel and settled in London; his reputation opened for him the doors of trade relationships. But he refused all offers of partnerships and always insisted on playing a lone hand. Anon, he was presented with a charter by the Queen, becoming thereby, by special appointment, jeweler to Her Majesty. In 1589 there is an entry in the royal account book which reads: "To-day received in audience John Blake, Esquire, who presented us with a diamond. He was suitably rewarded."

From the temporal standpoint, therefore, John Blake appeared to the eyes of the world as a man who had gained for himself his heart's desires: his boyhood ambitions were realized: fame and fortune were his. Nevertheless, in spite of those outward insignia of happiness, there was a mystery which his neighbours seemed incapable of piercing. As far as we know, no word of it ever passed his lips even when in his cups. Sly hints or open speech were no avail against his silence on the subject of his secret. His mouth would shut tight and

his face would become grim and hard. But all noticed no woman ever graced his house.

II

The reason for this apparent dislike of the fair sex had its origin in a journey undertaken during the spring of 1598.

A rumour had percolated through the trade that a ruby of unusual size and color had been discovered and was to be found somewhere in Europe. Naturally, John Blake was the first to be consulted on the subject and by unanimous consent of the Goldsmiths' Company, he was elected chairman of a group of merchants entrusted with the mission to purchase the stone and bring it to England.

He sailed from Chatham with a well-filled purse and the good will of the entire fellowship; he safely reached Amsterdam, which city he proposed to make his headquarters. The search took him into many countries and cities. The bankers of Holland granted him credit and guilders. Whilst waiting for news, John Blake visited Haarlem. It was during this visit that he contracted an ill-advised marriage with a Dutch girl, Phillipina, of unknown origin. It seems strange that this clever and far-seeing man of business should have embarked on a youthful liaison and so conducted the intrigue that he actually was trapped into making a wife of a mistress. Nevertheless, the marriage ceremony was duly performed and is recorded in the archives of the city. Frans Hals had all the papers relating thereto; and the entry into the register of St. Peter's Church can be no forgery.

But John Blake, though an unwilling bridegroom, was not to be tied by a service in a church. Matrimony lay lightly on his shoulders and he wore it as if it were a cloak, to be cast off as soon as its use was no longer needed. Within the year, the famous ruby had been found and bought by him; he shook the dust of Haarlem from off his feet,

deserting the young girl-wife of a few months, soon to become a mother, without compunction, without a thought for her welfare and that of his unborn child.

On returning to England, the profit made on the same ruby was such that retirement from active business was now well within his reach. Without denying himself of any of the pleasures of life, he retained his trade relationships with Amsterdam and London, and was thus able to add considerably to his income, already swollen in the past years to healthy proportions. In other words, from the general practitioner, he became the consultant, the expert whose advice was sought and whose opinion soon became law, whilst he drew a goodly percentage for the services so rendered.

Thus in the year 1600, he had prospered exceedingly. He was the possessor of a stately country mansion in the village of Blakeney, in Sussex; his freehold of over a thousand acres was rich in pasture and timber; he had banking accounts in every capital of Europe and the Queen had received him at Court. Fortune had indeed smiled on this rough farmer turned jeweler and country squire, and every project or transaction which he touched turned to gold. Life had treated him kindly and age didn't seem to impair his magnificent physique. But there remained always an unpleasant taste in his mouth at the recollection of the Dutch wife.

III

Since Dutch Protestantism looked upon sexual sin as the cardinal crime, and since few were ready to believe the story of her marriage to John Blake – at any rate, those who had known her as his mistress and who were not impressed, therefore, by her talk of marriage lines – Phillipina, after Blake's desertion of her, was exposed to obliquity and insult. From this life of shame and misery she was rescued by Frans Hals, who, a true friend, gave her shelter in his house and his

protection for what it was worth. It was whilst living under his roof that she gave birth to John Blake's son, who was christened Percy.

There seems to be no record extant of those early years. We know the artist cared for the boy and gave him what learning was necessary, providing him with clothes and paying the required fees. Of Phillipina next to nothing is known. Diogenes was wont to call his mother a saint; beyond this one phrase, he hardly ever spoke of her. Where she died, and when, is wrapped in the silence of time.

Thus is Destiny accomplished...thus the story told of a hero's birth...thus is the life of a vagabond linked through a poor little anonymous Dutch girl to that of the English dandy, Sir Percy Blakeney, the Scarlet Pimpernel.

But in the year 1625, Lachesis was spinning the thread of life of the nameless adventurer, working into the woof the warp of coming events....

Chapter Three ~ Coat of Arms

I

There comes a time in all biographies when dull facts must be recorded to appreciate to the full the life and works of the principal figure. A legendary hero may act upon the world's stage isolated from the rest of the chorus or the minor roles. He is permitted to pirouette and prance in a *pas seul*, and people do not require rhyme or reason for his dance. But an historic personage needs a background of ancestry from which his hereditary characteristics, both virtues and vices, may be accurately deduced; for the man or woman cannot escape from environment and upbringing, nor be separated from them. A man's actions are too complex, his thoughts too tangled to be analyzed simply. He cannot be detached from the foundation rock of family; he cannot be impaled on the point of a pin like a winkle and relished without seasoning. The necessary details must be touched upon -- those details which describe the real man, however briefly.

The exploits which gained for the unacknowledged son of John Blake the hand of Gilda Beresteyn, the beautiful daughter of the richest burgher in Haarlem and the honours which the Stadholder showered upon his broad shoulders, have been handed down from father to son in the families of two countries. The daughters of the Blakeney's of Sussex are still married in the lace veil worn by Gilda Beresteyn on her wedding day; the sons of the Blakes of Haarlem show pridefully the sword of Bucephalus with the petals of blood-rust upon its blade. Diogenes emerges against his will from the obscurity of his vagabondage and, in a few months, appears in the limelight of the historical stage. And his cue was the face of a beautiful maiden who whispered a few frightened words into his ear on New Year's Eve, 1625.

So much of the history is now legendary that it has been difficult to disentangle truth from fiction. History, however, provides the evidence which goes to prove that Diogenes, on New Year's Eve, 1625, fell in with a group of hooligans and rescued a Spanish girl from death at their hands. His two companions, vagabonds like himself, were wounded during the affray and Diogenes carried them into the precincts of St. Peter's Church in order to render them first aid. There it was that he encountered Gilda Beresteyn for the first time.

That much of the story is quite clear. The remainder of the tale is to be found in a little brochure written, some fifty years later, by Hans Beresteyn, a cousin of this same Gilda. Unfortunately the author, in his endeavour to sing the praises of Percy Blake--Diogenes--whom he seems to have greatly admired, has slurred over the true facts, and in certain chapters he is undoubtedly guilty of deliberate romancing. Nevertheless, even allowing for considerable bias, a fairly accurate outline of the story may be gleaned from Hans' book, so long as the reader is careful to discount--at any rate, in part--the eulogistic phrases concerning Diogenes and to reject certain quotations of conversation for which the author must have drawn upon his imagination.

"Lord Stoutenberg," he writes, "that arch villain, was nursing his hatred against the Stadholder. On New Year's Eve, 1625, he, together with Nikolaes Beresteyn and a few others, was plotting to murder Maurice of Nassau. Fearful of some eavesdropper overhearing their nefarious plans, those abominable traitors had chosen the chancel of the church for their council chamber. And Gilda, who had entered the church to pray to the Almighty, unhappily overheard the treachery through the lips of her own dearly beloved brother.

"She was discovered. Horrified at the dastardly plot, she threatened

to reveal it to her father; whereupon Stoutenberg demanded of Nikolaes the removal of Gilda to a place of safety where she could be kept prisoner until such a time as the deed was accomplished, lest she put her threat into execution. Nikolaes, unwilling personally to put this outrage upon his sister, searched the town for a man who would be unscrupulous enough to do it for a consideration. Everybody in Haarlem knew that Diogenes, the vagabond, was always ready for adventure, and that he suffered from a chronic lack of money. To him did Nikolaes unfold his story and succeeded in bribing him to abduct Gilda."

According to Hans Beresteyn, Diogenes accepted the bribe and consented to carry out this shameful plan because he deemed that the girl would be safer in his hands than in those of a pack of assassins and conspirators headed by her own brother.

He carried out the instructions given him by Nikolaes Beresteyn. Those were that he should convey Gilda, by a roundabout route, to Rotterdam, and there place her under the care of one Ben Isaye, with whom Nikolaes and his family often had business dealings. It seems that once there, the girl did attempt to win Diogenes over to her side and revealed to him the truth surrounding her abduction. Thus he learnt for the first time of the conspiracy to murder the Stadholder.

Percy Blake was now in a quandary. The adventure which had begun as a lighthearted affair, had turned into an undertaking of a grave and dangerous nature. He felt that he must try to warn the Stadholder of the peril which threatened him and, at the same time, keep watch over Gilda in order to protect her from the machinations of Stoutenberg.

With this double object in view, he hastened to Delft, where the Stadholder was staying, and was thus able, that same night, to warn Maurice of Nassau of the plot against his life. On his return to

Rotterdam early the next morning, he found that Stoutenberg, no doubt aware that Gilda was likely to betray her knowledge of the conspiracy, had taken steps to keep her in durance under his own eye and, to Percy Blake's dismay, he saw Gilda being borne off in a sleigh, whither he knew not, surrounded by Stoutenberg's men.

To make matters worse, whilst endeavouring to keep Gilda in sight, he himself was set upon by a band of ruffians and overpowered. He was taken across country to a deserted Molen where the conspirators had their headquarters, and here he was kept a helpless prisoner. He had apparently failed in his second undertaking. He certainly had succeeded in warning the Stadholder, but he was now powerless to help Gilda, who was trapped in the snares of the plotters; both she and he were at Stoutenberg's mercy.

"Gilda," Hans Beresteyn tells us, "proud and disdainful, still smarting under the humiliation of her abduction at the hands of the vagabond, believed the plausible stories which her brother and Stoutenberg now told her. She believed that Diogenes had abducted her solely for the sake of the ransom which her father would be willing to pay -- she believed that Stoutenberg had renounced his plan of murdering Maurice of Nassau and had, in fact, freed her from the hands of an unscrupulous and venal adventurer."

And here the author's admiration for Diogenes becomes very marked, for he declares that Diogenes actually confessed to the truth of these calumnies, because his one wish was to spare Gilda the pain of learning the full extent of her brother's turpitude. He denied nothing and calmly awaited death at the hands of his tormentors.

"Indeed," says Hans Beresteyn, "the brave man was on the point of suffering a shameful death when rumour spread like wildfire among Stoutenberg's followers that the plot had been discovered and that

the Stadholder was advancing upon the Molen with a large body of troops. During the *saue qui peut* which ensued, Diogenes succeeded in getting Gilda out of Stoutenberg's hands and forcing Nikolaes to confess to his father the ignoble part that he had played in the plot against his own sister."

That same evening, Percy Blake was betrothed to Gilda.

II

Cornelius Beresteyn was forced to admit that the vagabond was indeed a fine fellow! Ungrudgingly, the father agreed that Diogenes had earned the right to marry his daughter. But he was very anxious lest Diogenes' lack of patronymic should cause future unpleasantness for the young couple and affect their position in Haarlem. Now that the happy-go-lucky days were presumably over, now that Diogenes was assuming civic responsibilities by taking Gilda for wife, Cornelius insisted, not unkindly, that his future son-in-law should try and tell him something of his parentage.

Diogenes frankly told him all he knew; his father's name, the secret marriage, the cruel desertion of the young wife and child. Tactful questions had elicited these and other facts about the sad story. The older man felt that the time had come to forget rancor and to heal the breach between father and son. Not that Cornelius was a man of that stamp who would refuse his daughter happiness just because her lover was nameless; but he felt that irresponsibility had been carried too far and that the jest had been overdone.

But neither persuasion nor threats prevailed against Diogenes' obstinacy. He flatly refused to take any steps toward reconciliation with a father who had disowned him and broken his mother's heart. Cornelius therefore determined to seek out John Blake himself. The world was indeed a small place, Cornelius felt, for Blake was a man

whom he had often met in the course of business; in fact, many pieces of the Beresteyn jewelry had been acquired from the English merchant.

As soon as the excitement of the Stoutenberg conspiracy had died down, Cornelius arranged a meeting between father and son. He discovered that John Blake was at that time visiting Rotterdam and straightaway sought him out and invited him to stay at the Beresteyn house in Haarlem. It was indeed a strange meeting for John Blake and Percy -- a meeting fraught with hidden and subtle emotions; on one side, the dull ache of ancient memories and the sharp pricks of a guilty conscience; on the other, the fierce force of hate and the cold contempt for the coward who had deserted wife and child.

But the call of the flesh proved stronger than hate or conscience. The father gazed upon the handsome, devil-may-care adventurer and indifference turned to ungrudging admiration. Here was a man to be proud of -- a man any father would joyfully acknowledge as his son. The wistful expression of the lonely old man thawed the ice which had frozen Diogenes' heart and, in a trice, the two were locked in one another's embrace, half-crying, half-laughing, with the emotion which overwhelmed them.

Naturally the father, overjoyed that the breach had been healed, wished for this son's company. He also felt that it was only right and proper that Percy should visit England with him; to be introduced to English society and installed as his legal heir -- a worthy heir indeed to the wealth and position which he had built up; and also to instill into his son a love for his own country.

Thus did Diogenes sail for England. An old letter written by him to Gilda in Dutch gives us an amusing insight into his first impressions of the country.

"My journey to England," he wrote "has killed my only attempt at sobriety, for there I found that the stock from which I come was both irreproachable and grave, had been so all the time that I, the most recent scion of so noble a race, was roaming round the world, the most shiftless and thriftless vagabond it had ever seen."

Gilda, however, did not believe him, since it was nearly always impossible to detect when he was joking or being serious. And this time he was joking. He had now seen the stately home; he had breathed the calm air of his native land; his blood had responded to the call. He realized that he was English of the English, and not just a nameless and homeless vagabond. He felt that he could easily learn to love this rain-soaked country as soon as Gilda should live there as his wife.

England, at this time, was transported with joy; illuminations and bonfires lit up the streets of London all night long! The marriage between Charles, Prince of Wales, and the Spanish Infanta had been definitely broken off. The people acclaimed with enthusiasm the collapse of that shameful policy which for so long had dragged England on the tow-rope of Spain. The return of the Prince from there was taken as a sign of his strength and the complete rupture of any Catholic alliance. Buckingham demanded war! Cranfield was accused of deceit! The Spanish ambassador left London!

So England turned to its only Protestant ally--Holland. James the First sent for John Blake and entrusted to him the mission of winning the Stadholder's support. And the father, proud of his only son, and knowing how high Diogenes stood in the Stadholder's esteem, led him to the king, and it was agreed that Percy should lead the Embassy to Holland, not as a poor vagrant, but as the representative of a mighty nation. The Stadholder showed appreciation of the delicate compliment paid him by the King of England in thus sending

to him as ambassador, the man who had saved his life, by readily acceding to the English proposals.

On the successful conclusion of the mission and the signing of the treaty of alliance, King James, realizing the signal services thus rendered by John Blake, desired to confer some honour on him. But the latter, either because he was advanced in years, or because he desired to show some singular mark of favour to his son and to make amends for past wrongs, petitioned His Majesty to bestow the proposed honour upon his only son.

The King agreed to this course and conferred a baronetcy upon Percy Blake. But an initial difficulty arose, owing to the fact that at this time, no legal precedent existed which permitted a son to take a hereditary title whilst a father was still alive. A compromise, however, was reached; Percy changed his name to that of the village in which his father now lived -- a name that was curiously like to his own -- Blakeney. Thus it came about that Diogenes, the vagabond, the beggar, the outcast, became Sir Percy Blakeney -- the first Sir Percy.

III

But Diogenes -- Sir Percy Blakeney -- did not remain in England long; his heart was away in Haarlem with Gilda, the lone star which had led him into accepting honour, position, and wealth. For himself, he laughed heartily at the very notion that he had now become a baronet of England. So, within three short months, he was back again in Holland, awaiting, with as much patience as he could muster, the day of his marriage.

Nevertheless, the few fleeting weeks had been sufficient to give birth to that strange sense of longing and incompleteness which he had always felt. The call of blood had worked its miracle in him; the green meadows and scented orchards of England had twined

themselves into his heart. He was infused with its spirit, drunk with its fragrance, filled with its beauty. After the wedding, he made up his mind that he would return thither with his bride, to dream his life away in love and contentment.

IV

But the Fates decreed otherwise. Sir Percy Blakeney did not return to England until 1630. The records show that he was again called upon to take an active part in the destinies of his adopted country, Holland. Van Aitzema, in his voluminous work entitled *Saken von Staat*, refers again and again to the "Englishman," the husband of Gilda Beresteyn. He is recorded by that chronicler to have been an active participator in the fighting which followed a second uprising engineered by Lord Stoutenberg.

Thus, in the spring of 1626, Van Aitzema tells us that the Dutch were being driven in defeat in front of an invading Austrian army headed by Stoutenberg; that these troops had contrived to cut the Dutch armies in two; that an attack on Arnheim had been successful and that Vorden was menaced with a siege. He relates that the Dutch had been caught unawares and thus had been put to flight, but that the only chance of salvation lay in sending a message across the Veluwe, through the invaded areas, so that the Dutch troops and German mercenaries in the Stadholder's pay could join forces in time to co-operate and perhaps thus avoid total destruction.

"The Englishman," he writes, "undertook this perilous task. By night, right under the mouth of the Austrian musket and cannon, did Sir Blakeney (as he calls him) swim under the Veluwe. For ten long miles he swam, sometimes diving under the icy waters in order to escape detection by the Austrian outposts; sometimes battling desperately against an adverse wind which whipped up the surface of the river and threatened to drown him. But, though spent and severely

wounded, he reached Vorden in time to save us from disaster."

Again, a few weeks later, Blakeney, it seems, was leading a detachment of Dutch troops against the Austrians at the "Battle of the Molen," and distinguished himself in conspicuous style by the capture of Lord Stoutenberg himself. In fact, Van Aitzema declares that it was through Blakeney's fine tactics that the Austrian army was forced to retreat and the uprising finally stamped out.

It seems that from then on Sir Percy Blakeney sheathed the sword Bucephalus and took to the quill. But, in his case, the pen was certainly not mightier than the sword, for he made but little mark in the world of politics, though the Stadholder showered appointments upon him.

In 1627, Maurice of Nassau appointed Blakeney reorganizer of the army. In this he seems to have succeeded remarkably well and was created a general of the Dutch army as a reward for his industry. And he himself has left us a record of his impressions in a long letter which he penned to his father about this time.

"I fear me," he writes, "that I am no clerk. Certainly I am no diplomat. Already have I made enemies with the stolid Dutch colleagues with whom I am supposed to work. They are senseless and wooden-headed, and do not seem to realize that fighting consists of a little more than mere brawn and a straight eye. It really amazes me that these people have ever contrived to win a battle. But one must give them their due; they are a loyal set of men, earnest and patriotic, thinking only of the good of their beloved country and the greatness of it. The Stadholder continues to shower honours upon my unworthy shoulders -- honours which I am totally unfitted for. Thus, he informs me that he wished me to become his comptroller! Imagine it! Diogenes, the vagabond who could never keep a guilder in his purse,

practicing accounts and learning the art of domestic economy! Cornelius, that dear man who is my father-in-law, naturally desires me to accept. I feel that my only chance of safety lies in escaping to Blakeney Manor."

In spite of all his protests, Blakeney was persuaded to accept the position, and so his dream of returning to England receded farther and farther into the future.

The only other event during those five years worth recording is the attempt that was made on his life. At least, the happening must be so designated; actually, it seems to be rather of a mystery, and so far, an unsolved one.

To celebrate the anniversary of the "Battle of the Molen," the Stadholder had commanded a military display of all the Dutch troops. This review took place on the banks of the Veluwe, on the old-time battle-field. The principle event in this display was a mimic battle portraying the actual fight of three years ago. For this purpose Blakeney unsheathed his sword Bucephalus and re-enacted his part in the affair. At the critical moment when he was charging to the head of the company, a musket was loosed and the bullet wounded Blakeney in the left shoulder, luckily only causing a flesh wound.

An investigation was immediately set up in order to discover the culprit. It was speedily ascertained that there were many malcontents among the troops -- men who resented Blakeney's position as general of the army. But as those men confessed freely to their opinion, it was perfectly evident that none of them would ever have dreamt of attempting a criminal act on Blakeney's person.

The soldiers who had been standing near the spot from whence the shot must have been fired, stated that they had noticed nothing untoward and were willing to undergo torture to the death should they

be lying. The only conclusion to which the authorities could come was that some unseen assassin had lain in wait and shot at random in the hope of killing Blakeney. But the culprit was never discovered. Blakeney himself vowed that the whole affair was the result of an accident and begged the Stadholder to drop the matter. The soldiers who had been implicated in the cabal against Blakeney were pardoned at his earnest request and the affair remains a mystery to this day.

V

In the meanwhile, over in England, John Blake had died and left his son sole heir to his vast wealth and considerable property. Nothing, therefore, kept Sir Percy in Holland now that peace had been restored. Blake House awaited its future master. Sir Percy took his bride across the water and settled down in England, there to pass the rest of his days in peace.

And so the years passed away.

Atropos cut the thread of life with her scissors, and Diogenes rests in the churchyard of Blakeney beside Gilda, his dearly beloved wife.

And Nikolas, his son, reigned in his stead.

Sir Nikolas Blakeney carried on the tradition -- love of adventure cannot be quenched in the "mad-cap" Blakeney. They can never settle down and live in quiet enjoyment; they must always be up and doing, battling for fame and fortune, for the mere sake of the sport itself. And Nikolas was a true son of his father; he fought with Marlborough, going with him from victory to victory; he organized the Dutch allies; he was caught spying for the English generals; he escaped by the skin of his teeth; whilst his wife, Helen Hamilton, waited patiently at Blake with her son, George. But Nikolas never

returned. On the eve of the Battle of Blenheim he was stricken down by a fever and died within a few days -- died as all Blakeney's have wished and ever will wish to die, to the sound of the trumpet and cannon, with a sword in his hand.

Sir George Blakeney was a failure! Nothing could induce him to travel or to take up arms. It is to be feared that he was the black sheep of the Blakeney family. The only important thing in his life, on which entitled him to a mention in their chronicles, is the fact that he nursed his grandchild, Percy, the Scarlet Pimpernel, on his knee. He played games with the baby; invented stories, recounted the history of his famous ancestor to this boy, who was himself destined to invent the greatest game of all -- who was to be the most famous and most beloved Blakeney throughout the length and breadth of England, the most hated and feared man in revolutionary France. A small, insignificant red flower became a device, the mere sight of which thrilled the hearts of his gallant friends, brought smoldering fear into the souls of his enemies.

And soon a lazy, slightly inane, but irresistible, laugh echoed down the corridors of Blake House...

Part One: Once Upon a Time...

Chapter One ~ Early Markings

Chapter Two ~ Fags and Fists

Chapter Three ~ Pranks and Politics

Chapter Four ~ "That Demmed Clever Woman..."

Chapter One ~ Early Markings

I

Percy Blakeney was born on the fifth of December, 1760, at Blake House.

A deep and lasting sorrow overshadowed the lives of the Blakeneys at this time. Percy was only a few weeks old when his mother fell a prey to the terrible malady which in those days was looked upon as incurable and nothing short of a curse from God. Algernon Blakeney had the terrible misfortune of seeing his idolized wife become hopelessly insane after two years of happy married life. Madness was a stigma which attached itself, so people said, only to those who had erred in life, but since no one could point the finger of accusation at the Blakeneys or the Dewhursts, this sickness, therefore, was regarded as a mystery, a visitation of the devil or a witch's foul curse for some imagined insult. Many looked upon it as a just punishment predestined ever since the time when John Blake had deserted his Dutch wife over a century ago. But these only circulated in private and with extreme caution, since the vast wealth of Algernon and the great social and political influence of Lord Fulford precluded any veiled hints from being uttered in the open. One and all, however, pitied the new-born babe who had entered this world amidst such disastrous circumstances, already predicting a dreadful and miserable destiny for this scion of a noble race.

And indeed, it proved a tragic misfortune for both husband and son; the one deprived of the society and joy of a beautiful wife; the other of the tender care of a loving mother. And one can only conjecture how that poor woman must have suffered in the isolation of her deranged brain.

Joan Dewhurst was only eighteen when she married Algernon Blakeney. Her father was a younger brother of the Marquis of Fulford and the alliance was considered a very fitting one, though, according to some, the girl might easily have chosen a husband who stood higher up in the ranks of nobility, her beauty and accomplishments being famed far and wide. As to Joan herself, she seemed, at first, to have stepped straight into the romance of fairyland hand in hand with a Prince Charming who frankly adored her. And the young couple seemed to have nothing but happiness to look forward to in life. But within two years, a distracted husband was forced to leave his home and to take with him into exile a woman who did not even recognize here erstwhile lover, who had wandered away into a land of shadow lonelier and more terrifying than death.

For Percy it was a curious jumble of recollections that eventually emerged from these first few years of life. There was never a connected memory; it seemed as if isolated incidents alone held sway in the boy's mind. Somewhere or other, there were storms at sea, evil-smelling boats, the bustling of strange lands and the din of foreign incomprehensible languages; somewhere else, the green meadows, the lowing of cattle and the serenity of an English spring. At one time, there was the utter desolation of illness and the frenzies of his father at another, the soft hands of a young woman and the jolly romps with an aged grandfather. But through them all there was no distinct line drawn between each set of impressions, they being, as it were, mixed higgledy-piggledy one into another, so that he could not tell which was first or which was last; the one evoking, even to his dying day, a sense of oppression and of evil presentiment, whilst the other induced always a feeling of well-being and cheerfulness.

One of the earliest recollections and the first milestones in his life, must have been the sudden collapse and death of old Sir George. The shock was a tremendous one for Percy. Though only just turned

five at the time, he remembered every detail of that fateful afternoon when, alone with his grandfather at Blake House and whilst in the act of playing together, the old man stumbled and fell at the boy's feet. The sight of the heavy ashen figure, the noise of the laboured and stertorous breathing terrified him. He watched the still figure with horror and alarm.

In his childish incomprehension of what had happened, he stood gazing down at the lifeless body until a feeling of sudden and utter loneliness surged up within his heart and took possession of his faculties. He remained motionless, hesitating, striving to repel the growing fear which all in a moment had now gripped his mind. He touched his grandfather; he tried to lift him, but the dead weight was too heavy for him to lift. Then the silence of the room suddenly struck Percy with a shock – a shock of awe and dread. He called to the old man, softly at first, coaxingly; then louder and louder until his voice sounded like a shrill shriek which echoed unanswered through the room.

After a valiant battle with himself he incontinently fled from the room. In an upstairs attic he faced the awful truth. The impression of a mysterious, hidden enemy, who stalked people unseen, striking without warning or reason, was an overwhelming one to his infant mind and remained as vivid in old age as it had been at the time of the occurrence. Thereafter, death became a reality long before it should; an actual person whom Percy endowed with flesh and blood; a person to be tracked down, detected and overcome; an insatiable monster to be cheated, its appetite to be starved.

"I shall never forget," he is reported to have said on one occasion to his intimate friend, Anthony Dewhurst, "my first sight of death. It was so unheroic, so damned stupid, that I was overcome with shame at the idea that it could kill a Blakeney in so silly a fashion."

Algernon, summoned in haste, failed utterly to grasp the situation as it appeared in the eyes of his son.

"Why did you run away?" the father asked.

And Percy, an emotion of strong aversion prompting him, made answer:

"I couldn't help it: I was so ashamed."

II

The aftermath of this episode was to see the temporary break-up of the Blake household.

The French doctors under whom Lady Blakeney had undergone treatment at various private institutions, were now hopeful of a partial recovery and begged Sir Algernon to bring Percy over to France in order that the reunion of mother and son might hasten the desired cure. Hitherto, at their insistence, the father had refused, strongly opposing their entreaties on the ground that the shock might have a deleterious result on his wife and fearing lest it might produce a feeling of revulsion in Percy which might ruin his whole future outlook on life. The opportunity for the experiment had now, however, presented itself. After the formalities of death and succession had been complied with, the new baronet left the property in the hands of a capable lawyer and set sail for Calais with his son.

The next two years are almost a blank. There exists no exact record of the Blakeney wanderings. That the meeting of mother and son nearly ended in disaster, that the boy ran more or less wild, that Sir Algernon grew more and more morose, is certain. But the details are entirely lacking. Percy never could remember any fixed event during those twenty-four months, so overcome was he by the death of his

beloved grandfather, and so bewildered was he by his mother's strange attitude towards him.

Again there were only blurred and faint recollections; a fat French woman who washed clothes and taught him "*argot*"; a rapid transitory impression of varied houses and queer streets; here and there, some vague picture of tramping dispirited soldiers, a bunch of ragged children jeering at him, calling him foul names, of long, wearisome journeys in rickety stage coaches.

During this time, however, one very definite emotion emerged, his indifference to his father. On the occasions when they met there was always friction. It seemed as if Percy could never do right -- either he was too noisy and boisterous or else too subdued and shy. Percy stood in awe of this strange man whom he scarcely knew and whose moods were so changeable.

Sir Algernon, on his side, could not understand the high spirited temperament of his son. Thus it came about that they bickered and quarrelled continuously over unimportant trifles until at length a definite sense of hostility was born and effectively erected a barrier against mutual understanding. Percy found himself hugged and embraced one minute only to be repulsed with angry words the next; whilst Sir Algernon was bitterly hurt by his son's unresponsiveness and was deeply offended by the total disregard paid to his wishes.

Gradually, however, Percy learnt to contain his lively spirits, refraining from childish provocation. He appeared, at this time, stupid in the presence of his elders, since he could not adapt himself to their varying moods. On the other hand the atmosphere was not very conducive to friendly relationship, since his father was too deeply steeped in his own misery to give a thought to any one else. He felt that Percy could not share his sorrow and would not understand it. Neither ever attempted to approach the other or to find a common

foundation on which to build a mutual trust. Thus they drifted apart, the breach widening with the years until they became strangers.

III

Lady Blakeney, having taken a turn for the worse, was ordered to go to Berlin, where a famous specialist for the mind was achieving remarkable results. Thither Sir Algernon departed in high hopes and Percy found himself once more at Blake House under the care of Anne Derwent.

Anne was only seventeen when she married Captain Edward Derwent, a young and wealthy army officer. The girl had been content with her lot at first; she knew no other happiness since she had passed her girlhood in the religious seclusion deemed necessary in those days for the well-being of maidens in exalted social circles. The honeymoon bliss, however, did not last; she found herself deserted for mistresses and ballet-girls, until, after five years of misery, she was left a widow, Edward having committed suicide owing to a threatened court martial. Soon after that she was in residence at Blake House under the protection of Sir Algernon Blakeney, her maternal uncle.

Percy adored this cousin of his, who, in gratitude, poured out her starved love upon this boy so tragically deprived of home and companionship. She quickly divined the streak of romanticism which lay slumbering in his heart, and carefully nurtured it so that it evoked in him a flame which burnt brightly all through his life. Under her guidance life became tinged with romance; every act and thought was invested with glamour. The stories of mythology and the tales of adventure ceased to be mere tales and became actual happenings made real by his vivid imagination. He carried them into his play, treating his games seriously as if they were real events so that, in the

end, he would reproduce faithfully but often with disastrous results the incidents recounted in his story books.

Unfortunately, he chose for the "damsels in distress" he desired to rescue as mythical hero, the daughters of the neighboring squires, and the complaints of Percy's wildness and roughness became so notorious that on several occasions only pecuniary damages salved the feelings of outraged parents. The climax of these exploits nearly brought about a scandal on one occasion. After he had carefully studied the story of Perseus and Andromeda he lured his small neighbor, Mary Ffoulkes, aged nine, out into the park and, having stripped her of all her clothes in imitation of the picture in his book, he immersed her in a stream and bound her to the trunk of a tree. The rescue was carried out to the last detail and Percy triumphantly brought the girl home, unfortunately forgetting that she was still in a state of complete nudity. Filling the house with laughter, he deposited his frail and dripping burden at her mother's feet, exclaiming:

"I've just rescued her from the sea dragon. I claim the reward of her hand in marriage."

Anne Derwent went as usual as the peacemaker and, as soon as Lady Ffoulkes had recovered from the vapors and little Mary was safely tucked up in a warm bed, she questioned Percy.

"But why on earth did you strip the child and immerse her in water? Why can't you play like other children? Why can't you pretend that such things are only a game?"

To which Percy gave the unexpected reply:

"That would not be the same thing. It must be real. What is the good of pretending I am rescuing a princess in distress? She would not be properly frightened if she knew that it was only a game."

And Percy laughed that boisterous and hearty laugh of his which was irresistible. Gradually both Anne and Lady Ffoulkes thawed under its influence so they could not find it in their hearts to continue to scold.

But these pranks had become too frequent of late to allow them to pass unchecked and Anne grew apprehensive as to the effect of so much freedom and enforced idleness on the boy's moral character. She thought it was her duty to acquaint Sir Algernon with these daily episodes of Percy's life, and at last the father awoke to the realization that his son was growing up and was no longer in the baby stage. He perceived that Anne was not strong enough to cope with the lad any longer: but he absolutely refused to leave his wife and take charge of the boy himself.

The result was an impasse, a stage of vacillation on the part of the father which threatened to have an injurious effect on the boy's entire future. However, there was already something fine and strong in Percy's character, for temperamentally he did not seem to be any worse for this period of laxity in his moral education. In the end it was Anne Derwent's constant and repeated pleadings that forced Sir Algernon to rouse himself out of his supineness. He finally decided that the time had come for Percy to learn to work. Hence, very soon after this adventure with little Mary Ffoulkes the boy was introduced to the books and school studies.

IV

During this first dozen years of his life, it was only natural that, as he was constantly passing from pillar to post, Percy should only have received the most elementary education. It is to be feared that he displayed an exaggerated talent for idleness coupled with a total incapacity to master the principles of hard work. With no fixed abode,

lessons and discipline had been out of the question or else reduced by fits and starts to the absolute minimum at the kind though somewhat incompetent hands of Anne Derwent, so that the boy learnt to hate school books and took no pleasure in erudition.

On the other hand his early travels had inculcated in him a knowledge of men and affairs far in advance of his years; with that imitative capacity inherent in most children, he had picked up without conscious effort a remarkable fluency in French for one so young, which language he soon spoke not only idiomatically, but without the slightest trace of foreign accent.

Up to his seventh year he had been allowed to gratify his every whim and his chief delight was the pursuit of all sport such as a boy of his age could indulge in. From his earliest days his physique had been above the ordinary. He was broader, taller, and stronger than most boys of his own age. His well-knit little body and his long legs never seemed to tire however great the strain put upon them. He was able to outrun and outbox the country lads. And he hunted with the local hounds, never boggling at fences or refusing the exhausting cross-country runs.

But this freedom was now to come to an abrupt end. In consequence, Blake House saw a succession of tutors, for the most part worthy schoolmasters or clerics who, desirous of increasing their meager stipends, were loath to give up a lucrative post and took the line of least resistance.

One and all were sent away or resigned their duties through sheer inability to make any headway with the boy, though Percy was very far from being stupid. He had a rooted aversion to Latin and Greek and neither threats nor promises of reward induced him to alter his opinion. In mathematics he showed a marked genius for the business side of figures -- a genius doubtless inherited from ancestor Blake.

At the early age of ten he could keep an account book and ledgers, and computed compound interest. But the higher branches, such as algebra and trigonometry, frankly bored him, so that his teachers soon gave up the attempt of driving those into his head.

Above all, Percy showed a marvelously inventive faculty for getting rid of his tutors and he contrived to play on them some of those mad pranks of which he was so fond. A Mr. Horace Webley suffered very severely at his hands. To him, Percy took an instant dislike and determined to rid himself of his unwanted presence: this he duly effected by the simple expedient of tying Webley up in a disused barn and leaving him there for twenty-four hours. The poor man had to rely on a pile of green apples for his sole substance, thereby enduring such torture of colic that he could hardly walk to the London coach the next day.

"Thank goodness," Percy exclaimed that same afternoon to Anne, "I hated Webley; he was always so greasily dressed."

V

Sir Algernon, over in Berlin, was duly notified of his son's wilfulness and waywardness, but obstinately closed his eyes to the root cause of it all. Sick to death, however, of the eternal complaints which reached him from England, he decided to have the boy educated abroad. As luck or chance had it, he was called to Paris on business. He therefore sent for his son to join him there. For the next six months Percy lived in France with his father. Only one notable incident occurred during this stay.

In Paris, Percy had occasion to learn swordsmanship. He managed, though only nine years old at the time, to learn the intricacies of sword play as practiced in France. He subdued his strength and bulk, turning them into a neat and precise machine under the control of his

brain and eyes. His master, one of the champion fencers of Paris, was astounded not only at this English boy's diligence, but also at his wonderful capacity to master the complicated ripostes and elaborate parries then in vogue, which he executed with a flick of his iron wrist as if born to the art.

Since the fashion and the ridged rules of etiquette then pertaining to aristocracy of France considered dueling the only possible method of wiping out an insult, the sons of the nobility were gathered together in the *Cercle d'escrime*, there to receive the requisite training in sword play, and be taught to conform as closely as possible to the unwritten laws of their elders. Thus duels between children were of everyday occurrence and though Percy, being an English boy, was averse to settling quarrels in this foreign fashion, he was often dragged into what was called in those days an affair of honour.

In the annals of the Club, there is inscribed a date with the names of two boys who fought a duel on a memorable occasion. The story forms part of the archives of two noteworthy families. The date is January 10th, 1769, and the names are: Percy Blakeney, aged nine, and the Vicomte de Bonnefin, aged eleven.

The young Vicomte had been watching Percy lunging desultory at a padded target; a patronizing, somewhat contemptuous smile curled his lips and suddenly he snatched the *épée* from the English boy's hand with the insolent remark:

"You cannot expect an English booby to lunge gracefully," and he proceeded to give Percy a lesson in the art. "All Englishmen are bullies," he went on with the same impudence, "but this one is mad."

Percy, whose youthful temper was not under that control which he achieved in manhood, merely knocked the braggart down and rescued his sword. Thereupon uproar ensued: it was an insult, a

challenge, more portentous and venomous than any of those petty quarrels that occurred in the Circle. It was a direct challenge from perfidious Albion to Madame la France.

Within a few minutes, in shirt sleeves, the young opponents stood face to face, surrounded by an angry crowd of boys all of whom were partisans of their own compatriot. Percy was alone, unsupported, except by the fencing master who, supervising the fight with commendable impartiality, encouraged the English lad. Unfortunately the Vicomte, though two years the elder, was no match for the calm impassivity and steel wrist of Percy.

It became obvious from the beginning that France was getting the worst of the encounter, and England seemed deliberately to heap insult upon insult by disarming the opponent at every opportunity, and returning his sword with a mischievous look in a pair of lazy blue eyes. Indeed, for Percy, the whole episode had by then developed into a joke and become not a little ridiculous. In England fists would have decided the quarrel and he felt that this smacked of the theatre. The affair became silly and distasteful to him; he lost interest and fenced with as sure a wrist as before but more mechanically.

Then came disaster. The boys were now both cross and tired: the foil play grew wild and uncontrolled. The Vicomte hurled himself impotently against his tormentor. Percy, staggered by the unexpected attack, was not able to parry sufficiently quickly to avoid an accident. The shock of the onslaught sent the French boy's *épée* clashing to the floor. The lad staggered. Percy, thrown off his balance, slipped and his sword pierced de Bonnefin's right shoulder, inflicting a very severe wound. The Vicomte slithered to the floor and, with scarcely a groan, lapsed into unconsciousness. In those days surgery was still in its infancy: the wound did not prove mortal, but it became septic and the arm had ultimately to be amputated. De Bonnefin went through

life with one arm and enfeebled health.

When paying his respects to the boy's father, Percy said ruefully:

"Sir, why don't you fight with fists like I learnt to do in England?"

VI

Just after this episode, in the month of February of that year, Lady Blakeney seemed to recover her senses: her health was better and an improvement in her mental condition became markedly noticeable. So Percy was immediately dragged to Berlin.

A childish letter, treasured by Anne Derwent, gives us an amusing insight into Percy's mind when he first went to Germany.

"My dearest cousin Anne," he wrote six weeks after his installation in Berlin, "The Prussians are beastly people, I hate them all. I am not allowed to play those lovely games that we played together last year. Everybody is so stiff and the do not know how to enjoy themselves as we used to.

"I wish you were here. You would laugh at Hans who thinks such a lot of himself. He is a coward and would not fight me. He said such a thing was simply not done and that boys in Germany did not behave so stupidly. I like Mister Ingram. He is English and I stay with him, but I wish he would not talk German all the time. Father says I must learn to speak it and Mister Ingram gives me lessons every day and gives me cakes if I learn well. Hans does not like Mister Ingram who teaches him English. I don't think Mister Ingram gives him cakes after the lesson.

"Father rides with me every morning. I love that. The German soldiers are very smart, but very ugly.

"Dear cousin Anne, do come and take me away."

As a matter of fact, the journey to Germany had a great and lasting effect upon the immature lad. The laxity and the offensive morals of the French had made a deep impression upon him. His duel with de Bonnefin with its sad consequences, and his association with young boys who had never been taught to put a curb upon their desires, had developed in him some sense of revolt against his father's strict discipline, and especially against the life which he knew he would have to lead in England sooner or later.

"Sir, let us live in France for ever," Percy is reported to have said to his father when he first heard of the imminent departure for Germany.

But German respectability, the outcome of the spirit of Martin Luther, exercised a more steadying influence on his character. Here in Berlin he learnt many useful lessons in decorum and manners. The effeminate and elaborate courtesies demanded in France cut no ice in Germany. Percy found himself laughed at by his equals and deliberately snubbed. This brought him down to earth and he soon realized that frivolity and love of pleasure were not the real hall-marks of a gentleman and that personality was the only thing that counted.

Such a complete reversal of childish ideas might have been a task beyond the ordinary powers of a mere lad. But Percy, though still very young, had already a certain strength of character -- though most people who knew him at the time would have denied it -- this helped him, no doubt, to surmount many difficulties and to bend his young mind to this entirely new outlook on life. The lesson was hard, but he learnt it in the end.

Then, within a year, came the death of Lady Blakeney: this was a merciful release for all concerned after nearly ten years of sorrow and

terror and it put an end to Sir Algernon's foreign wanderings.

He returned to England with Percy and took up residence at Blake, endeavouring to gather up the threads of a tangled life. But existence seemed a paltry affair for this disillusioned and unhappy man. Though friends and relations gathered round him to ease his loneliness and to apply the healing balm of friendship to his wounds, he could not forget the tormented years. The stress of continual worry and the strain of perpetual anxiety had added years to his age and put a blight upon his mind which nothing seemed to cure or even alleviate. He sank deeper and deeper into the gloom of misery and wretchedness, unable to endure the slightest reference to the beloved departed. A restlessness, born of this spiritual ache, forbade him peace: it pushed him to the grave-side of his wife in his longing to be as near as possible to her earthly remains. He became a wanderer on the face of the earth, knowing no rest.

In the meantime, Percy was growing up in this brooding, mournful atmosphere.

VII

Anne Derwent, in spite of her sense of gratitude, found herself antagonized by Sir Algernon. Though she had devoted all her energies to the education of Percy and the maintenance of the estate, Sir Algernon did not seem to appreciate her loyalty: he certainly never rewarded it. After a few months, Anne, wearied and dispirited, cast about for an excuse to leave Blake House, but all her attempts in that direction were frustrated by Sir Algernon, who seemed incapable of managing his house and his estate without her assistance.

But a young and pretty woman cannot continue to live in the house of a rich widower without causing a certain amount of scandal. Though

the village knew how closely Anne was related to the Blakeney family, the gossip-mongers soon spread unpleasant rumours. These rumours were carefully kept away from Sir Algernon's ears, but they were freely discussed in taproom and bar parlour. Gradually, however, gossip grew more bold and an inkling of it filtrated through to the neighbouring gentry, with the result that Anne found herself stared at in the road and on more than one occasion was subject to open insult.

Anne Derwent was not a fool. She realized quickly enough that her position would soon become untenable and, hardening her heart against the separation from Percy, she forthwith packed her trunks. Sir Algernon raved and fumed when she broke the news of here imminent departure. He threatened to have the law upon the slanderers: he pleaded with her to remain if only for Percy's sake. But Anne, glad of an excuse for leaving Blake House, refused to be turned from her purpose.

After her departure, others, both friends and relations, followed her example. Though they pitied both Sir Algernon and the boy, Percy, from the bottom of their hearts, they felt they could not face a long visit at Blake House, and contented themselves with writing occasional sympathetic letters which generally remained unanswered.

Sir Algernon hardly noticed the gradual falling away of his circle of friends, steeped as he was in memories of the past, but he did try to settle down and to give his son some kind of home life. Unfortunately, he had lost the power of visualizing a parent's duties and neglected the most important ones, either through lack of knowledge or total indifference. In consequence, Percy was thrown on his own resources and quickly developed a tendency to run wild with the abandon of a savage. His father thereafter found life very complicated; he was at an absolute loss how to cope with the boy

and generally alternated between the extremes of severity and the limit of leniency. Frequent chastisements, however, had the effect of irritating Percy into worse excesses until, at length, Sir Algernon found home life well nigh intolerable; row following row with painful regularity.

Most of Percy's pranks, since "maidens in distress and tutors to be tortured" had been banned, now consisted in expeditions wherein horseplay and rascality were most conspicuous. These pranks were generally carried out with the co-operation of the farmers' boys recruited from the neighbourhood – boys who readily accepted the young gentleman's leadership either from sheer admiration of his pluck or fear of his hammer-like fists.

These escapades consisted in raids on neighbouring farmyards, carried out with audacity and cunning, chiefly to the detriment of live-stock; one farmer discovered his cows unable to leave the stable because all their tails had been tied together with rope; another noticed that his prize white pigs had been painted over in patriotic colours. There naturally followed stormy interviews with irate farmers, ending in severe inroads on the Blakeney income and a sound beating for Percy, until Sir Algernon finally realized his own total incapacity to deal with his turbulent son.

He therefore came to the conclusion, with a certain amount of personal satisfaction, that the best way to be rid of Percy would be to send him to school, a proceeding which solved the problem of education for the boy and relieved the father from further responsibility.

So the boy was sent to Harrow and Sir Algernon packed up his trunks and returned to Paris.

Chapter Two ~ Fags and Fists

I

Percy was sent to Harrow at the age of twelve. To him, school was a word totally devoid of meaning, but the idea of living in community with two hundred or so other boys of various ages did convey a sense of excitement and of thrill to his young mind; even though he felt somewhat dismayed at the thought of regular and systematized lessons. The few stories of brutal discipline which had reached his ears at different times left him cold and unmoved since the fear of birch and cane was nil, and he felt that his powerful physique, aided by his skill in boxing, would relieve him of the unwanted attentions of any bully who might attempt to bait him. But the preliminaries of departure were highly exciting and entirely to his taste. There was the visit to Lord Fulford who had signed his nomination papers: there was the pleasure of buying new clothes, there was the joy of seeing London for the first time.

Any nervousness which he may have felt towards the approaching reality of school was rapidly dissipated by the delight of being treated as a grown-up man by his elders. The stories of past Harrovians and their exploits, as recounted by Lord Fulford, thrilled Percy. In spite of his foreign and haphazard upbringing, the associations which Harrow had with the great names of English history and the traditions of the old school, not only enthralled his romantic heart, but fired him with enthusiasm for his future life there and created in him a pride that he should have the honour of adding his name to its list.

Young Percy would have been saved many weeks of toil and bodily exertion if Sir Algernon, who was not a public school boy, had not said aloud in the school ante-room:

"Well, Percy, this is Harrow: hope you'll like it. I shall stay here for a few days to see how you settle down and to hear what the Headmaster decides about you."

Probably fifty or more of the two hundred Harrovians must have overheard this piece of fatherly solicitude: and for these lads there was plenty of humour in the fact that a boy of twelve should be accompanied to school. But still more comic was it that the father should put up at Harrow for the night in order to watch over the entry of his young hopeful. Sir Algernon, by offending against this unwritten law which forbids parents to accompany sons on the opening day of term, had placed Percy at an unfair disadvantage since Harrow was an arena where you must be a hero and stand upon your own two feet, if you were not to escape ridicule.

The next day he was examined in the library by his three masters, and gave a very doubtful account of his learning. The two M.A.'s, after testing his classical knowledge, expressed their views in unreticent language. Doctor Robert Sumner, the Head, however, mindful of Lord Fulford's personal influence with the board of Governors' soon discovered Percy's miraculous fluency in two foreign languages, his practical notions of geography and his absorbed interest in history which put him on a better footing with the other masters. So Percy was admitted to the school, though in a class below that of boys of his age. Luckily, Sir Algernon was resigned to this verdict, he had not expected any other, and was indeed highly grateful that the lad had passed the simple tests at all.

Father and son thereupon parted and Percy returned to his house, where he was shown into a dormitory wherein were several beds and, not knowing what to do, he lay down on one and fell fast asleep. He was quickly awakened by a douche of cold water which some one was gently squeezing out of a sponge down his neck. By the time he

had returned to full wakefulness, his aggressor had fled and only the sound of running footsteps dying away down the corridor and the echo of mirthful and mischievous laughter revealed to Percy that he had not been dreaming, but had, indeed, been the victim of a mild rag.

Seething with rage at the thought that his tormentor had escaped his just wrath, he did not intend to sit quietly under the insult. He resented most of all that he had been taken unawares and had been found guilty of sleeping when he felt that he should have been awake; he was angry that he had placed himself in such a ridiculous position at the very outset of his school career. He ran hurriedly down the stairs to seek out the offender, but was met in the ante-room by a monitor who led him into the hall and introduced him to the other boys.

As the quizzing stare of a hundred pairs of eyes was riveted upon him, Percy nearly lost his self-composure, but, pinning his faith in brawn, he drew himself up to his full height, conscious of his perfectly fitting clothes; he achieved an elegant bow and sat down in the place allotted to him. During the meal, twinges of uneasiness coursed down his spine and he was haunted with the suspicion that all the boys knew of his discomfiture; he felt that he was surrounded by grinning faces which seemed to be enjoying the joke perpetrated at his expense. He observed, however, that though most of the glances levelled in his direction were humorous, there certainly was no malice apparent in them.

He found that he was to share a room with three boys -- young Lord Bathurst, Andrew Ffoulkes and William Pitt.

That evening, he should have undergone the inevitable and usually extremely unpleasant initiation at the hands of his elders, but, deeming that a policy of aggression was to be preferred to one of passivity, he came to the conclusion that it would be better to pick a

quarrel than to have one forced upon him. He therefore strode up to Bathurst, the biggest and most powerful in the room, and scrutinised the latter's clothes in obvious and undisguised scorn.

"What a disgusting fit!" he said coolly. "Really, Bathurst, you must permit me to introduce you to my tailor. Just look at that demmed seam."

And he ripped up the other boy's beautiful velvet coat from tail to collar. The other two stood aghast and gaped at the impudence, but its show put a temporary stop to the processes of initiation and the night passed off fairly comfortably for the new boy. In the morning, however, the rule was that every boy should walk naked over the stone floor to the bathroom; in winter this was an extremely uncomfortable proceeding, but to a new boy it was a very trying ordeal. Ffoulkes grinning at Percy declared loudly that "Blakeney's flesh was too demmed white to be tolerated."

Whereupon Percy had two fights on his hands within twenty-four hours of his arrival.

In the first hours of school, Percy's colossal ignorance on almost every subject struck not only the masters, but the other boys themselves. Ordinarily, ignorance in a new boy elicited a good deal of sympathy, but rumour of the insult to a head boy had gone the round of the school; it was felt that expressions of sympathy might not be welcome and Percy was left severely alone. But this state of isolation did not last long. That very afternoon he was able to show his superiority in the fisticuffs as well as his ability to impose his will on others. Accompanied by the usual ceremonies, he fought both boys in the milling ground beneath the old school yard, and, after the double fight, walked off the field not only twice a victor, but already the acknowledged leader of the junior aristocratic set.

Thereafter life went on comfortably enough for Percy. He made friends with the three inmates of his dormitory and the quartette presented a united face to the rest of the school.

Though Harrow was a small republic, yet there were two distinct parties among the boys -- those who were peers or heirs to peerages and those who were not. Even amongst the former class, there was a line of demarcation which, though never openly referred to, was none the less clear. This consisted of the "ancients," as they were called -- men who could boast of an ancestor who had come over with the Conqueror or fought in the Crusades -- and those who had only recently been ennobled.

Within these subdivisions there was complete public solidarity: the boys voted, played games, and acted generally in unison, even though in private bitter feuds would often be waged. The "ancients" in their pride of birth drew a distinct social line between themselves and the newly ennobled, whose swagger and assumption of aristocratic ancestry they both mocked and despised. Nevertheless, they were ready to admit into their innermost circle any boy who happened to be very rich or a fine athlete, even though his grandfather had been born in the gutter.

Popularity was not easily won at Harrow in those days, even if a boy became a "blood" or a scholar. Respect, admiration, and a circle of friends could only be won after several years, when, either through good luck or charming personality, a boy arrived at the monitor stage. But strangely enough Blakeney was an exception to this rule.

None of the boys quite realized how it was that he had become such a popular figure in the school in so short a time, in spite of the great drawbacks of being only a new boy and a fag. His dandified dress, his indolent and indifferent ways, his witty and often acid sallies, his inane and infectious laughter on all and every occasion, would in the

ordinary course of events, have been branded as nothing short of impertinence and would have brought down on his head the collective wrath of Harrovians. But somehow he escaped the usual punishment meted out to eccentricities. He naturally ran the gauntlet of the innumerable raggings to which a new boy was invariably subjected.

At first, he was singled out for especial treatment in this respect and received rather more than his full share of horseplay at the hands of the few who resented his polished and somewhat foreign manners. The Lower School ragged him just to see what he would do, and to provoke him to further exploits. His fists were kept busy at first, but soon many ceased their unwelcome attentions because they found their baiting too painful to themselves. Brute force is always admired by the very young and Percy's physique earned him the respect of his fellows and thus he gradually acquired that ascendancy over them which had in the beginning puzzled the majority.

Somehow, at school singing, when it was his turn to stand upon the hall table and to sing a song to the accompaniment of jeers and raucous shouts, no one interrupted him though his voice certainly did not strike the choir-master as deserving of a place in the chapel choir. This and other incidents of a more or less trivial nature showed the extraordinary hold which Percy had over his schoolmates.

On the other hand, he cheerfully accomplished the menial duties assigned to him as a fag, never grumbling whatever the task. The captain of sports found in him a ready and powerful ally. The school clubs soon felt the weight of his presence. The rages of a more serious nature were developed more accurately and expeditiously under his suggestions. Above all, he never bragged of his exploits nor did he adopt a pose of a swagger. On the contrary, towards the boys he adopted an attitude of jolly companionship without the slightest hint of superiority.

The winter term proved to be a happy one for Blakeney in spite of its inauspicious beginning. The only favouritism he never won was that of his tutors. They tried to cram him with knowledge, without, however, the slightest success. In point of fact, he was straightaway put under special supervision and extra studies in order to catch up arrears of work. And, strange to say, Percy managed to accomplish the effort demanded of him for, after a short month, he was put back in his own class and allowed to resume normal studies.

From the first, Percy took a great liking to the headmaster, a sort of sympathy having sprung up between them. The boy saw in the strict disciplinarian a human being who, beneath the outward guise of authority, knew every boy's failings and weaknesses. Face to face with any of them, the cold dictatorial exterior would drop and the mask of sternness replaced by one of infinite understanding. Percy, throughout his Harrow career, never came to grips or at cross purposes with the Doctor, nor did the latter ever have cause to repent his seeming laxness as far as Percy was concerned.

With regard to the under-masters, all the boys treated them with that tolerant contempt which characterizes the English public schoolboy. Percy saw no reason to diverge from this attitude and ragged, skimped impositions and was inattentive with the rest, there being little or no contact with the masters outside the class-rooms. Percy disliked the maths "beak" and aped his drawly and pompous voice to the vast amusement of the boys; he tolerated the Latin master because he was sorry for the obviously earnest and seriously minded man; he openly laughed at the French master for his utter ignorance of that language. Only towards his erstwhile tutor, Horace Webley, who had now obtained a post as assistant theological master, did Percy show open hostility, never having forgotten their previous

relationship.

Otherwise his life was no different nor yet more exciting than that of any other Harrovian in the year of grace 1772. Percy at this time had no feeling for tradition and was indifferent to the past, since his father had not been in the school before him, and he cared little for the future in his relation to Harrow as he was too young to visualize the inner significance of the great school or its influence upon the minds of its scholars.

III

As soon as the holidays came round, Percy went to stay with the Dewhursts since Sir Algernon was still in Berlin in order to be near the grave of his wife, and he did not wish to have the schoolboy mooning around him.

It was indeed fortunate for Percy to have such an amiable and gallant protector during those vital years of adolescence, Lord Fulford giving him as much care as he did to his own children. For the first time in his life, Percy, admitted as he was to an intimate family circle, tasted the simple joys of a true domestic and happy life.

In the home of the Marquis of Fulford he saw and felt all those touches and links which he had missed through no fault of his own. From these charming people he learnt the real hard battle of life and the principles which ought to go to the making of a perfect English gentleman. The rather wild barbarian became transformed; he fell under the charm of Lady Fulford whose influence on him was immense. She softened his rather ebullient and rough ways: she taught him the necessity of self-control, for the government of his equals and the proper and just dealings towards his inferiors, the art of give and take, the sense of loyalty and patriotism, and above all, self-esteem and the pride of bearing.

During the first holidays in London he met those members of his own set who, later on, would be his companions. He also spent a week-end with the Earl of Chatham and was introduced to young Sheridan. So that one wonders whether Harrow or Lord Fulford had the privilege of shaping this raw material into what he became -- the most gallant gentleman of England.

The few weeks flew along on swift wings all too quickly and the coach took Percy and Anthony Dewhurst, well provided with tips and hampers, back to Harrow. As the horses galloped down the Harrow Road, Percy was more silent and grave than he was wont. He was now beginning to understand the position which wealth and a future title meant.

IV

The following term a school rebellion broke out which nearly turned into a miniature revolution. The origin of the trouble was a flogging. The chief personalities were Percy and Webley.

That term Percy found himself in the form over which his one-time tutor presided and all Percy's hate surged to the surface again, and, unmindful of possible consequences, he immediately started on a campaign to render the master's life intolerable. In this pursuit he was ably seconded by the rest of the class. Within a week, while the headmaster was temporarily absent, Webley, having heard of some particularly audacious prank in the school, suspected Percy of being its originator and instigator and demanded an explanation.

Percy, who in this instance happened to be entirely innocent, refused, true to school traditions, to divulge the perpetrator's name. Webley, already driven to exasperation by Percy's torments, not only cross-examined him with extreme severity, but also, having ordered

him to his room, administered a sound thrashing which was doubtless from Webley's point of view richly deserved, but at that juncture was distinctly injudicious. The boys, in revolt at such autocratic and unwarranted treatment, were up in arms; the flag was hauled down and the water turned off; the immemorial Harrovian custom of showing extreme discontent. This was tantamount to a declaration of war.

On his return, Doctor Sumner faced a grim set of boys. He straightaway set up an investigation which lasted throughout the night. The boys sat up, discussing the situation, while boy after boy answered the summons from the hall. And as each hour passed the tension grew intense, the Head and the boys realizing that a decisive battle was being waged. A boy could be forced to sneak on a school-fellow at the insistence of any of the masters, and, should he refuse, the punishment would be a thrashing. Such was the issue in Harrow's eyes.

From a theoretical point of view such a procedure was allowed by the rules, but it had never received legal sanction by the School and was determined that their rights should be preserved at whatever cost, the majority of the boys declaring their readiness to undergo any punishment even to expulsion so that the immemorial tradition of "no-sneaking" might be kept inviolate. Only a few -- mostly scholars and plebeians -- formed a minority: and these were tactfully warned of the risks they would run should they deem fit to persist in this hostile opinion.

By the middle of the night, the original cause for the dispute having been lost sight of, a search was made of the actual organizer of the revolt and for the boy who had hauled down the flag and taken the key out of the water cistern.

Since no way out of the impasse could be found there was only one

honourable solution and this, after many hours of deliberation, Percy carried out. Order would be restored straightaway in the school and the offender would own up to the Head in person on the condition that his confession be treated in the spirit in which it was made and no further punishment inflicted on any one, and on condition also that the boys' rights in the matter of "no-sneaking" be in the future respected.

That same afternoon the flag flew and the water flowed. Thereafter peace reigned in Harrow School once more; excitement gradually subsided and the rebellion died a natural death.

Percy's reputation was greatly enhanced by his tactful handling of the revolt. His prestige was high both in the eyes of the masters who had for the most part been all along on the side of the boys, and in those of the Harrovians themselves who considered that they were fortunate to have had the affair so quietly and deftly settled without painful reprisals.

Percy Blakeney was thereafter the leader of the aristocratic set and received not only their congratulations, but also their gratitude in the form of special privileges. Thus, although still a member of the Lower School, he was let off fagging in the future, allowed a comfortable chair of his own and permitted to take his baths in private.

For the next two years he indulged in his favourite recreation, sport in all its forms, boxing taking first place. He was able to knock out the instructor who had been a noted prize-fighter in his time. Another diversion which earned him great credit was running, cross-country steeplechases or hares and hounds being his special fancy since his endurance could outlast all pursuers, his long, lanky legs enabled him to out-distance rivals within a few yards of the start.

For this prowess in sport, he was, in his second year, elected to the Philathletic Club and obtained the captaincy of boxing, fencing,

running and also the mastership of the hunt. Later, he was to graduate into the coveted ranks of the "Bloods"; his election took place the following summer at the annual general meeting amidst universal applause. To his extreme satisfaction, his friends Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Bathurst were elected at the same time, the dormitory thus housing three out of the seven members of the famous and exclusive "Blood Club."

V

After three years at Harrow, Percy, to his vast surprise and amusement, found himself a monitor.

In the interval the ups and downs of school life had passed quickly and uneventfully. Though by nature an idler, Percy was by no means lacking in intelligence. He possessed a quick and receptive mind, an amazing memory for facts and figures and an able brain. His teachers were often infuriated by his slovenly work and apparent stupidity, and they had just cause for complaint since he never seemed to show a desire to exert himself at lessons. It was a standing grievance with the classical master that he refused to work for the scholastic honours which his ability undoubtably deserved.

Instead, Percy had perfected a system whereby he contrived to do the minimum amount of work required to avoid impositions and beatings. The system at Harrow in those days whereby a boy obtained promotion (remove as it was called) at least once a year, unless he was totally unfit for it, enabled him to climb very slowly, but surely, from the Lower to the Upper School, ultimately attaining, somewhat precariously, the dignity of a sixth-form boy without having worked very hard for the honour.

But even if these years had failed to make a scholar out of him, they were the means of forging those great friendships which were

destined to last a lifetime, friendships built on varying foundations.

The original sharers of the dormitory, Andrew Ffoulkes, Edward Bathurst, and William Pitt, linked themselves together in enduring bonds tacitly acknowledging the leadership of Percy Blakeney. Though they were just schoolboys, they had already discerned in the companion those magnificent qualities of courage as well as of cunning, of magnetic personality and the power to command, of irresistible gaiety and charm whatever the predicament, which later on in life called forth their unqualified obedience. At Harrow these three being inseparable earned the nickname of the "Three Devils," since no escapade or freak prank was ever carried out successfully save at their instigation.

They once held up the London to Hertford mail coach in approved highwayman fashion, and, having revealed to their victims their identities and intentions, they sent the proceeds of their robbery to a well-deserving charity. They ruled the juniors with an iron hand, put a stop to all bullying and to all unwarranted outbursts of childish rebellion. They even, by means of the subtle art of "sidetracking," reduced a too presumptuous master to subjection and by physical force deposed a too bumptious monitor. The headmaster was quite willing to admit that the influence of the "Three Devils" was all for the good of the school, and that whenever they brought a request to him he was always ready to give it his earnest consideration and to grant it when possible or reasonable. Hence, their unexpected promotion to monitor rank.

Strangest of all was the close friendship between Blakeney and William Pitt. It was a friendship which brought Percy much of the help and consideration in high places of which he subsequently stood in need in his work of mercy.

It was a case of extreme opposites meeting; Pitt admired Percy's

wonderful physique and fearlessness, whilst Blakeney paid tribute to the other's capacity for hard work and moral courage. At first, Percy only showed toward his friend that tolerant contempt which the athlete has for the bookworm. Later it dawned upon him that Pitt was more than a plodder, was, in fact, a genius, and contempt was thereupon turned into genuine and generous admiration. He accepted quite humbly the rebukes and railings which Pitt levelled at his idleness; and so great was Pitt's influence over him that presently the masters noticed an unaccountable improvement in Percy's schoolwork. Soon it became known that Pitt was under Blakeney's especial care and that any one who wished to tease or bully the studious boy had first to reckon with Blakeney's fists.

Pitt was Ffoulkes' fag. When Percy was released from performing menial duties after the brilliant part he had played in the school rebellion, he set himself the task of helping to perform his, so as to enable his friend to study without interruption; and when he in his turn became a fag master he made his own young slave carry out duties for Pitt, until such a time as the latter could command a fag for himself.

The Earl of Chatham, at his son's request, sent a holiday invitation to Percy and, after he had listened gravely to his young visitor's exploits as recounted to him by William, he remarked:

"Damn it, if I only had you in my ministry I would defy Bedford and . . . hm . . . even the King."

Which remark Pitt was soon after to remember in a manner and at a time that caused his friend Blakeney much consternation.

VI

It was soon after his elevation to monitorial rank and in the

beginning of summer term 1775, that Percy received a summons from the headmaster. This was to apprise him of the sudden death of his father in Berlin from heart failure. The boy was granted long leave from school. The Marquis of Fulford, who was one of the trustees under Sir Algernon's will and appointed Percy's guardian until the latter's majority, acted once again in that spirit of kindliness which he had always shown to the Blakeney: he took the carrying out of all the legal formalities on his shoulders, as well as the doleful task of bringing the body across from Germany to its last resting place in England.

Percy Blakeney, at fifteen years of age, found himself a full-fledged baronet and the possessor of a vast fortune. His feelings in the matter of losing his father so unexpectedly must have been very mixed. He had never understood and never loved his father. The first sense of bereavement, such as it was, was soon submerged in that of childish pride in his own wealth, and of enjoyment in having the freedom to spend.

Lord Fulford's guardianship was of the kindest and most easy-going where pocket-money and expenditure were concerned. He was one of those men who believed in allowing growing boys as much freedom of action as their character permitted.

For Percy the mere fact of losing his father could not have perturbed him: love as between father and son had been entirely absent in their relationship towards one another and their intercourse remained devoid of all sympathy and understanding. The boy had no real cause for weeping: no apparent cause for sorrow. No thread in his life had been snapped: no loving memory broken. On the contrary, he was now given new hopes for the future and he seems at this stage to have let life roll on as before, just as if nothing of any great significance had happened or any radical change in his life had

occurred. This attitude he summed up in a letter to his guardian in answer to questions relating to his new estate.

"I cannot," he wrote on his return to Harrow, "go about with a long face. I hope you, sir, who so well understand my family, will perceive that I am not unfeeling or lacking in gentlemanly instincts. The reverse of the case is the truth. I glory in the fact that I am entitled to be called 'Mister' Blakeney by my masters instead of my surname *tout court*. As to my future, I am very undecided. I hope that you will permit me to remain here for another two years at least. Frankly, the University does not attract me, but I may enter politics with my good friend Pitt. Or else I shall roam about the world a bit. I suppose the truth is that I do not know what I want."

The school round and the onerous monitor's duties soon drew him back into Harrow life again, and his bereavement was forgotten in the everyday excitement of writing lists, preparing lessons and supervising meals. His drawl of a voice convulsed the school when first he read the lessons in chapel: his attempt to sing in the choir gave the music master a stomach-ache. On the other hand, he kept the junior school well in order, and never had there been such quiet during preparation as when Blakeney was in command.

The illicit joys of breaking bounds and drinking at taverns were quickly suppressed amongst the Lower School, though many an afternoon saw Sir Percy and his three friends in the bar parlour playing cards. Likewise he seems to have kept a stable and to have gone hunting regularly once a week, though how he managed to do this is difficult to conjecture, for this form of sport was strictly forbidden by the law of the school since London was only a few hours' ride away. But authority, in those days rather partisan, winked at Percy's misdemeanors, so long as his iron discipline over the Lower School remained unchallenged and unimpaired.

And he took those prerogatives for granted as if they were his due. He never stopped to consider the ethics of his conduct and whether he was setting a bad example to others: the boys, on the other hand, allowed Blakeney's defiance of the laws to go unchallenged, because they realised that he was a good sportsman, always willing to turn a laugh against himself and that he never lost control of his temper even under the most severe provocation.

Since Percy seemed to have no inclination for any special branch of learning, the problem of his future exercised his tutors far more than it worried their pupil. They mapped out several careers for him, pointing out with infinite pains the advantages to be gained from the Law, the Army, or whatever happened to be the proposal of the moment. But all they encountered was a rebuff accompanied by an inane and merry laugh and the invariable remark:

"Lud, sir, I'm too demmed lazy. What you propose requires brain not brawn."

Lord Fulford, at whose home Sir Percy now stayed on all occasions, when told of these well-meaning meddlers, threw up his hands in horror, exclaiming:

"For God's sake, Percy, behave decently like a gentleman. There is no earthly necessity for you to work."

With which statement Sir Percy heartily concurred. However, now and again, books were read and annotated, a few notes were written in the margin: an occasional brilliant essay was painfully born, for at eighteen, Percy was fired with the zeal of saving England from the hands of traitors -- those foul men being Rockingham, Fox and others. His admiration for Pitt spurred him on to the nearest approach to hard work ever yet done by him, and, before leaving Harrow for good, he had pledged himself to stand by his friend as

soon as the latter should be Prime Minister.

The masters, perceiving the futility of ever persuading the youth to undertake a serious career, soon dropped the subject, for which Sir Percy was eternally grateful.

VII

And thus his last term came all too soon. By that time, with universal consent and general acclamations, the school had elected Blakeney head of the Philatheletic Club; the masters, for reasons best known to themselves, had promoted him to the dignity of "School Monitor," one of the select "twelve," and for the short period of thirteen weeks, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., could boast that he was, in truth, the head boy of Harrow, both in work and in play.

As the day of ultimate parting drew close he experienced the strange, yet fruitful emotion of regret. He looked back and saw, in a new perspective, these years of boyhood; the lost opportunities, the waste of time, the compelling atmosphere of tradition. The years had sped by on golden wings and there seemed to be nothing to catch, nothing to stop and gaze at with awe or with pride. The larks were now reduced to absurd futilities: the revolts diminished to inconsequent follies.

In a moment the proportions appeared reversed, in inverse ratio to their former significance, as if the events were fleeing before the onrush of infinity, whilst dwindling down to zero. Boyhood was gone: he was now a man and must emerge into a man's world – a world in which there was no room for petty grievances or harsh authorities. And others would step into the shoes so lately shed: new monitors would take his place, new boys would sit in the empty form: new "Bloods" would replace the old and everything would continue on the Hill as if he had never existed.

The old Hall reverberated for the last time to Sir Percy's laughs, to his quips and jests, which echoed through the sacred Yard. On his left and right sat the quartette. They pledged each other in sound, full-bodied port, drunk from tankards.

"We meet in London, my hearties," roared Sir Percy Blakeney, "this day week, and, by God, we'll paint the old town red!"

Forty years on, when afar and asunder

Parted are those who are singing today,

When you look back, and forgetfully wonder

What you were like in your work and your play,

Then it may be, there will often come o'er you

Glimpses of notes like the catch of a song —

Visions of boyhood shall float then before you,

Echoes of dreamland shall bear them along,

Follow up!

Chapter Three ~ Pranks and Politics

I

England was in an extremely critical state at the beginning of 1779. A great discontent had spread throughout the land; the navy was disorganized, divided against itself by party politics; the army was consumed in inactivity on the American continent; the colonies were menaced by greedy enemies; trade was slowly dying, strangled by acts of piracy. The ministers had lost the confidence of Parliament and of the nation and were rapidly losing confidence in each other. Alone, in the cabinet, His Majesty was strong, though considered obstinate, battling for the rights of the people, the power of the government and the prerogatives of the British crown.

At Drury Lane, in deference to the King, who was an avowed admirer of Handel, the season was composed of oratorios. Most nights the Royal box was occupied either by His Majesty himself or a member of the Royal Family. Among the latter, George, Prince of Wales, secretly loathed serious music, though he tactfully forbore to say so and he hated going to the theatre when it became his turn to attend. Of late, H.R.H. had noticed a young man in a neighbouring box, always exquisitely dressed, who appeared to hold the same aversion to Herr Handel's oratorios as himself, since, after the first few bars, deep resounding snores would proceed from his direction. The young prince, curious at first, became interested in the youthful dandy and sent his tutor to investigate the matter. The latter returned in due course with the information that the person in question was Sir Percy Blakeney.

The young prince became excited. Surrounded as he was by the ridged etiquette of the Court, which did not allow him much latitude, he hoped that this unknown young exquisite would prove to be the

congenial companion he had always wished for: the prospect of finding at last a friend whom he would choose for himself, and one who could not fail to find favour with his Royal father, caused him to overcome his childish diffidence and to summon this Percy Blakeney to the Royal box. On receipt of the command, Sir Percy, with a swift glance at the set of his cravat, followed the tutor and presented himself to the Prince, whose first question to him was:

"Sir Percy, since you so obviously dislike music, why do you attend the opera?"

With a low bow, Blakeney made answer:

"Your Royal Highness, I beg to make my excuses and hope that I did not disturb you. Begad, sir, I find Drury Lane the only comfortable place in which to sleep a few peaceful winks."

Whereupon H.R.H. whispered complete agreement and begged Sir Percy to keep him company at least for that performance.

From this rather fanciful encounter sprang an intimacy which, between the heir to the throne and Sir Percy, was to last a lifetime, a friendship which embraced not only these two, but subsequently their wives and families. At the time of this meeting the Prince of Wales was seventeen years old and Sir Percy the elder by two years.

Blakeney, in after life, sometimes referred to this meeting with the Prince. In a diary written some years later, he gives us a picture of the heir to the throne at that time and one or two intimate details of their friendship.

"He was an engaging youth in some ways. He was always very ill at ease when in the presence of strangers, and I remember concluding at the time that he was probably kept tightly on the curb. I fancy,

however, that he must be a bit of a thorn in the side of his father, and, if I am any judge of character, he will not be a successful king. Although but seventeen when I first met him, he showed ugly tendencies even then -- tendencies which I would not have tolerated in any person in my own set. I suppose that a future king must be allowed some license. Begad, I thank my lucky stars I was not born a royal personage.

"I remember that night when he insisted on being taken to Warren's Den, a pretty low-down haunt in those days. He drank far too much for a young lad -- his head for liquor was always demmed weak -- and I was prickly with fear lest he betray himself to the girls who seemed to dote on him. In the end, I had to remove him forcibly ere the pace became too hot."

Judging from diaries and contemporary letters written by and to Sir Percy about this time, it seems pretty certain that he was drawn into Court circles and became a great favourite at St. James. In one or two letters there are distinct allusions to the young prince, looking up to him and following his advice on the subject of clothes and deportment.

They became inseparable companions during those early days of their intimacy and were seen in one another's company on every possible occasion; they rode together nearly every morning; they fenced and boxed nearly every afternoon, and, whenever feasible, forgathered in the evenings. And as the years passed, so did this friendship grow. It was not merely that the Prince enjoyed Percy's sallies and jokes, or that his clothes were the most beautiful in London; it went much deeper than that, right down into the core of the mind, a subtle sympathy which had flown between them that night when both had been so unutterably bored by the high-flown harmonies of Herr Handel and out of this, real understanding had

been born.

And, indeed, this new influence in the young prince's life was considered by many to be the very best thing which could have happened, and was encouraged by the much harassed tutor, who was often hard put to it to keep the heir to the throne away from other rash and evil friendships. Sir Percy found himself in a new rôle and one which he had never studied, that of mentor to the prince, and he seems to have greatly enjoyed the position.

As was only to be expected, petty jealousies soon came nosing round this intimacy between Prince and commoner. Gossip, none too clean or kind, busied itself with their names. Those who, for some reason or another, had been refused entrance into Court circles, chose to deride Sir Percy Blakeney for accepting Royal favours; they chose to discern in his acceptance either personal ambition for higher honours or a mere bid for popularity. But neither the Prince nor Blakeney was perturbed by these scandalmongers, the majority of whom had their being on the fringe of society.

There was the usual flood of anonymous letters, one of which seemed to have caught Sir Percy's fancy, or tickled his sense of humour, for he kept it among his family papers.

"Sir," writes the nameless correspondent, "would it not be more honourable and more becoming in a gentleman of your exalted standing and wealth to earn the honours which you evidently so ardently covet by serving your country rather than by currying favour with a certain august young man? Doubtless, with your genius and personality, you can lead him down any path you choose, but the writer of this letter deems it is a disgraceful and shameless action to have initiated the said personage into a life of debauchery and licentiousness when you could have done so much good to your country by elevating his morals

"One who, at least, has at heart the good of his country and the dignity of the English Crown."

With the exception of this one letter -- more virulent than most -- Blakeney treated all anonymous letters with the contempt they deserved, consigned them to the wastepaper basket and their writers to the nethermost regions.

"Another batch of these demmed letters," he wrote in his journal on December 5th, 1779. "Zounds, people must be frightfully bored with life if that is the only subject they can think of to chatter about. *Entre nous*, H.R.H. needs no lessons in the art of debauchery."

It certainly sounds paradoxical that a boy like Percy Blakeney, then only nineteen years of age, should have counted the friendship of the equally young Prince of Wales for the purpose of social advancement. He needed none, for he was rich and had a large circle of friends, and what is more to the point, had ever since early boyhood, scorned both flatterers and sycophants, whilst his one ambition was to exact all the enjoyment out of life that his great wealth put within his reach.

II

That he contrived to realize this ambition is amply proved by the records of the next two years. The most exclusive circles in London and in Bath received him with open arms: within six months he was the acknowledged leader of fashion and of style. Sir Percy's coats were the talk of the town: his inanities were quoted by all his circle of friends, whilst his foolish talk was aped by the gilded youth at Almack's and on the Mall. Society accepted him, petted him, made much of him, since his stories were the wittiest in London, his wines and parties the most sought after in England. In fact, he was looked

upon as the ideal model for the fop and the philanderer.

One section of London society openly laughed at him and were wont to declare that Blakeney was the "demmedest ass that ever graced a drawing-room," whilst another kept his company solely because they wished to partake of his popularity and hoped that they would be noticed in the same room as the Prince of Wales. Others again were frankly puzzled by the young man, and could not make up their minds whether he was just a dandy without brains or a really clever man, masquerading for some particular purpose of his own as a fool.

This picture of Sir Percy Blakeney, painted by the gossip of the time, does not tell us much about him personally, nor does it enlighten us as to his real character. Actually, it is a mere sketch of the superficial man -- just that aspect of him which he chose to show to the public. It seems to have been the general opinion of his world about him at that time. But a closer study of the period tends to prove that that opinion was an entirely erroneous one.

As a matter of fact, there is a vivid description of Sir Percy Blakeney, written by a man of great culture who was a contemporary of his and who seems to have known him quite intimately. After a long discussion anent the various meeting-places of London society and their frequenters, in his *Reminiscences and Personalities*, Sir Edward Egmont devotes a chapter of his book to the London Clubs and in it describes his first meeting with Sir Percy Blakeney.

". . . It is wrong to imagine that all the young men who frequent the fashionable London Clubs are thus degenerate and debauched. There was one young man in particular whose personality was so forceful, so arresting, that, though it occurred over twenty years ago, I can remember my first meeting with him as vividly as if it were to-day. Sir Percy Blakeney, baronet, was undeniably handsome -- always excepting that lazy bored look which seemed habitual with him, like

the mask of an inane fop. Six foot three in his socks, as broad as a prize fighter in full trim, every inch of his figure seemed to radiate hidden strength. His forehead was low and square, crowned with thick fair hair, smooth and heavy: deep-set, somewhat lazy blue eyes beneath firmly marked, straight brows, and in those eyes there was an intensity behind this apparently lazy look, a latent passion which lit up his face whenever some subject dear to his heart was mentioned. But he seemed purposefully to subdue those flashes which revealed another nature, almost as if he were afraid that they would betray the secrets so jealously guarded by his habitual lazy look.

"Many scoffed at him; many laughed indulgently at him. There were some who ridiculed his rather obvious foreign manners. I was told over and over again that, though no one could call him dull, every one thought that he was hopelessly stupid.

"But I divined in this rich and pampered pet of society, a depth and an understanding far beyond that of those who judged him thus lightly. His exquisite clothes were but the outward sign of his great love of beauty in all its forms. I doubt whether Blakeney could have existed without beautiful things around him. And his love of beauty pervaded his everyday life and manifested itself in many forms; for are not charity and honour and chivalry forms of beauty? I quickly discerned the shrewd brain behind the inane speech; the moral courage behind the lazy look. I knew that before me stood a man who would soon astonish those who dubbed him foolish and who would soon play an important and leading part in the history of the world . . ."

Percy, of course, though still very young and under the nominal guardianship of Lord Fulford, could give rein to his every whim and caprice wherever these might lead him. Nor did his guardian greatly trouble himself to interfere. What did it matter? The Blakeney fortune was more than sufficient to meet its young owner's demands.

"If," said Lord Fulford, with an attempt at cynicism, "Percy intends to go to the devil, why the deuce shouldn't he, and in his own fashion? He is rich enough to buy the freehold of Hell and its contents and he will!"

Be it said, however, that Percy Blakeney was neither a debauchee nor a gambler, and that no one knew this better than his guardian and trustee.

It was about this time that the bulk of ancestral property was sold. Percy found that an obscure village, miles away from the beaten track, was somewhat in the nature of a white elephant and of no particular value to the pursuit of his enjoyment. He kept the house itself, for sentimental purposes probably, together with a few acres of land, but the rest of the property, which was rich in pasture and arable, was bought up by the local farmers, and with the proceeds of the sale, Percy bought a house on the river at Richmond.

Richmond House, as it was known at the time, and which Sir Percy rechristened Blakeney Manor, rapidly became the center of fashionable society. Soon, everybody who was anybody or considered themselves anybody, not only accepted Sir Percy's invitations to routs and parties, but greedily cadged for them whenever possible. Richmond became the *rendezvous* of the *élite* of society, and the Blakeney water parties, an invention of his own, became famous throughout the fashionable world; they drew the rank and fashion by chaise or coach to the small village by the river, there to enjoy the young exquisite's lavish hospitality.

The luxurious furnishings, the priceless pictures and rare books which he had collected or inherited, attracted the connoisseurs; his wines soon brought the gay sparks, young and old, round him like flies, and his horses won for him the esteem of the sporting fraternity.

Added to which the fact that, perchance, the Prince of Wales or some other member of the Royal family might be encountered in this intimate and friendly atmosphere, set the seal of social approval on Blakeney's position.

But these favours and this popularity were not won gratuitously. Sir Percy had to pay the price of his extravagances; and a very big price it was too, for money in those days was more scarce than it is now. But he was always willing to pay. He liked to live *en grand seigneur* and was more than ready to indulge that fancy, though always within the limit of his fortune.

In these days, when it was more or less the fashion for gentlemen -- young ones especially -- to be up to their eyes in debt, Sir Percy Blakeney never owed any man anything. He hated contracting debts and never allowed a bill to become overdue. Dull he might be, stupid he often appeared to be, but in business transactions he was both scrupulous and methodical. Those who were wont to dub him an inane fop whose thoughts ran only on cards and clothes, might have paused sometimes to consider how it came about that the Blakeney millions, whatever their provenance, were not only efficiently administered, but had even of late considerably increased.

The existing accounts of Blakeney Manor show that Sir Percy must have spent a small fortune on his installation. Originally, the house, with its grounds sloping down to the river, had cost him nearly twenty thousand pounds to buy, but he had also poured money inside its four walls, decorating, renovating and furnishing the rooms in sumptuous style. Besides which, the actual upkeep of the place, even in those days of low wages and long hours, must have run away with an enormous amount of money.

The staff consisted, we are told, of eight gardeners, a dozen women servants, a French chef of international repute, with his attendant

scullions and kitchen wenches, a highly paid butler and a number of lackeys. To these must be added Sir Percy's own valet, and valets and maids specially kept for the service of guests. Then there were the stables, where Sir Percy kept over twenty horses both for riding and driving, with a large contingent of coachmen and grooms.

His personal expenses were also on a lavish scale. His wardrobe was a marvel of elegance. These were the days of elaborate and at times sumptuous clothes; of velvet coats and brocaded waistcoats, of lace cravats and ruffles, of silk stockings and jeweled buckles. Sir Percy affected a style which might almost be called superfastidious, but at the same time he contrived to wear his clothes with so much grace and elegance that he never appeared effeminate or overdressed.

From this somewhat superficial sketch of Sir Percy Blakeney culled from scraps of contemporary writings, it must not be inferred that his interests in life were wholly given over to extravagance and the pursuit of pleasure. He was still very young at this time and chiefly endowed in sowing a crop of wild oats before settling down to the serious business of becoming a useful member of society. There is no doubt that even then, there were stirrings in his heart and mind all tending towards an ideal, as yet immature.

Roughly speaking, he already had vague aspirations towards something fine and beautiful, but he did not know what that something was likely to be. Already he had a real hatred for everything that was ugly or base, and above all cruel; the sound of a child crying, or an animal in pain, would rend his heart-strings and the sight of some bully ill-treating a small, defenseless creature would cause him to see red. His powerful fists were often in requisition on such occasions.

But though Sir Percy Blakeney was, as it were, the sun around which revolved the several constellations of London's *jeunesse dorée*, he did not forget his studious and staunch friend William Pitt. Many hours of relaxation did he spend in the latter's house, discussing politics and tilting at the reputation of party leaders.

Pitt had won a seat in the new Parliament which met in October, 1787. The King's speech was firm against the continuance of the American contest, and bitterly resentful of French interference in favour of the rebel colony. The debate on the address was carried on with acrimony on both sides of the house; tempers waxed hot and language often became immoderate. The ministry was obviously losing the confidence of the nation, whilst Fox, as usual, incurred the King's aversion by a series of insults levelled against what he called "The sacred shield of majesty interposed for the protection of a weak administration." He acknowledged the Sovereign's personal virtues, but declared that "his whole reign had been one continued series of disgrace and calamity."

It was at this juncture that Pitt and Sheridan were first heard in the House of Commons. Pitt's first speech in Parliament in support of Burke's bill for administration reform created a veritable sensation. Curiosity to hear whether the mantle of the great Chatham had descended on his son, soon yielded to unqualified admiration. The young orator stood up fearlessly amidst a circle of brilliant statesmen and spoke in a voice so harmonious and in language so well chosen and eloquent that both parties accorded him ungrudging praise.

Sir Percy Blakeney had a seat in the Stranger's Gallery, and there was not a man in the House to whom Pitt's instantaneous success gave as much joy and gratification as it did to his one-time schoolfellow.

That same year on the occasion of the King's birthday, there was a

magnificent reception at Court; many were present who had never been honoured with an invitation before. Members of the Government, the House of Lords and the House of Commons were present in full force, and as the aristocratic element was predominant in the ministry, the brilliance of the scene surpassed that of all previous years.

Sir Percy Blakeney, we know, was present on that occasion. He had made up his mind to attend, because of his firm determination to be of service to his friend William Pitt by introducing him personally to His Majesty and to the Prince of Wales. The Prince in any case was always ready to fall in with his friend Blakeney's views and to accept his friend's friends as his own. There seems to have been no doubt whatever in the minds of such writers as Glynde and Egmont, that it was Blakeney's influence at Court that procured for Pitt the following year the Chancellorship of the Exchequer.

And Pitt was the first to recognize the true worth, the energy and the extraordinary powers of organization that lay behind the mask of inanity and foppishness, so persistently worn by Blakeney. He did indeed try to drag him into the meshes of a parliamentary career.

"Dear Percy," he wrote on August 10th, soon after his elevation to Cabinet rank, "I feel that your presence in the House on our Benches would strengthen the Government's position. The coalition between Fox and North was concluded yesterday, and announced to the House at a late hour last night. We all baited these old rivals as violently as we could, but North slept peacefully during our most offensive personal attacks. You could manage that side of our politics in a much more brilliant and worthy manner than any of us! The King is furious and is trying by every means in his power to break the partnership. Our only hope is that Fox, either through his ill-considered attacks on His Majesty or through impetuosity or

imprudence, will one day go too far. I do not think that the coalition will have a long life.

"What an arena the Commons is. You really must join us if only as a target (this is Sheridan's idea), but better still as a battering-ram. At any rate think it over."

Less than a year later he had again occasion to congratulate himself on possessing a friend whose tact and discretion, in this instance, saved the Cabinet from a serious embarrassment -- one, in fact, which very nearly brought about the wholesale resignation of the ministry and probably the dissolution of Parliament.

"Now my dear friend," Pitt wrote on this occasion to Sir Percy Blakeney, "I am to beg a favour of you. The King has in mind the setting up of a separate establishment for H.R.H. I have just received communication to that effect. The King has declared most emphatically that no heavy burden shall thereby be laid on the nation, and, with this end in view, he is willing to give 50,000 sterling to the Prince out of his own civil list. All that he will ask from Parliament is a lump sum of 60,000 sterling for initial expenses. I happen to know, on the other hand, that the Cabinet wishes to vote an annual income of 100,000 sterling to H.R.H., but the King is violently opposed to this. Try to talk to H.R.H. and explain the situation to him so that both the King and Parliament may be satisfied."

Blakeney accepted the onerous task, promising to do his best, but well knowing he would not find it easy. To begin with, the Prince of Wales had lately very much angered the King by his constant association with Fox, who, in this instance as in most others, was at once in opposition to the Sovereign. Why the Cabinet should have been so eager to spend the nation's money at a moment when its finances were in a very parlous state it is difficult to imagine. But there it was.

His Majesty was willing to forgo 50,000 a year from his civil list in favour of his son, but the coalition ministry, which included several of the Prince's friends, wished to give him a regular settlement of 100,000 a year, the same as had been granted to Prince of Wales before this. And the King rejected this proposal most emphatically on the grounds that so large a sum would only bring a crowd of parasites fawning round the person of His Royal Highness, and that in any case the nation could not afford this expenditure right on top of a disastrous and costly war. And this rejection was couched in terms of such acrimony that the ministers threatened to resign in a body.

"For God's sake, Blakeney," Pitt now wrote to his friend, "influence H.R.H. into a moderate view and entreat him to obey the King's discretion. Otherwise there will be a change of ministry, a proceeding which would be most injurious to us all at the present moment. Our time has not yet come."

The affair in the end passed off better than most people expected. The Cabinet's somewhat extravagant offer was put down by half; the Government escaped defeat and the King was overjoyed at his son's more reasonable frame of mind. The upshot of it all was that Sir Percy Blakeney received his first honour at the hands of his king, his name appearing on the next honours list as a knight commander of the Order of the Bath.

"Dear William," he wrote to Pitt after the investiture, "I was only too happy to use any influence I may have in the pursuit of your plans, but you need not have gone to these lengths of making a public exhibition of me. Damn it, you ought to know by now how I should hate any reward for the small service I may have rendered you. You were a sly fox to get His Majesty to lay his sword across my shoulders. I should not have thought you capable of such a

treasonable act towards a friend. But beware! I'll have my revenge on you some day!"

IV

But if Blakeney imagined that, after these strenuous exertions, he would be allowed to dream away his time at Blakeney Manor and sink back into his lazy and indolent life, he was vastly mistaken. Pitt was now Prime Minister of England, and thereafter Percy was given no peace. From then on, he was bombarded by his friend with entreaties to stand for Parliament, and to his utter astonishment, Bathurst and the happy Harrow band added their voices to that of Pitt. He was offered what was practically a safe seat. Unwillingly, yet pushed by some vague desire to serve the country which he loved with an intense if secret ardor, he acceded to these "demmed monstrous" demands and anon found himself a Member of the House of Commons.

His first sensation was one of hot anger against those who had pushed him into it; faced by the awful solemnity of that august assembly, and, in the presence of that gathering of brilliant and cunning brains versed in the art of politics, he felt comparatively, nay, hopelessly out of his element.

His entrance was greeted with derision. Those in the House who knew him -- and they were mostly members of the Opposition -- hooted and poked fun at the dandy from Richmond. Cries such as "straight from the Royal nursery," "the dissolute member from Richmond Fair," and so on were shouted from all sides. But Pitt had risen, and, as he led his friend to a seat immediately behind the Government benches, a hush fell upon the assembly. This signal act of Pitt's was more eloquent than any sharp-witted give. Amidst the silence that ensued, Sir Percy settled himself down comfortably, stretched out his long legs and surveyed the House through his spy

glass. The scrutiny was ironical and the lazy blue eyes gleamed with impish malice. Leaning over Pitt's shoulder, he remarked, half-audibly and with an affected drawl:

"Begad, but I've never encountered such a set of ugly mugs collected in one place before."

And his inane laugh went echoing for the first time round the solemn confines of the House.

Blakeney's sojourn in Parliament, however, was not of long duration. The official reports go to prove that he did not take an active part in the acrimonious debates that were so prevalent at the time, nor did he seemingly show any marked talent for oratory. Pitt, on the other hand, often declared that, to have Blakeney close to one during any decisive debate, amply compensated for lack of brilliant rhetoric on his part. His witty remarks or quaint sallies usually timed to perfection and his frequent bursts of laughter when a scathing attack had been launched against his friends were worth many votes at division time. His intimate knowledge of continental affairs was of great value to the Cabinet whenever questions on the Government's foreign policy were on the paper.

Pitt attempted in vain to cajole him into accepting a minor office in the Cabinet, but to this suggestion Blakeney opposed an adamant refusal.

"Zounds, man! You cannot expect me to talk on abstruse politics! Think of the damned mess I would make of it all!"

He made one or two speeches in support of the Government policy, mostly in answer to the spiteful attacks initiated by Fox. These speeches opened the eyes of many, both enemies and friends, to his undoubted ability if only he would take the trouble to exert it. One

speech in particular is worthy of record for it caused the opposition to writhe, so skillfully did he find the chinks in its armour and pierce it with withering ridicule.

"*Maître corbeau sur un arbe perché . . .*" he began, and then inveighed against the "*renard*" and that animal's sly method of obtaining the succulent fruits of office. His travels abroad, he said, forced him into the position of warning the House against France. He told them of the discontent against Louis XVI. He advised them to beware of France, and predicted that, before the century was out, England would have to protect her vast possessions from a greedy and unscrupulous revolutionary Government. He finished his speech by saying that his party was being cajoled into opening its beak too wide, and that, if they were not careful, *le renard* would run off with the cheese.

The report of this speech soon spread through the Clubs and amongst the haunts of the gilded youth. At Almack's Blakeney was fêted by his cronies, and the chaff was not always good natured. But he took no notice. Already after nine months of politics, he was beginning to regret his precipitate decision to enter Parliament. Indeed, the notion of a political career for Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., K.C.B., was, from the onset, an anomalous one. For he was not a cadger after office or honours; in fact, his feelings in such matters were very much the reverse of self-seeking. The very idea of being pushed into the limelight was thoroughly distasteful to him and, as time went on, this desire to hide his light under the proverbial bushel grew into positive fanaticism. And now that he had entered the political arena and been able to judge for himself of all the corruption, the dishonesty, the double-dealing that was not only condoned, but openly flaunted, he realized how thoroughly out of place amongst so much moral turpitude was any kind of ideal or aspiration towards political integrity. He saw high offices, votes and honours bought and

battered and sold to the highest bidder, and his very soul revolted at the sight. Much as he admired and esteemed his friend Pitt, who, he knew, was of an unshakable honesty, he could not disguise his rancor before him when he inveighed against party politics.

"Damn it," he said to his intimate friend Ffoulkes, "to think that we are governed by a band of thieves and blackmailers. Poor old England! Heaven guard her!"

Nor would he admit the excuse that, after all, since no one knew what went on behind the scenes, it did not matter whether members of the Government thieved and bribed, were honest or corrupt, since it did not seem to injure the country, which specious argument would throw Sir Percy Blakeney into a greater fury than before.

But what chiefly influenced him in his decision to abandon a political career was his horror of injustice and his immense sympathy for the under dog. His attempts, during his time in Parliament, to alleviate the suffering of the poor and the submerged were either met with rank hostility, or at best received with complete indifference. Time and again he threw himself with ardor into debates upon the existing social system and the problems of unemployment and relief which confronted the people of England, but his eloquent appeals were doomed to failure from the outset and generally strangled at their first inception. The ministers were far too busy with their own quarrels and his fellow members too jealous of their own political future to trouble about such trifles as the starving poor.

For once, that magnetic personality of his had failed to attract. And, indeed, Blakeney felt but little incentive to exert his powers to the full; he was soon sickened by the growing hostility shown towards the measures he tried to introduce. He was humiliated by his inability to influence his fellow members to divert their thoughts from their own petty jealousies. After two years of patient striving to gain some

amelioration in the Poor Laws, he realized that he was wasting precious time and breath on an ungrateful task. His undoubted talents had no chance of expansion in the House; it did not seem to require courage, ideals or selflessness to gain honours and high position, but only backstairs intrigue and bribery.

A particularly acrimonious debate, initiated by him for the purpose of introducing a new law in connection with outdoor relief, set the seal upon his purpose.

Close to Richmond there was a slum area where the homeless poor and outcasts of society collected. These wretched people were driven from pillar to post by the police, and for the most part ended their lives in gaol. Blakeney wished to alleviate their extreme distress, but found to his consternation that he could do nothing on a comprehensive scale without the sanction of Parliament; even though he himself was willing to provide the money for an institute where they could be fed and sheltered. He set down on the motion paper a proposal for the amendment of the law then in force. He castigated with no uncertain tongue a Government who allowed such a state of affairs to continue. He demanded of them certain grants of money towards the rescue of these unfortunates. The rest, he declared, would be subscribed by private individuals.

"For God's sake, stop that man Blakeney," exclaimed Fox. "We require the time and the money for more important work than soup-kitchens. How the devil can we govern this land with such fellows in Parliament? This House is not a philanthropic institution!"

"Unless you help such poor miserable beings now, you won't have any country to govern," shouted Blakeney furiously. "Wait until the revolution is upon us."

He was so disheartened and so disgusted at his failure that that

very night he applied for the Chiltern Hundreds.

"Though your motives, my dearest of friends," he wrote to Pitt, "are, in my eyes, both noble and just, those of some of your followers are demmed disreputable. Therefore, since I cannot countenance their ways, I hope that you will accept my retirement in the spirit in which it is offered and that you will not take it amiss or feel that I am a backslider. I hope to see you next Monday week at Blakeney Manor for dinner. H.R.H. will be there, and he wants to talk to you."

That Sir Percy could have satisfied the highest ambitions of the seeker after honours cannot be denied, for, after his retirement from the House, and before the next general election, Pitt tried to force a peerage upon him, the King having decided to strengthen the Government in the Lords by creating five new peers. But Sir Percy firmly refused:

"My dear, dear William,

"Have you completely lost your sense of humour? I am vastly honoured that you should deem me a worthy subject to decorate that ornate chamber, and I daresay that it is a good place wherein to sleep off one's midday bottle of port. But Lord Blakeney of Blakeney - damme, the joke is too good a one, and I could not support a coronet on my head. Please accept the humble apologies of your friend. The best of wishes for a handsome majority at the elections and my best wishes for your future, which I shall follow with loving interest. In the meantime, do not entirely forget your prize black sheep who is always at your service.

"Percy."

And that was the end of Sir Percy Blakeney's two years' political career.

There are several version of what became known in Sir Percy Blakeney's set as the Mary de Courcy episode. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who was his most intimate friend, strenuously denied that Percy was even in love with her; but others would have it that, at any rate, at first, it was a case of *la grand passion*.

The episode occurred in 1788, and Mary de Courcy, a pretty blonde with languishing eyes and a rosebud mouth, was its heroine. The truth is that fashionable London did wake one morning, rub its eyes and stare when it discovered -- or thought it discovered -- that the dandy who had the reputation of being the sleepest, dullest, most British Britisher who had ever set a pretty woman yawning, had seemingly fallen in love at last. Yet the fact remained. Sir Percy, so 'twas said, was in love with a lady of noble birth; at any rate, he was paying court to her with as much earnestness as his laziness permitted.

The Honourable Mary de Courcy, though inclined to laugh at his intentions, was secretly flattered by the honour conferred on her by the acknowledged leader of fashion and had soon made up her ineffectual mind to win this pearl of great price in the matrimonial market. To become Lady Blakeney should prove no difficult task, she thought: and the exalted position ought to be a sinecure with such an easy-going man as Sir Percy.

Anyway, it was worth relinquishing girlish illusions in order to become the wife of one of the richest men in England, even though he did not display the fervour of an ardent lover. But, as her girl friends remarked, Blakeney was not the type of man to write odes to his mistresses' eyebrows or to fall on his knees in an ecstasy of passion. They reckoned that Mary could easily forgo the transports of love for the privilege of being admitted into the intimate Royal circle

and the right to spend a fortune on dress if she chose. The pros so outweighed the cons that the girl's head was completely turned by Blakeney's somewhat halting proposal of marriage, and it seemed nothing more was needed but a fashionable wedding.

Now, according to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who was the only man likely to know for certain, Sir Percy's views on the subject were not very clear. To his best friend he confided the fact that he did not know what disease he had caught and supposed that he was just mad like all the Blakeneys. He did not -- naturally, perhaps -- put his feelings on record in his diary, but Sir Andrew did subsequently declare openly that the whole thing amounted to this: Blakeney had realized that marriage for him was something of a duty. A man in his position was under obligation to marry in order to carry on the title and to have a woman presiding over his household.

Besides, he was thoroughly tired of the match-making dowagers who buzzed around him like flies, bombarding him with their wiles and their often unattractive daughters. Far better, he thought, to get oneself tied to some ineffectual maiden and be, thereafter, totally free to do as one liked. And Mary de Courcy seemed to fit the case exactly. She was exceedingly pretty; he was definitely attracted to her, liked her, in fact, well enough, and, as far as he knew, she seemed to reciprocate his feelings such as they were.

Unfortunately for her, Mary prattled.

When her avowed intentions stood revealed and Sir Percy was allowed a glimpse into her mean, petty little soul, he was so disgusted that she was quite taken aback, not to say frightened, by his sudden show of anger. There ensued a terrible scene during which neither kept their tempers or concealed their hidden thoughts. The lady was more furious at losing the prize than at the bitter truths hurled at her. Sir Percy was not only angry, he was touched to the

quick, his pride was reduced to dust, by this chit of a girl -- that Blakeney pride which had so often before caused misunderstandings between him and his friends.

Mary raged when it dawned upon her at last that this was no lover's quarrel which could be patched up with kisses, but was indeed the final blow to her cherished dreams of position and wealth. Sir Percy withdrew into his shell, a sadder but wiser man, realizing for the first time, that wealth had been the main attraction for Mary, and not girlish affection for himself. He left the interview with bitterness in his heart and outwardly more cynical and flippant than before. But later on, when the fire of his wrath had died down and left his brain clear of passionate anger, he realized what a lucky escape he had had. Indeed he was, in his heart of hearts, thankful that he had discovered Mary's secret thoughts in good time, for already, almost unknown to himself, he had tired of her silly little ways and childish affectations.

After the engagement was broken off, honour demanded that Sir Percy should efface himself, go abroad, in fact, until such time as the scandal had blown over and the lady was safely married to some other man.

Chapter Four ~ "That Demmed Clever

Woman..."

I

The political situation in France was causing the English Government grave uneasiness. The reports from the British Embassy in Paris were anything but reassuring and often contradictory, being for the most part full of dismal prophecies based on rumours and gloomy commentaries upon the situation. According to these reports the King appeared willing enough to grant reforms demanded of him, but seemed incapable of taking definite action or of sticking to his word. He made promises which he was too supine to fulfil: he gave with a free hand one day, only to draw back the next.

His constant tergiversations exasperated all the parties, and tired even his most loyal adherents. On the other hand, it was an open secret that even these adherents did not stand in a united phalanx round the throne. The nobility was divided against itself. Some of the younger men had imbibed the philosophy of Diderot and Rousseau and appeared ready to relinquish some of those feudal rights, beloved of their elders. The Church, too, was feeble, weakened by internal dissensions, and the example set by a number of priests, of extravagance and immorality.

Pitt, whose policy was one of peace, became very anxious; he was worried by the news from the Embassy, whilst the men whom he had sent to France to spy out the country returned with tales which were often contradictory. He was determined to retain at all costs a friendly attitude towards France, and at the same time to keep a close watch on the extremist party over there. Any sign of a revolutionary outbreak would, he knew, break the thin thread of international peace, and

England, who had only just begun to recover from a disastrous war, could certainly not afford to embark on another. He was averse to the drastic step, suggested by the King, of recalling the Ambassador; but he was conscious at the same time of the necessity of sending a shrewd and tactful man of unimpeachable character over to Paris on an unofficial mission, a man who could be relied on to gather reliable information.

Circumstances and opportunity provided Pitt with the one man whom he could trust with such a delicate mission, one who would certainly be welcomed by the exclusive Royalist set in Paris by reason of his birth and education, and who, moreover, spoke French with such perfect purity of accent that he could with equal ease mix with the populace without arousing their suspicion. That man was Sir Percy Blakeney. And Blakeney, forced to go abroad for a time owing to his tangled love affair, was only too willing to undertake a mission which would relieve the tedium of a sojourn in a foreign country.

Thus it came about that, in November, 1788, Blakeney found himself once again in Paris -- a city which he had not revisited since his boyhood days. He was received at the British Embassy with open arms, and Her Excellency, who had known Percy's father in the past, welcomed the son of her old friend and insisted on keeping him at the Embassy as a guest until he should find an apartment for himself. Soon his tall powerful figure and exquisite clothes were as well known on the Place Louis XV as they were in the Mall.

"*Le dandy Anglais*," with his inane laugh, his brilliant repartee, became the talk of Parisian society, and his name was on the tongues of most of the aristocratic and fashionable people. Indeed, his life in Paris hardly differed from his life in London. At the same time, judging from the letters and reports which he sent to Pitt, there is no doubt that under the guise of a young exquisite about town, he

devoted his brain and energy to the study of the political situation as it was fast developing in France. It was also during this time that he gleaned all that intimate knowledge of men, of places, and of things which stood him in such good stead later on.

"Dear William," he wrote on January 20th, 1789, "I suppose that my official reports to you should have been dotted about with abstruse comments which for you would have been difficult of understanding, and for everyone else entirely unintelligible. The truth is that it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain reliable information or coherent accounts of their aspirations and their aims from these so-called revolutionaries and their followers. Tactful questioning elicit references to Rousseau, Diderot and Malesherbes; abstract philosophies dealing with the rights of man. But try to discuss with the leaders the present political situation and they become furtive, evasive and as silent as the grave, as if one had thrown a fireball into their midst.

"However, here are a few facts, the truth of which I can vouch for. During this last month, I have had occasion to meet and become very friendly with the Marquis de St. Cyr and his family. The marquis is one of the real old type of French aristocrat -- feudalistic to the backbone, hard, intolerant, but the perfect courtier. From him I gathered that the King will definitely refuse to sanction the '*Assemblée Générale*,' and will attempt to govern with the aid of the army. St. Cyr is in communication with Austria, and he told me that he had negotiated for an Austrian army of 10,000 strong to march upon Paris as soon as any trouble occurs. I imagine that the trouble refers to the possible revolt of the '*Tiers Etat*' should they not obtain the constitutional reforms which they demand. I also gather that the King and the *noblesse* (with the exception of a few), look upon the revolutionary party as a clique which will bark a lot, but which will never bite.

"I am hoping to obtain further and more precise information later on, but trust these few items will prove of interest."

February 10th, 1789

"Dear William,

"Thanks for your letter, the contents of which amused me vastly. I always thought H.R.H. was a bit wild and I am not surprised that gossip has linked his name with 'Our Doria.'

"I have passed a highly diverting fortnight. I ran across the Vicomte de Bonnefin last Friday, and, in spite of the wound which I inflicted upon him nearly twenty years ago, he was exceedingly friendly and bore me no grudge. Through him, I gained access to the salon of Mademoiselle Lucille Phillipon, a triumph, my dear friend, I can assure you! She is more inaccessible than the Pope and far more exclusive. It appears that this chit of a girl -- Lucille is only twenty -- has established a salon more select and more erudite and artistic than any of her rivals. And what is more, in her house it is that the real leaders of the revolutionary party meet to plan and discuss their seditious coups.

"Firstly, there is Maxmillian Robespierre. A young lawyer and an engaging youth. He is a fanatic and madly ambitious. He will stick at nothing to gain his ends. His idea is to abolish religion, the law, the state, the monarchy, in fact everything! A simple *programme*, what? Then there is Louis St. Just, Robespierre's shadow and second self. Elegant, well dressed, well read, but with no ideas of his own: he merely echoes what Robespierre says. Then there is Armand Chauvelin whom probably you knew when he was in London with Talleyrand. I cannot quite make him out. He is a gentleman and an aristocrat, and has had several diplomatic missions, besides the one

in London. He is undeniably clever and shrewd, but he gives me the impression of being entirely unscrupulous and a time-server. I met him at a rout given by the St. Cyrs and again at a reception at the Comte de Tournay's. But I have also seen him hobnobbing with Robespierre and the revolutionary faction. It looks to me like a case of the hare hunting with the hounds. I fancy that he is a dangerous man -- a traitor to his caste -- a convert to revolutionary ideals and therefore all the more fanatical. There are others of course: look for them in my next letter.

"The joke at the moment, as far as I am concerned, is the opinion which these hot heads have of me. They put me down as a stupid idiot, a dull inane fop, and a complete fool with the result that they air their most outrageous views in my presence thinking me of no account. This is all to the good. It appears that the Phillipon holds me in utter contempt and of course to these revolutionaries anyone with my name and upbringing is anathema. It is all demmed amusing."

Except for a few brief visits to London and Richmond, Sir Percy Blakeney seems to have spent more than three years in Paris. From his letters to Pitt during that time -- the few letters which have been preserved -- it can be inferred that while he carried out the mission entrusted to him to the best of his ability, his life ran on normal lines: nothing especial occurred which could not have happened to any other wealthy foreigner who chose to remain in France during those early days of the revolution, and witnessed the commencement of the greatest social upheaval that ever sent a dynasty tottering and nearly annihilated an entire caste. That he was not altogether contented with the work he had in hand and was looking for different and higher activities is shown in his fragmentary diary: for already in 1789, he wrote:

"I am now in my thirtieth year and I have accomplished nothing.

Unless there is a war, it looks as if I shall continue to do nothing save idle my life away and spend my money on trifles! Yet I feel deep down in me, that one day opportunity will knock at my door and beckon me to unknown and marvelous adventures."

On March the tenth of that year, the Théâtre des Arts opened the Paris season with a gala performance. A new and reputedly beautiful actress was billed to make her appearance on the dramatic stage and her début was fixed for that night. The King and Queen had promised to be present: and the auditorium was a resplendent mass of glittering jewelry, exquisite clothes and ornate coiffures. The political turmoil was, for the moment, forgotten, and a stranger, surveying the magnificent scene, could scarcely have credited the fantastic tales that were rife of famine and revolution.

It was on that evening that Sir Percy Blakeney set eyes for the first time on Marguerite St. Just.

II

She had descended upon the capital the previous year with only her beauty, her short experience of the provincial stage, her political convictions and a small parcel of clothes wherewith to conquer Paris. Her aspirations towards success and her ambition urged her to seek out her cousin, Louis St. Just, who had already become a prominent figure in the world of politics and art. Thanks to his influence, she obtained an engagement at the Théâtre des Arts. From a minor role she soon entered stardom, and, by popular acclamation, became the leading lady at that fashionable theatre.

Gradually, Marguerite St. Just became the idol of fashionable Paris. Actors, authors and producers craved her presence or her influence. It was inevitable, therefore, that she should attract a circle round her more personal and more intimate than that of her acquaintances on

the other side of the footlights. To have a salon these days was to obey the decree of fashion, and the salon of the beautiful young actress soon became one of the most fashionable meeting-grounds for all that was most intellectual in Paris.

Scarcely twenty, lavishly gifted with beauty and endowed with talent, chaperoned only by a young and devoted brother, she had soon gathered round her, in her charming apartment in the rue Richlieu, a coterie which was as brilliant as it was exclusive -- exclusive that is to say from one point of view only, for Marguerite St. Just was from principle and by conviction republican -- equality of birth was her motto -- inequality of fortune was in her eyes a mere untoward accident. Money and titles might be hereditary, but brains were not. And thus her charming salon was reserved for originality and wit, for clever men and talented women, and admission into it was looked upon in the world of intellect -- which even in those days and in those troubled times found its pivot in Paris -- as the seal to an artistic career.

Clever men, distinguished men and even men of exalted station formed a perpetual and brilliant court round the fascinating young actress of the Théâtre des Arts, and she glided through republican, revolutionary, bloodthirsty Paris like a shining comet with a trail behind her of all that was most talented, most interesting, in intellectual Europe.

It was not only her beauty, her charm and her lively wit which opened to her the doors of society. There was a something -- an elusiveness -- which seemed like an integral part of her personality; a something which attracted irresistibly both men and women from every class and walk of life -- rich man, poor man, aristocrat and plebeian. She seemed to live a life that was aloof, indifferent to the flattery of her admirers, disdaining their offers of friendship, of love and of luxury:

but she allowed them to dance attendance upon her and suffered the attentions of all comers with unfailing courtesy and good humour. She never refused entrance to her house to an artist or an intellectual; she showed no personal feelings towards any of her visitors, with the result that many came anxious to prove the depths of this mysterious personality. Many also strayed away from her orbit after a time, for she was not effusive enough towards the "butterflies" who made a habit of fluttering round any personage of note; she certainly never counted the good-will of those who had only great names or well-filled purses to recommend them. She became a law unto herself and there the matter rested.

So great then was the popularity of Marguerite St. Just that her friendship was coveted by all that was the most fashionable and intellectual in the capital, and invitations to her salon were sought after more than any other event in the social world.

To say she was besieged with proposals of marriage, that her drawing room was overcrowded with love-sick swains, would not be an exaggeration. These were a tribute to her intelligence and beauty. Adulation and devotion were hers by right, and she might easily have chosen for here husband the highest noble in the land or the most famous man in Europe had she so willed. But so far Marguerite had remained untouched and unmoved. No man could lay claim to a more intimate place in her affections than mere friendship gave him. she seemed impervious to the darts of the god of love, resisting his every onslaught with a witty sally or a gracious smile.

III

There was, however, another side to her gay and intellectual salon. At the time of her triumphal entry into Paris, there was already talk of coming changes in the constitution, whispers of momentous happenings and of plots against the monarchy. Marguerite and her

brother Armand, together with her cousin Louis St. Just who was Robespierre's intimate friend, were upholders of this new trend of thought; they were known in the revolutionary clubs as ardent supporters of a republic. Nor was this upholding of revolutionary ideals either a caprice or a pose. Marguerite had had to fight a grim battle with life both for herself and her brother Armand, and, like all people who have had to struggle for existence, she understood the feelings of the down-trodden and sympathized with their sufferings and their wrongs. But something more than mere abstract sympathy contributed in the end to the forming of Marguerite St. Just's outlook upon life.

Her brother, Armand, when little more than a schoolboy, fell desperately in love with Angèle, the only daughter of the Marquis de St. Cyr. This sentimental attachment was hopeless at the outset, for the Marquis, full of the pride and arrogant prejudices of his caste, would never have permitted a union between his daughter and a plebeian. One day Armand, the timid and respectful lover, ventured to address a small poem of his own composition to the idol of his dreams. It fell into the hands of her father. The next night the unfortunate young man was waylaid outside Paris by the valets of the Marquis and ignominiously thrashed -- thrashed like a dog within an inch of his life -- just because he had dared to raise his eyes to the daughter of an aristocrat. This outrage, Marguerite, who idolized her brother, never forgot.

The time came when the Marquis de St. Cyr, like many of his caste, actuated by loyalty to the throne and realizing that unless aid came from outside, France as a nation would be powerless to save her monarchy, made overtures to the Austrian Emperor with a view to obtaining his support against the revolution, then in its infancy. By some means or other that are not quite clear, Marguerite St. Just got to know of this. She had a great many friends and probably the

Marquis was just the victim of a friend's indiscretion. Be that as it may, Marguerite, animated partly by her loyalty to her own cause, and partly moved no doubt by her feeling of hatred and revenge for the insult to her brother, let fall a hint of what she had heard anent the Marquis' participation in what was known as the Austrian plot.

"*La patrie en danger*," was already the rallying cry of Danton and of those who dominated in the National Assembly, and within twenty-four hours Marguerite's hints had born fruit. The Marquis de St. Cyr was arrested, his papers searched and the treasonable correspondence brought to light. He was arraigned for treason, his wife and two sons were accused of complicity, and all four perished on the guillotine. Angèle alone escaped the fate of her family and found refuge subsequently in England.

No one outside a close circle of intimates, came to hear how the denunciation against the Marquis de St. Cyr had come about. Certainly no one attributed it to the fascinating actress of the rue Richlieu who held all Paris in thrall. So, her salon continued to flourish, continued to be the magnet which drew to her all those who considered themselves intellectuals and Marguerite continued to earn the rapturous applause of the theater-going public.

IV

At first no surprise was evinced when the English dandy was not only admitted into the distinguished coterie presided over by beautiful Marguerite St. Just, but became one of its most frequent associates. Sir Percy Blakeney was seen everywhere, was welcomed wherever he went, what more natural than that like any other star of the social firmament he should presently revolve round its most brilliant planet? But what he found there to entertain him was difficult to guess, for he spoke but little, and never joined in the political debates and friendly arguments which as time went on came

more and more often on the tapis in the popular actress's salon.

As a matter of fact Blakeney, after that evening at the theatre which had witnessed Marguerite St. Just's début, had made up his mind to get an introduction to her. He approached several of his friends with this request, but was met with a polite refusal. It was easier, these friends told him, to enter paradise than the salon of a lady who only received such persons as were intellectually distinguished; a slight lifting of the eyebrows and a discrete smile would then complete the unequivocal phrase. But Percy Blakeney was nothing if not stubborn. These polite refusals only served to enhance his determination to gain admittance within that charmed circle, wherein, he strongly suspected, he might be able to gather much information that would be useful to his friend Pitt.

It was finally through the good offices of Louis de St. Just, Marguerite's relative, that he obtained the coveted introduction and after that his great bulk, always immaculately dressed, was frequently seen reclining in the beautiful actress's comfortable arm-chairs.

Though his presence seemed certainly out of place in the intellectual atmosphere which reigned in the apartment of the rue Richlieu, he was accepted and made welcome not only by Marguerite herself, but also by her intimates: and soon the intimate coterie which paid court to "the cleverest woman in Europe" as she was frequently called, was greeted with the spectacle of a foreigner who was quite undistinguished save for his dandyism and exquisite manners, being received on terms of equality by some of the keenest brains in France.

The truth of the matter was that in Sir Percy Blakeney Marguerite had found a type which was new to her. She had never before come in contact with that species called *le gentleman anglais*, and he

interested her. He flattered her æsthetic sense by his perfect manners, his elegant diction and his marvelous knowledge of her country and of her countrymen. Moreover, he was without doubt extremely good to look at, and few women can fail to be thrilled by six foot three inches of handsome male. After a few visits from him she became intrigued in his personality. Through his outward flippancy and his parade of shallow levity, she was clever enough to discern the brilliant mind and the strength of character which lay concealed within. She loved to sharpen her wits against those of her English friend and to taunt him with her republican creed.

"What right have you, Milor," she would say, "to your idleness and luxury? You have never lifted a finger towards winning your wealth or your title."

Sir Percy indignantly protested. "Zounds, madam, you deign to talk as if I wasn't kept busy with social duties all the day: i'faith, I am literally rushed off my feet."

"Yet, sir, you find time to idle in my apartment every afternoon and to attend the theatre every night."

Sir Percy shrugged his broad shoulders. "That, fair lady, is all part of the day's work. I must keep an eye on France's prettiest and most dangerous republican."

And Lalage avers that Marguerite was greatly troubled by this apt retort, wondering whether there was not some hidden meaning behind the jest or perhaps a warning. (1)

(1) Lalage: Les grandes actrices du XVIIIème siècle.

Then one fine day social Paris was aroused out of its habitual nonchalance: it could hardly believe its eyes when it saw Marguerite St. Just drive out to the Bois in her barouche with Sir Percy Blakeney seated at her side. The intimates were frankly shocked; it was unprecedented; astonishing; almost unbelievable. She had never done such an outrageous thing before. It was preposterous, undignified, impossible.

To the thousand entreaties for an explanation of this amazing departure from precedent, she turned a deaf ear and, what's more, she now took -- deliberately, it seemed -- to flaunting her new friendship in the face of all who cared to see; even going to the lengths of frequenting the fashionable restaurants and places of entertainment alone with him. That Marguerite St. Just was actually in love was deemed inadmissible; that she could prefer the company of this foreign dandy to that of intellectual Paris was not to be thought of.

Sir Percy, when questioned on his open devotion to the popular actress, gave one of his usual evasive replies.

"Lud, sir," he said, "she's a demmed pretty woman. And I like demmed pretty women."

"But," retorted an English friend of his who had lived in Paris for years and knew all the local gossip, "you won't get anything out of her."

And Blakeney merely turned his lazy blue eyes on his interlocutor so that the latter winced and quickly apologized for his remark, which certainly was in questionable taste.

Marguerite, on the other hand, sailed serenely on her way. Her actions might seem eccentric in some people's eyes, but it was tacitly admitted that she had a perfect right to do exactly as she

pleased in this as in all other matters. So things went on just the same and gradually tongues ceased to wag and gossip was lulled into quiescence. The few who had feared that the affair might become serious, felt relieved.

Now that the episode seemed happily to have blown over, they realized that their fears had been futile since Marguerite St. Just was an ardent adherent of the revolutionary party and both by upbringing and conviction totally opposed everything that the English aristocrat stood for. She despised wealth and scorned titles. And the Englishman had nothing else but those to recommend him save, perhaps, his fine figure and handsome features. Well, thank goodness, that was now safely settled and life could from now on resume its normal round.

This state of affairs went on for the best part of a year. Sir Percy did not desist from his attentions to the fair Marguerite nor was he made less welcome in her salon. The fire still smoldered on.

Then, quite suddenly, Sir Percy Blakeney was seen no more in Paris. He had left secretly without advising a soul of his departure or of his probable whereabouts. Some said that Marguerite St. Just had at last come to her senses, had summarily dismissed him and that he had gone away to nurse a broken heart; others that he had tired of being a clever woman's lap dog. None guessed the truth which was simply that Blakeney had realized that he was irremediably in love with a woman who, he firmly believed, would never consent to be his wife.

Still smarting under the knock-out blow which Mary de Courcy had inflicted on him, he did not feel that he could venture on a proposal of marriage to this woman, who placed a man's intellectuality above every other gift that he might lay at her feet. The very thought of being accepted by her for the sake of his wealth and position was so

abhorrent to his pride, that he deliberately turned his back on what had been for a whole year the happiest time he had ever had in all his life -- daily intercourse with one who fulfilled every ideal he had ever conceived, and possessed every virtue he had ever dreamt of in his future wife.

It is recorded that Sir Percy Blakeney went East, journeying to the new colonies and to India; but presumably he gained neither peace nor a measure of contentment for he was back again almost before he was forgotten, his mind made up.

Then came the climax.

VI

Some smiled indulgently and called it artistic eccentricity, others looked upon it as a wise provision for the future in view of the many difficulties which were crowding thick and fast in the country just then, others again -- and these included the intimate circle -- were scandalized and aggrieved more at the lack of her confidence than at the fact itself: whilst to all, the real motive of the climax remained an unexplainable mystery. Certain it is that Marguerite St. Just married Sir Percy Blakeney one fine day, just like that, without any warning to her friends, without a betrothal party or a wedding breakfast or other appurtenances of a fashionable wedding.

Sir Percy, himself, was half-dazed by his extreme good luck. Ever since that first day when he had met her at the theatre he had fallen irretrievably in love with her, even though he was still more or less tongue-tied after the unexpected thunderbolt which had fallen over his head in the shape of his misadventure with Mary de Courcy. As time went on he realized that Marguerite St. Just was the only woman in the world for him and that he had no greater longing or ambition in life than to ask her to be his wife. But he was not to be tricked into

declaring himself a second time and be met with yet another rebuff.

So he went away, not with a view to trying to forget, for he knew he could never do that, but in order to ease the pain of unsatisfied yearning, kept alive by daily intercourse with her. But that same unappeased yearning soon brought him back to Paris. The pain of absence was greater than he could bear. Fortunately for his sensitive pride, he had a wonderful faculty for concealing his feelings. He was able, so he thought, to meet Marguerite again without hinting at those emotions which had dragged him back to her chariot wheels. Once more ensconced in her best arm-chair, he was content to bide his time. He allowed himself to be jeered at by her intimates and endured the sallies of his own friends. He waited for the time when his entrance to the apartment of the rue Richlieu would bring a blush to the loved one's cheeks, and half-veiled glance to her eyes. He wanted to be sure -- oh, so sure -- this time that his love would not be spurned, his ardor killed with ridicule.

And the time came at last. Marguerite had long since noted with that marvelous intuition granted to every daughter of Eve, the silent adoration and the masterful passion of the handsome Englishman. At first, she took it as mere flattery -- all men loved her more or less. But soon it dawned upon her that this man was different to the others -- the sincerity, the honesty of his gaze could not be mistaken for mere transient desire. This was real devotion -- the magnificent god of love -- which she had always worshipped in secret, but had always failed to find.

Then one fine day he spoke those first words of love which are sacred to every man and woman. They touched Marguerite's heart as no other words had ever done.

Enough; she married him and the cleverest woman in Europe had linked her fate to that demmed idiot Blakeney, and not even her most

intimate friends could assign to this strange step any other motive than that of eccentricity. Those friends who knew, laughed to scorn the idea that Marguerite St. Just had married him for the sake of worldly advantages with which he might endow her. There were at least half a dozen men in the cosmopolitan world equally well born, if not as wealthy as Blakeney, and certainly more talented and famous, who would have been only too happy to give Marguerite St. Just any position she might covet.

As for Sir Percy himself, he was universally voted to be totally unqualified for the onerous post which he had taken upon himself. His chief qualification for it seemed to consist in his blind adoration of his young wife, his great wealth, and the high favour in which he stood at the English Court; but many thought that it would have been wiser on his part had he bestowed those worldly advantages on a less brilliant and witty wife.

There were plenty of young women in England of quite high birth and good looks who would have been quite willing to help him spend the Blakeney fortune, whilst smiling indulgently at his inanities and his good-humoured foolishness. It was a pity -- so many ventured to exclaim -- that silly noodle-pated Mary de Courcy had blabbed and that the rupture had been final. She would have been a more suitable wife, they said, for Blakeney.

VII

In the spring of 1792 Sir Percy brought home his beautiful young wife whose fame had already reached England. But no sooner had they made their entry into London society, than the wiseacres began to prophesy that the usual epilogue to a love romance was already on its way. No one pitied Blakeney since his fate was of his own making. Moreover, he got no pity because he seemed to require none -- he

seemed very proud of his clever wife -- and to care little that she took no pains to disguise that good-natured contempt which she evidently felt for him, nor that she amused herself by sharpening her ready wits at his expense. But then, if his matrimonial relations with the fascinating Parisienne had not turned out all that his hopes and dog-like devotion for her had pictured, society could never do more than vaguely guess at it. In his beautiful Richmond house it was soon perceived that he played second fiddle to her with imperturbable good nature: he lavished jewels and luxuries of all kinds upon her which she deigned to accept with inimitable grace, dispensing the hospitality of his superb mansion with the same graciousness with which she had welcomed the intellectual coterie in Paris.

But the wiseacres were right. There was an undercurrent of unhappiness in the Blakeney *ménage*. And the reason for this sudden estrangement after only a few months of wedded bliss was pride -- - damnable, short-sighted, idiotic pride.

The true facts of the case were never made public. In Blakeney's journals and diaries there are only brief references to the episode. But there are sufficient fragments extant to make out the story.

It appears then, that, directly after their marriage and whilst still in Paris, where they stayed for their honeymoon owing to Marguerite's engagements at the Théâtre des Arts, malicious tongues began to wag -- tongues which hitherto out of deference to her had kept silent. But, as soon as the marriage had been celebrated, rumours began to fly round the clubs of Paris -- rumours which soon reached Sir Percy Blakeney's ears -- rumours of a denunciation for high treason which had caused an entire family, men, women and children to be wiped out of existence. And this denunciation was linked with the name of Marguerite St. Just, Lady Blakeney.

These rumours came to Blakeney's ears through friend and foe

alike. At first he paid no more heed to them than he would to the buzzing of wasps. But when the gossip persisted and presently took more definite shape, he set his mind to discovering exactly what his wife's part had been in the affair and to ascertaining who had been the chief actors in the drama. The result of his tactful investigations was a series of terrible moral shocks. First there was no doubt but that it was Marguerite who had denounced the victims of the tragic affair; secondly he learned that these victims had been his great friends the St. Cyrs.

As soon as he was in possession of these two indisputable facts he did the only thing possible for a lover and a gentleman. He asked his wife straight out for an explanation, for he was convinced in his own mind that there was one which would exonerate her in his eyes. But she refused to give him any explanation: insisting in her pride and her consciousness of his love for her that he should believe in her, despite anything he might hear from gossip-mongers. She demanded in fact from her lover and husband a humiliating obedience which he was not prepared to give.

Her standpoint was that this crisis in their life was a test of his love, and, according to her, it had not borne the test. And thus the rift widened to open rupture; neither would forgo either pride or moral principle. Marguerite stood on her rights as the adored wife whose every word and deed must be accepted without question, and he on his code of honour which forbade such abject submission.

Tacitly they agreed that henceforth each would lead his and her own life; outwardly they would remain quite good friends so as not to make public property of their disillusionment, and Marguerite agreed to accompany her husband to London. Paris, now in the full tide of revolution, had become an impossible abode for a beautiful and refined woman, and for a foreigner of the type of Sir Percy Blakeney.

The spring of 1792 then found the Blakeney installed in their beautiful Richmond home. And here, as in London, gay, fashionable life went on as before. Balls, routs, parties, court receptions -- the beautiful Lady Blakeney always exquisitely dressed and wearing magnificent jewels was seen at them all. She was far too clever ever to air her political views on the subject of what went on in her own country, and both at Court and in aristocratic circles it was naturally surmised that so elegant and refined a woman could not possibly belong to any but what was termed in England, the respectable party.

True that the high-born *émigrés* who had shaken the dust of revolutionary France from their shoes, openly cold-shouldered the ex-actress of the Théâtre des Arts, the cousin of St. Just and friend of all the republican leaders: but Marguerite Blakeney had by this time become so popular in society, and her husband such an avowed friend of the Prince of Wales that the Marquis of this or the Duchess of that did not, out of deference to English society who had so cordially welcomed them, dare to snub her openly.

Of Sir Percy Blakeney himself during this first year following on the tragic *dénouement* of his love romance, we know really very little: because of the life which he led as the most popular man about town, the acknowledged leader of society, the king of dandies and intimate friend of the Royal Family, was only so much sand thrown in the eyes of the world to conceal his feelings and the intolerable pain in his heart.

He never revealed his real, innermost self to anyone, and at no time did he wear more closely the mask of flippancy and somnolent indifference than in the presence of his wife. He saw little of her save in the midst of a crowd. It was easy for a man and a woman of fashion, living in sumptuous style in a vast mansion and constantly surrounded by guests, to avoid intimate intercourse. Marguerite was

as reticent as he was; and in England, though she was very popular and beloved by many, she had no friends in the true sense of the word, in whom she could confide.

And so the London season dragged its length along, and Sir Percy and Marguerite continued to wear their masks of polite aloofness and tolerant good humour with an assurance calculated to deceive the most curious. It is only from scrappy phrases culled in the correspondence of such men as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes or Lord Bathurst, Percy's whilom schoolmates and constant companions, that one does, now and again, get a glimpse of Blakeney's true character.

There are a few anecdotes recorded here and there, and scraps of conversation, which show that already schemes had found their birth in the man's brain which very soon came to maturity. They reveal at this early stage a wonderful sympathy for the down-trodden and the friendless, coupled with a total disregard of self; but also a shrewd knowledge of human nature and unerring intuition of motives; as a matter of fact, it was that knowledge and that intuition which brought home to him the fact that Marguerite's love for him had only been an illusion.

She had cared for him -- yes! in a way! -- - there had been no mercenary motives in her acceptance of him -- artistic eccentricity perhaps and interest in what was to her an unusual personality: physical attraction must also be reckoned with -- but love? No! not as he understood it! At the time of their parting, honour for her had not been at stake, as it had been for him; pride in her case had been little more than the vanity of a beautiful woman, accustomed to adulation. And as he watched her at entertainments, operas, Courts, and so on, he never once caught a look in her eyes that told him that she cared, that she suffered, ever so slightly, that she loved him still.

Perhaps it was destiny -- the great destiny that lay in wait for him --

who decreed that Marguerite's heart should be closed to him until such a time as he started on the sublime work of pity and self-abnegation for which his generous nature had never ceased to crave.

Part Two: The Scarlet Pimpernel

Chapter One ~ "A Hunting We Will Go..."

Chapter Two ~ "We Seek Him Here, We Seek Him There . . ."

Chapter Three ~ "Tally Ho!"

Chapter Four ~ "Those Frenchies Seek Him Everywhere"

Chapter Five ~ "Is He in Heaven? Is He in Hell?"

Chapter Six ~ "That Demmed Elusive Pimpernel!"

Chapter One ~ "A Hunting We Will Go . .

."

I

And while in England life went on very much as it had done before during the last decade, in France Hell had been let loose.

It is not the purpose of the present chronicler to pass comment on the titanic struggle that was going on over there. Men, and women too, on both sides suffered and died for ideals that in their opinion would make the world purer and finer than it was and there was bitter disillusion for all. Tyranny after the struggle was more rampant than before, and in the meanwhile civilization came to a standstill, and passions were let loose that had hitherto been held in check either by education or oppression. When man loses his hold on his own passions he is apt to resemble the brute beast in his lust to kill, for man's idea of vengeance for past wrongs is to destroy the enemy who had made him suffer. So it was in France during those years of anarchy and bloodshed, the shameful record of which no amount of argument or sophistry can erase from the pages of her glorious history.

But all this is beside the question. It is not the rights and wrongs of the great revolutionary movement that pertains to the life story of that very gallant gentleman, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., but rather his own sympathy with the numberless innocent victims of that gigantic cataclysm.

On the whole, England -- respectable, conservative England -- as well as her more liberal and freedom-loving citizens were outraged by the excesses committed in France in the name of Liberty. But on

the whole the majority was content to watch and to wait, trusting in the good sense of the King who, in his recent speech from the throne, had declared that England would not depart from her attitude of neutrality. It was not her business to interfere in the internal politics of a sister nation.

There certainly was a fairly large party who clamoured loudly for war against a country who had dethroned and imprisoned her king, but there were no violent outbursts of popular indignation or riots in favour of or against the republican government of France. True Paine, with his book *The Rights of Man*, had created a mild sensation, and a few agitators, probably suborned by the revolutionary clubs of Paris, had tried to sow the seeds of sedition among the workless and the malcontents at home, in consequence of which a handful of hotheads had invaded the Foreign Office and attempted to assault Lord Castlereagh. But these were in a minority. For the most part, people kept their political opinions to themselves and emulated the King in his desire for non-interference.

On the other hand, since the King and Royal Family were granting liberal aid to refugees from France, those who could afford it showed their sympathy for those *émigrés* by subscribing generously to the various funds opened for their support and benefit.

II

From scraps of notes found among Sir Percy Blakeney's papers, from letters written at different times and to various friends, from the diaries of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and others, a reconstruction of the founding of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel can be made with a fair amount of accuracy. When the first story of the "Scarlet Pimpernel" was written in 1905, the author had not then the whole of the original documents in her possession. But as interest in this strangely arresting personality grew, letters, old pages of diaries

were gradually collected; and at last, for the first time, details of this historic event can be brought to light.

It must not be imagined that the daring plan was the inspiration of a dream whilst asleep in an arm-chair after one of H.R.H.'s luncheon parties; nor that it was the result of a passing fancy, the whim of a moment's casual thought. It was the outcome of several factors which each had an influence on Blakeney's mind.

His hopes for married happiness had been rudely dashed. He was brooding over his disillusion, hardly able to sleep. The canker of disappointment was gnawing at his heart and undoubtedly, had he not been a man of exceptionally strong character, he would have ended his own life there and then. For a time he tried to allay his heartache by throwing himself into a vortex of pleasure. It was noticed that Blakeney drank a good deal more than was his wont; that he gambled heavily, that he would sit up late, often never going to bed at all.

His intimate friends, such as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, Lord Bathurst and Lord Anthony Dewhurst, would try to persuade him to take up politics again, or, if he was averse to re-starting a career to go in for farming or some other occupation which would help to pass the time away. But their friendly advice was ignored. He could settle down to nothing useful. And thus the weeks passed and the pain was as acute as ever.

Again and again, during the long hours of mental torment, ever since the terrible revelation of his wife's denunciation of the St. Cyr family and its tragic sequel, he brooded over the fate of those unfortunate men and women who were paying such a heavy price for their former life of ease. Right from the beginning of the Reign of Terror in France, his soul sickened at the thought of the hideous carnage of innocent

people with no distinction as to age or sex. Vaguely he wished that he could do something to alleviate their suffering. Exactly what or how, he could not imagine at the time. Nor could he understand why he was burning with the desire to help. He only knew that he did, and this thought, in time, took stronger and stronger root in his brain.

"It is a farcical notion, I admit," he writes to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes at the beginning of June, 1792, "to attempt what must seem an impossible task; namely to come to the rescue of those unfortunate people who are daily suffering torture and death in France. Why I should wish to do this, God alone knows. Perhaps it comes from a desire for expiation, to avenge the St. Cyr's. Perhaps again, it is a form of revenge: a revenge against the views, the so-called ideals, that brought their martyrdom about. But it is all so mixed up in my mind that I hardly understand it myself; my thoughts are in a tangle. But, oh, my dear Ffoulkes, how I long for an opportunity to escape from the confounded mess which I seem to have woven around myself . . ."

But the germ of the idea was born when, after a great deal for fruitless thinking, he finally made up his mind to devise some kind of workable plan for the rescue of those who appeared to him most worthy of sympathy. His ideas were vague at first on the subject. There were so many over in France, who were worthy of sympathy -- intellectuals, artists, aristocrats, faithful servants -- mostly scared to death at the magnitude of the cataclysm that had befallen them, unable to raise a finger to save themselves or those they cared for, and above all wholly destitute by now, without the means of organizing, let alone carrying out their escape from the revolutionary inferno.

Blakeney's scheme was to provide a fund for the purpose of forged passports and clothes and paying for the services of those who might

be useful in an organized escape. But he soon realized that it would be impossible to distribute the money, for it would have to pass through so many hands, to most of which it would certainly stick long before it reached those for whom it was intended.

His second plan proved equally unworkable. Having paid a surreptitious visit to Paris with the intention of being of service to some of those unfortunates, he hoped that by offering substantial bribes to one or other of the poorly paid, half-starved, officials he could, by appealing to their greed, enlist their aid in his errand of mercy. But though he found no great unwillingness to accept good English gold, most of these men were equally ready to betray him and, through fear of reprisals if discovered, his plans also, or else openly spent the money they had received on themselves and none on the necessary preparations and journeys to the cost. Something more real, more dependable, was obviously needed.

And soon opportunity presented itself and with it the great idea was born.

III

What happened was this: over in Paris, Armand St. Just, Marguerite's young brother, had done a very foolish thing. Sickened by the terrible excesses committed by the Terrorists, his one-time friends, he had recklessly embarked on anti-revolutionary activities. This brought him into bad odour with the leaders of the extreme party and gravely imperilled his life.

His cousin, Louis de St. Just, who played Damon to Robespierre's Pythias, learned of Armand's revulsion of feeling, and delighted to hold the whip-hand over members of his family whom he considered traitors to the cause, dangled before Armand's frightened eyes the unpleasant picture of what exposure would mean to him. For Louis

would willingly have sacrificed his own kith and kin on the altar of Liberty so long as that sacrifice redounded to his own credit and popularity.

Armand was helpless. He was not strong enough to take the bull by the horns and dare his cousin to do his worst, even though he knew that Louis had no definite proof of his complicity in the various Royalist plots that were hatched all over the country just then, nor had he sufficient physical courage to make a dash for liberty. He did not at first dare to communicate with his sister in England, or, for that matter, with anybody who might have been able to help him out of his trouble. He just stayed on at his lodgings in Paris, hoping for the best, with a sword of Damocles hanging over his head. And Louis continued to play with him and to taunt him until the poor young man was nearly driven mad with fear.

A fortnight later, about the fifteenth of June of that year, it appears that Armand, at the end of his tether, summoned up his courage and resolved to make a bid for freedom. He wrote to Marguerite and begged for her aid. This letter never reached its destination for his movements were closely watched and Louis of course made a point of having all his cousin's correspondence intercepted. Thus another weapon in the shape of that compromising letter was held over Armand's head, and this weapon was a highly dangerous one, since it was considered the act of a traitor to seek outside aid in any kind of emergency, or to attempt to leave French soil. The punishment for these crimes was of course death. After this, Armand St. Just was a virtual prisoner in Paris, though he was not actually cast into prison.

But Marguerite had heard from various sources, notably from friends with whom she was still able to keep in touch, that her brother was threatened with arrest. The exact cause for this she was not able to ascertain. At her wit's end how to get him out of France, she turned

for help to the inane husband whom she hoped might prove useful at this juncture through the high favour in which he stood with the King and Royal Family, and through his intimacy with Pitt, Castlereagh and other prominent members of the government. She told him of Armand's terrible plight, and the deadly danger he was in, and begged Percy to do what he could to save him. Her entreaties did not fail to arouse her husband's sympathy; and he pledged Marguerite his word that he would bring Armand safely back to England. Twenty-four hours later he crossed over to France armed with all the safe conducts with which Pitt and Castlereagh could ensure his personal safety.

But after the very first interview with the men in power, it became perfectly clear to him that neither money, nor position, nor credentials counted for anything with the revolutionary government. Bribes were useless, threats no less so. There was no way out of the impasse. But his stay in Paris taught him one thing, the real horror of the existing situation. He became the unwilling spectator of the travesty of justice and the mock trials that went on day after day; he was able to see for himself the difficulty of achieving any success with regard to Armand; he could estimate how meager were the chances of rescuing any man, woman or child from death once they fell under the ban of the Public Prosecutor. There was no mercy, no compunction to be found in the hearts of those demagogues who had now assumed the reins of government of the new republic of France. All his schemes to aid the innocent and the persecuted seemed foredoomed to failure, and he saw himself reduced to helplessness which was terribly galling to his pride and a blot on his honour, since he had promised Marguerite that he would bring Armand back with him to England. And Sir Percy Blakeney had never before this broken his word.

However, he stayed on in Paris; still hoping against hope. He had

seen Armand almost daily but the gates of Paris were so severely guarded these days, that the question of passing through without the necessary papers and passports seemed out of the question. Then one day he received an unexpected visitor in the person of a young girl who came to him with a pitiful story. She was a worker in a lace factory and had heard the other girls gossip about an English gentleman who had arrived in Paris, and who was so wealthy and powerful that he would be presently returning to England in the company of citizen Armand St. Just. Now, citizen St. Just, as everybody knew, was a traitor, and would surely have been sent to the guillotine before now, but for the kindly feeling which great men like Danton and citizen Robespierre had for his sister, the great actress of the Théâtre des Arts.

With this story ringing in her ears Anette -- this seems to have been her name -- had ferreted out the whereabouts of the English gentleman and had come to beg him on her knees, when he did return to England, to take her dear sick mother with him too.

Why did the poor sick mother want to go to England? Why should she be willing to part from her daughter Anette? Why not stay in Paris where persons of her condition in life were not usually looked on askance? Well, Paris was no longer safe for the poor sick mother; she had been for forty years the faithful servant of the Princesse de Lamballe, until the latter's terrible death at the hands of the mob, and surely the English gentleman knew what fate awaited the faithful servants of noble lords and ladies who had incurred the hatred of the revolutionary crowd.

This pitiable tale told to the accompaniment of a flood of tears did naturally stir Blakeney's passionate anger against his own helplessness, more than ever before. But it did more than that; it aroused in him a proud determination to conquer that helplessness

and to master the thousand and one difficulties that stood in his way. It is of course impossible to guess what went on in his mind during the next few days, while he pondered over the case of Anette and her mother, or how the idea first struck him to effect their rescue by a clever stratagem.

What he did do, was to begin by giving it out that he was now leaving Paris, and returning to England after having fulfilled the many commissions entrusted to him by Lady Blakeney -- dresses, hats, reticules, for Paris, despite its demagogic tendencies, was still the arbiter of feminine fashion. And three days later the rich English dandy who had come armed with safe-conducts and passports from his own government, left the capital in his magnificent barouche escorted by his own valet and a French postilion hired for the occasion and followed by a wagon piled with luggage -- her ladyship's hats, shoes and hoops -- her ladyship who had been the idol of Paris when she was plain Marguerite St. Just of the Théâtre des Arts.

This imposing procession rattled along the cobblestones of Paris to the delight of quidnuncs who were passing by. It halted duly at the *Barrière du Trone* for the usual formalities, but as the English milor was so well provided with all the necessary papers for himself and his retinue and so lavish with his money, these formalities were gone through with as little delay as possible and the splendid barouche, followed by the wagon containing his ladyship's hats and hoops, was allowed to proceed on its way.

The most zealous and suspicious official on duty had not guessed that the young lad who sat next to the driver of the wagon and who formed part of the English milor's retinue, was no lad at all, but just a laceworker named Anette, and that under a pile of boxes containing supposedly her ladyship's new silk dresses, a terrified old woman lay

concealed.

IV

A week later Blakeney was back in Paris, not with a retinue this time, not in a sumptuous barouche, nor arrayed in magnificent clothes. He came back in the disguise of a hired man in the employ of a market gardener, who brought agricultural produce daily into the city. Whether Blakeney assumed the disguise as a rough laborer before engaging with this man, or whether he made it worth his while to pass him through the city gates as one of his employees, is not easy to say. In any case it was never so difficult to enter a city during these times of strict regulations as it was to leave it. Certain it is that he was in Paris at the end of July, 1792.

The excitement of planning the rescue of Anette and her mother and the success which attended this plan, drove him to fresh efforts. That these were not always successful can be gathered from one of the most interesting extracts out of his own journal which has most fortunately been preserved. It gives an insight into the workings of that astute brain, working away on schemes for the benefit of the friendless and the oppressed, not allowing itself to be discouraged by failure and determined to find a solution to every difficulty that presented itself. The extract is in fact the key to the man's entire character.

"Failure after failure! In my opinion, the only possible way to avoid further disappointments is to enroll other men with me in this enterprise. So far all the hitches have occurred owing to my inability to be in two places at once and also because it is necessary to have information collected from different sources. For instance, there ought to be somebody at the barricades watching for chances of exit or entrance; somebody must have access in and out of the prisons so as to gather information of the movements of the guards, of the

lists of prisoners and of any sudden changes in the disposition of the cells. The importance of these, and a hundred other details, is now made clear to me."

And below are the significant words: "I refuse to be beaten."

One or two successes did now and then encourage him to continue to play a lone hand. Then came a failure or two, where some well-laid plans came to nought, either through some unseen blunder on the part of his protégés or some unforeseen difficulty, which might have been overcome if he had had a devoted friend to help him. Then it was that he seriously thought of the possibilities of forming a league amongst his friends to join him in the work of mercy.

The next step was taken from Calais where his beautiful yacht, the *Daydream*, had been lying at anchor in the roads for the past week. From on board the yacht he wrote a brief letter to his greatest friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, a letter which has also luckily been preserved. It is doubly interesting from the fact that apparently Blakeney had before this thrown out a hint or two to Ffoulkes on the subject of his plans.

"July the twenty-seventh, 1792. *The Daydream*.

"My Dear Ffoulkes,

"You will be surprised when you receive this message from me, but I pray you to follow the directions contained therein should you feel so disposed.

"My many failures -- Armand alas! is still a virtual prisoner in Paris -- have convinced me that I am doomed to failure in most cases, unless a few fearless friends would prove willing to come and give me a hand and sacrifice their leisure to this new and exhilarating sport.

Therefore, do I turn in the first instance to you, my dear Ffoulkes, remembering our gay times at Harrow, and, should you be of such a mind, ask you to meet me in Calais at a certain disreputable hostelry called the 'Chat Gris' when I will propound my full plans to you. To this end, I will wait on the roads for the next six days so as to give this letter time to reach you and you to make your own arrangements. Every day after that at sundown I will visit the 'Chat Gris' in Calais and await you there.

"Should you not arrive by the second of next month, I shall take it that you cannot accede to my request. But, should you do so, for God's sake, let it be of your own free will and not out of friendship for me!

"Yours affectionately,

Percy Blakeney"

An annotation in the margin which is laconic, but descriptive, reads "Tally Ho!"

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes states afterwards that he received this letter at his lodgings in London on the twenty-ninth; it was brought to him by one of Blakeney's sailors; that immediately on its receipt, he questioned the man and discovered that the captain had made a special journey across the Channel in the *Daydream*, and that she was even then laying in the Dover Roads awaiting the answer; also that Blakeney was staying at an old inn just outside Calais called the "Chat Gris" and that the messenger had his orders to conduct Sir Andrew thither if the latter decided to go. Sir Andrew went! Having chartered a special coach, he and the brave sailor posted the very next day to Dover and boarded the yacht the same evening. With the turn of the tide they set sail, reaching Calais early in the morning of the thirty-first, a day ahead of the scheduled date.

Sir Andrew's memoranda are rather sketchy as to the subsequent proceedings and a great number of pages of Sir Percy's journal are unfortunately missing. That the two met is certain and there is no room for doubt, but that Sir Percy briefly recounted all his adventures to his friend, and discussed some of his plans with him, and that the two men subsequently set off for Paris together. After that there are only a few short remarks in the memoranda anent the actual journey and their entrance into Paris, which was evidently easily effected, since Blakeney, relying on his friend, had already supplied him with forged papers and a disguise.

"I looked," Sir Andrew recounts, "the most outrageous ruffian that ever set foot on the streets of Paris. My disguise was that of a coal heaver whilst Percy, having managed to conceal his enormous height, was a refuse carrier. Ye Gods! It was a never-to-be-forgotten sight; no one would have recognized our magnificent and immaculate friend in the dirt and grime that covered him."

It was during this visit that the famous device came to be adopted. Whilst wandering round the ramparts in company with Ffoulkes, Blakeney sketched out a plan for the rescue of an unfortunate ex-jeweller and his family, who had been denounced to the new revolutionary tribunal as being in communication with some *émigrés* in England and whose arrest was imminent. The plan was to get them out of Paris that same evening. Unfortunately some members of the family were at one end of the city and some at another. A general reunion was to take place in some obscure lodgings near the river which Blakeney had hired for the occasion. The trouble was supposing some hitch occurred whereby the existing plans would have to be modified, how to communicate with one another; obviously by a written message, sent by hand, but that message would have to be signed in some particular way, recognizable only to the recipient in case it should be intercepted.

"Blakeney," Ffoulkes tells us, "was running his fingers idly along the wall; suddenly they came in contact with a small flower -- red in color, star-like in shape -- a common wild flower known as the Shepherd's weather-glass. He gathered it and idly twiddled it between his finger and thumb. Then suddenly he laughed; and gave me a slap on the back that nearly knocked me over. 'Look,' he said, 'this is a wild flower called a Scarlet Pimpernel. I shall affix a drawing of this flower on my message to you. I can hide my identity safely under that device; nobody will guess it. By Jove, I will send one out to my whilom friend Maxmilian Robespierre straight away if we succeed tonight.' He was very much taken with the idea. He sat down on a stone and then and there set to work to practice making a drawing of the little flower. It seemed to me as good a secret device as could be invented and we decided to adopt it for all our communications. We also agreed that in the future Percy himself should be known as the Scarlet Pimpernel. I did point out to him, however, the folly of scattering his new insignia far and wide since the revolutionary spies would soon be on our track. But he only laughed, indicating at the same time his real reason for making free use of it. Firstly, so he explained, it must become widely known that by its means he could communicate not only with myself, but with all those whom he desired to help. Secondly, he wished to make an impression on the mob. He told me that our best chance of safety lay in making ourselves feared. To superstitious, half-educated people the mysterious device, sent to one or other of the judges of the new revolutionary tribunal every time an accused escaped the guillotine through our intervention, would act like a powerful charm or a curse, which would reduce many to a state of fear, especially if any of the rescues could be so contrived as to appear organized by supernatural agency. God, how right he was!"

Sometime during the first week of August, Armand St. Just with two of his friends were safely on board the *Daydream*. Sir Percy had managed to send messages addressed to Merlin de Douai and to

Chabrand, two of the newly-elected judges of the Revolutionary Tribunal; one of these messages he slipped into the coat pocket of the sergeant on guard at the barricades at the very instant when the little party were being questioned, their papers investigated and their belongings searched. Sir Andrew was supposed to have given the other to the concierge of the house where Armand had been lodging, but he forgot to do so. That message has fortunately found its way into the bundle of documents already referred to. It ran as follows:

"A Mm. les juges siégeant au Tribunal extraordinaire: J'ai l'enseigne honneur de vous fair part du fait que M. Raoul de Bonnefin ainsi que Mademoiselle sa fille ont échappée à vos griffes meurtrières. Tous deux sont en ce moment à moitié chemin entre la France et l'Angleterre."

("To the judges presiding over the Tribunal Extraordinary: I have the honour to inform you that Mr. Raoul de Bonnefin and Mademoiselle, his daughter, have evaded your murderous clutches and are now on their way to England.")

And on the right-hand bottom corner, a rough drawing in red of the little wayside flower known as the Scarlet Pimpernel.

V

A day or two later, Sir Percy Blakeney, dressed as usual with that supreme elegance which he affected, stood looking out of a window of Blakeney Manor; a far-away look was in his eyes as they swept over the stretch of velvety green lawn, over the silver ribbon of the Thames, and out to the distant country beyond.

The room in which he stood was of an entirely different character from the other luxurious apartments in the house. Here a severe simplicity reigned in the dark and heavy hangings, the massive oak

furniture, one or two maps on the wall; the general aspect of the room in question no way recalled the man about town, the lover of race-courses, the dandified leader of fashion, which were the outward representations of Sir Percy Blakeney. Here there was orderly method which suggested important business arrangements; the desk showed neat pigeonholes filled with papers, docketed and classified

Above the desk on the wall was the full-length portrait of a woman, magnificently framed, exquisitely painted and signed with the name of Van Loo. It was Sir Percy's mother. On the side of the desk there hung two large-scale maps, one of the North of France and the other of Paris and its environs. Except for the heavy desk, the hangings, a priceless Oriental carpet and a few chairs, the room was empty of trappings -- a bare, neat, orderly room into which only Blakeney's valet, Frank, had admission. This was the room of a capable and energetic man of affairs, not that of an empty-headed nincompoop.

And in this room on that day of August, 1792, there were assembled some ten persons whose names were all familiar to London society, men whose existence was apparently devoted to pleasure and good cheer, men who were considered as brainless and foppish as Sir Percy himself, whose intimates they were.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes was of course present: the others were Lord Anthony Dewhurst, my Lord Hastings, Lord Bathurst, Lord Stowmarries, Sir Edward Mackenzie, Sir Philip Glynde, young Lord Saint-Denys and Sir Richard Galveston, all of whom had been summoned to this meeting by Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. They stood or sat about obviously in a state of suppressed excitement, wondering what it was all about, some new prank of Blakeney's, of course, some scheme for enlivening the shooting season which was threatening to fall flat. Not one of them had the slightest inkling of what was to come, and when Blakeney turned round to face them they all experienced a

kind of shock. Gone was the lazy good humour, the inane idle look had been cast aside like a mask. His languid blue eyes shone straight with a strange light. His elegant figure appeared to be imbued with more than its usual virile strength. And his voice when he did speak had lost its drawling intonation and become firm and trenchant.

He motioned his friends to sit down, and then, in a few clear crisp sentences he gave them an account of the events of the past few weeks. He told them how his sympathies had been aroused by the travesty of justice and wholesale persecution that went on in revolutionary France, and how the determination had gradually taken root in his mind to come to the rescue of countless innocents who were made to suffer along with the really guilty. He told them frankly of the several failures that had attended his efforts in that direction and of his exertions on behalf of Armand St. Just. Indeed, he kept nothing from these friends whose co-operation he desired to enlist.

Finally, he recounted to them his first really successful effort on behalf of the girl Anette and her sick mother, explaining how this success had spurred him on in his schemes; how these had gradually taken on more definite shape until he found that his range of activities became so wide that he could no longer cope with them single-handed. Then he came to his determination to enlist the sympathies of those who, like himself, had a horror of injustice and oppression, and whose love of sport would prompt them to join him in this adventure, with all its risks and dangers, and the exhilarating incidents. He proceeded to describe some of his methods of working, and outlined the parts which each would have to play should they decide to join him.

They all listened spell-bound; and as the simple tale of single-handed heroism, of failures frankly admitted and of dogged

determination was unfolded before them, their enthusiasm broke all bounds. All they wanted was to become partners in this magnificent work, this war against injustice, some like Ffoulkes and Bathurst from sentimental ideals of self-sacrifice, some like Lord Tony and Saint-Denys from sheer love of sport. But with all their enthusiasm which gave itself vent in murmurs and in sighs, they felt the gravity of the situation, the dangers to life and freedom which they were asked to share with their friend.

Then, when the outline of the scheme had become clear to them, Blakeney told them of his idea to form a league, bound together by oath of mutual help and obedience to the chief; a solemn promise never to reveal the activities of the League or any of its projects to any outsider, not even to the King.

Oaths and promises, they declared unanimously, would readily be given. Without their realizing it these young exquisites were thoroughly sick of their empty existence, thoroughly bored with life; for that reason alone would they have joined with enthusiasm the proposed romantic League of adventurers, under the leadership of this man whose dual personality not one of them had suspected, and who were completely under the spell of this new side to his character.

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes made an entry in his diary, recording the fact that all those present signed a sort of agreement, a membership roll of the league, which was to be known as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. They swore that they would trust their chief implicitly in everything. They bound themselves by solemn word of honour to obey without question his every word, to keep his identity secret, and never by sign or word to betray anything whatever that pertained to the aims and activities of the League.

Another extract gives the result of the interview:

"The S.P., Dewhurst and myself are to have first duties. We depart this very evening for France. Our object is to effect the rescue of the de Tournay family. I am wondering now what will happen between Percy and his wife. He told me of the unfortunate St. Cyr incident which had estranged them and I shudder to think of the possible consequences should my lady ever discover the truth."

VI

As soon as he found himself alone Blakeney gave a deep drawn sign of contentment. His cherished ambition was now reached, the dreams of the last few weeks had materialized; and he had been able to enlist the aid of the most gallant and loyal sportsmen in Europe. For a minute he allowed pride to have its way with him -- it was akin to that of the artist in the work which he finds good: his friends had not questioned his leadership; they trusted him; they had unanimously agreed to all his demands on their loyalty, their time, even on their lives. His own existence made up of rich idleness and boredom was at an end. From now on he had an aim, a definite purpose in life, a use for his father's accumulated wealth, other than the mere spending on trivialities.

He would not have been the man he was or yet the perfect lover, had not thoughts of Marguerite got inextricably mixed with the hopes and ambitions of the future. Marguerite, his wife! the one being in the world he loved and whom he could not trust! The shadow of St. Cyr was doomed to stand for ever between him and the only happiness for which he craved.

A few hours later Ffoulkes and Dewhurst returned. The shades of evening were rapidly drawing in and it was time to make a start.

"We had ordered a chaise," Sir Andrew records in his diary, "and Percy's swiftest horses were already between the shafts when we

invaded his sanctum. There was a curious look about him then, which I could not explain, until, after a moment or two, from a distant part of the Manor, I heard the sound of a woman's voice singing an old French ditty. It was that of Lady Blakeney. Never in my life have I seen such utter grief, such hopelessness in any man's face, and Blakeney's deep-set eyes looked to me like the mirrors of despair. But as soon as he encountered my glance he pulled himself together, and with a genuine boyish laugh, he threw a travelling cape over his shoulder, took me by the arm, and the three of us sallied forth on the first adventure of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

Chapter Two ~ "We Seek Him Here, We Seek

Him There . . ."

I

The details of subsequent events are somewhat more difficult to piece together. Sir Percy Blakeney's diaries are a blank, neither do the few odd scraps from letters that have been preserved give us anything very definite to build upon.

Nor are the writings by various other members of the League of any help. They were all under oath not to divulge anything connected with the League, and the last thing they would have done, in any case, would be to put pen to paper.

One thing, however, is pretty certain, and that is that even before the terrible holocaust of innocent and defenseless people, known as the Massacre de 2 Septembre, took place -- an event full of unspeakable horrors, in which the League of the Pimpernel performed more than one heroic act of rescue -- the rumour had got about Paris that a band of English spies were carrying on anti-revolutionary activities in the city. These activities, it was said, took the form of helping certain traitors who had conspired against the State to escape just punishment; and these escapes were often carried out in a manner verging on the miraculous.

Passports bearing forged signatures were constantly presented at the gates of the city, deceiving some of the most astute officers in command. Some of these officers had been arraigned for treason, for slackness in the service of the State; more than one had been condemned to death, but all to no avail, escapes by condemned prisoners or persons under suspicion were becoming more and

more frequent as time went on. Sometimes it would be an entire family of aristocrats, at others a few wretched nuns who clung to their superstitious belief in God -- priests, artists, or men and women of the servant class. The English spies did not seem to select their accomplices -- that is what they were called -- more in one class than in another.

And soon these rumours grew to extravagance. The English spies, it was said, were seemingly under the leadership of one who was possessed of supernatural powers. His audacity was fabulous. Strange stories were told how he and a band of traitors whom he had rescued from prison had suddenly become invisible when they reached the gates of the city, and were thus able to get clean away through the intervention of the devil. As a matter of fact, no one had seen those mysterious Englishmen. No one knew who they were. As for their leader, he was never spoken of except with a shudder. Was he tall? Was he short? No one could tell. Was he dark, fair, black, white, red-haired? No one knew. The spies were in the city one day and had vanished the next. They slipped in and out of Paris, unseen and unharmed. It was even said that should one of them be trapped, his identity would still remain unknown; and that there would be ten, nay, a hundred more of them, ready to take their unfortunate comrade's place! All of which was utterly incomprehensible to the bulk of the people.

Citizen Fouquier-Tinville -- the newly-appointed Public Prosecutor -- would in the course of the day receive a scrap of paper from some mysterious source, sometimes he would find it in the pocket of his coat or among the official documents on his desk; or, again, someone in the crowd would thrust the paper into his hand and immediately be lost to view. And the paper always bore the same inscription, with the same dreaded message a brief note to the effect that such and such a traitor recently arrested, or even condemned to

death, was on his way to England; and it was always signed in the same way, with a device drawn in red -- a little star-shaped flower called, in French, *le mouron rouge*.

The guard at the gates had been doubled; the soldiers in charge had been threatened with death; rewards had been offered for the capture of the mysterious Englishman, dead or alive; vigilance committees composed of the most reliable and patriotic republicans in the land, were set up to watch and to make reports. All in vain; the escapes continued unchecked.

II

And presently these rumours, which at first had only circulated among the general public, reached the ears of some of the more prominent members of the National Assembly and thence those of members of the Government. Paris was growling and demanding an explanation. If something was not done quickly those growls would turn to threats, and those who ruled by terror would find themselves terrorized in their turn.

In the privacy of a room in the Palais de Justice -- and here we come to facts recorded in the official sheets of the period -- Fouquier-Tinville faced a turbulent assembly. Questions were hurled at him, fists brandished in his face, curses and insults spat at him. What was to be done? How to unearth this nest of English hornets and extract their sting? That was the problem. And a difficult problem it would be to solve. How? When? Where? An answer to these seemed impossible. The spies were here, there and everywhere. Here to-day and gone to-morrow. They were in the Conciergerie, they were on the Place de la Revolution, on the Carrousel, they were at the city gates. And no one knew whom to look for, whom to watch.

Then it was that inspiration came to Maximilian Robespierre, one of

the most astute brains in the National Assembly. Here in Paris, he argued, it was obvious that the authorities were impotent; they had no means of finding out anything about English spies. The only chance of discovering their identity lay not in France, but in England. Robespierre enlarged on this thesis and the others agreed with him. It was put to the vote and decided that a trustworthy patriot be sent to London, there to get in touch with every grade of society, and to ascertain how much was known over there of the identity and activities of this league of spies.

The account of these official proceedings in the Government sheets is not very detailed, but it seems that presently the name of one Armand Chauvelin came on the tapis. He was a man who, by origin, belonged to the old regime. He had at one time been ambassador to the English Court, but was now a good patriot and, what was very important, he spoke that vile English language like a native. Surely, in England, where they were so fond of bragging about their heroes and sportsmen, people would be heard to talk about that famous Scarlet Pimpernel; why not send Citizen Chauvelin, as a kind of unofficial representative of the Republic to England? He would certainly overhear words which would enable him to identify some of those mysterious spies.

Fouquier-Tinville supported the plan and talked persuasively and at great length. The scheme sounded feasible. His colleagues agreed to it and applauded him enthusiastically. By all means, invest Chauvelin with diplomatic powers: create him an "accredited agent" to the English Government. Then leave the rest to him. Thank goodness that little affair was now safely settled and shelved. All they had to do now was to possess their souls in patience and await events.

Meanwhile, the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel continued its

activities, and two days after citizen Chauvelin travelled to England, the Comtesse de Tournay and her daughter Suzanne, for whom a *mandat d'amener* had been issued, mysteriously vanished from their château where they had been virtual prisoners.

As was only to be expected, the rumours concerning the mysterious Englishman which had roused Paris to feverish excitement had reached this side of the Channel. Received at first with skepticism, then with curiosity, they were presently hailed with enthusiasm; the exploits of the gallant unknown became the sole topic of conversation at fashionable receptions: they were discussed in every club in town from the highest and most exclusive to the humble laborers' unions. Everybody's heart went out to the intrepid, lion-hearted leader and to the reckless little band of heroes who daily risked their lives in the cause of humanity.

There was something, too, in the simplicity of the device -- a common little English wayside flower -- that caught the fancy of the sport-loving populace. The anonymity, the gallantry, the danger of it all, appealed to the senses as well as to the heart. Soon the name of the Scarlet Pimpernel was on everybody's lips. Bets were made as to his identity. Tailors and cooks named their creations after him: brooches made of rubies and diamonds in the shape of the scarlet flower were sold by the hundreds. But, save a few intimates, the hero's identity was never known and never would have been, perhaps, if certain family archives, buried away in musty old chests, but the authenticity of which cannot be called into question, had not brought the true facts to light.

Chapter Three ~ "Tally Ho!"

I

Early in September, Armand Chauvelin arrived in London on the mission entrusted to him by the Revolutionary Government. As that mission was ostensibly a diplomatic one, it was not difficult for him to gain admittance into fashionable society; and though he was cold-shouldered by the more exclusive sets, his position as accredited agent of a government with which England was not at war, opened for him the doors of official circles.

In Paris he had, of course, known Marguerite St. Just intimately; he had been one of the most assiduous frequenters of her salon. It was to her that he turned, in the first instance, for introductions to the *milieu* which, but for her, would have been rigorously closed against him. England had not yet declared war against the revolutionary Government of France. She was still maintaining a rigid neutrality, but that was no reason why the representative of a "band of assassins," as the government was euphoniously called, should be made welcome in London.

But to Marguerite Blakeney he was really welcome. In spite of her social successes, she was lonely. Deprived of her husband's love, looked on askance by her own compatriots whose political views were opposed to her own, she turned with a pathetic sense of comfort to this man who had been her friend in the happy care-free days, before she was a great lady, and was still the popular, adulated star of the Théâtre des Arts. She also made Armand Chauvelin welcome, because she hoped, by resuming their intimate talks of long ago, to find out exactly what was the trouble about her brother Armand; what had he done? she wanted to know. Of what had he been accused?

But, as Marguerite very soon was made to realize, the happy-go-lucky intercourse of the past had given place in Chauvelin's mind to his great anxiety of the moment. To begin with, he feigned total ignorance on the subject of Armand: was the boy in danger? had he done something foolish? He, Chauvelin, had heard nothing of it.

Where, however, he did grow confidential was on the subject of the mission entrusted to him. He explained its object to her: the discovery of the identity of a band of English spies who were working in France itself against the existing Government. The band was led by an extraordinarily daring adventurer who was known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, a bitter enemy to France, whom Chauvelin had sworn to lay by the heels. Had Marguerite heard of him? She had indeed, and amidst much laughter and wealth of detail, she told her whilom friend of the vogue the mysterious hero had in his own country; race-horses, favourite dogs were named for him: babies born in this year of grace were christened Pimpernel or Pimpernella; fashionable dresses of whatever colour, blue, yellow or green, were named à la Scarlet Pimpernel.

Chauvelin listened to all this bantering talk, after which he reiterated the remark that this so-called hero was the most bitter enemy of France, adding that it was Marguerite St. Just's duty to help him to bring such an enemy to book. But here he met with a flat refusal. Nothing would induce Marguerite St. Just, Lady Blakeney, to lend a hand in a work of spying.

And with this firm refusal Chauvelin had perforce to be content.

Chance, however, presently favoured him. Armand St. Just was obliged for family reasons, in order to look after certain property held jointly by his sister, to return to France. He only intended to stay there a very little while, but Marguerite's heart was filled with dread and

misgiving at the unnecessary risks such a journey entailed with the nameless danger still hanging over his head. However, she could do nothing to dissuade him from going, and she therefore posted with him to Dover to see him off by the packet boat.

But Chauvelin, it seems, got to hear of this and followed them to Dover, with the vague idea in his mind that he might be able to force Marguerite's hand by using her brother as a leverage.

From Blakeney's point of view, Chauvelin's presence in England added a new and very grave difficulty to the League's activities. He knew, of course, that Chauvelin's pose of accredited agent to the English Government was only a blind to hide his real purpose which was, if humanly possible, to unmask the Scarlet Pimpernel and to lure him to France where a carefully baited trap would eventually close on him; after which nothing short of a miracle could save him from the guillotine.

II

It is interesting to gather from scraps in Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' diary that the arrival of Marguerite and her brother at Dover coincided with that of Sir Percy, who had come on shore from his yacht the *Daydream* in the company of the Comtesse de Tournay and her son the Vicomte, and her daughter Suzanne, whom he had with great ingenuity and good luck succeeded in rescuing from a terrible position which could only have ended in their condemnation and death.

Ffoulkes and Dewhurst were also in attendance on the party.

"Imagine our surprise," Sir Andrew writes in his diary, "when Lady Blakeney sailed into the coffee-room with young St. Just. Percy, too, was obviously taken aback, but soon recovered his marvelous

presence of mind. The comtesse and Lady Blakeney had evidently known one another in Paris, but the comtesse's greeting was anything but friendly. There ensued a humorous episode between Percy and the young vicomte. For a few moments my heart was in my mouth as I feared we had been discovered. How was it that not one of the de Tournay family went so far as to guess that they actually owed their lives to Blakeney I could never understand. Mademoiselle Suzanne, in her charming way, prattled incessantly of the gallant Scarlet Pimpernel and Lady Blakeney listened with obvious delight to hear her talk. I marveled if she was on the point of guessing the truth, for the coincidence of this rescue and our presence in Dover must, I thought, have jumped to the eyes. Percy, however, in his usual flippant manner, was ready with some fantastic story which allayed all suspicion and everything passed off without danger."

It was during the halt at the "Fisherman's Rest" that Sir Percy had actual proof that Chauvelin had already approached Marguerite on the subject of his mission. While his guests were resting after their meal he wandered out into the garden and it is practically certain that he overheard a conversation between his wife and the accredited agent. In the course of this conversation Chauvelin used certain threats in connection with Armand St. Just, and for the first time gave Marguerite to understand that he knew a great deal about her brother's anti-revolutionary activities. What Marguerite's attitude was in answer to these vague threats is impossible to say. Chauvelin had not, it seems, at the very moment any proof of what he asserted. But proof did come to his hands very shortly afterwards.

There are different versions as to how this came about. One version is that after Armand's departure from the "Fisherman's Rest" the rest of the party posted to London, only Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Tony remaining at the inn, pending further instructions from their chief. Two ruffians in the pay of Chauvelin and acting under his instructions

hid themselves under the settles in the coffee-room until the landlord and his staff had all gone to bed. Ffoulkes and Dewhurst remained talking by the fire in the public room, when they were suddenly attacked by the ruffians, their heads were smothered in sackings before they could utter a sound, and finally they were bound with cords and gagged while their pockets were ransacked. In Sir Andrew's pocket was a letter signed by Armand St. Just, which ran as follows:

"Dear Sir Andrew,

"Having been brought to safety by your gallant and chivalrous leader, I most earnestly desire to repay his kindness by enrolling myself under his banner.

Though this request may seem a strange one to you, please remember that my sister is married to an Englishman, your friend, that I have already shown myself to be anti-revolutionary in my ideas and that my great intimacy with the republican leaders might be of great value to your leader.

"Please, therefore, support my candidature with your influence which I know is of great weight with the Scarlet Pimpernel.

"Yours very sincerely,

Armand St. Just"

The other version has it that it was while posting back to London the following morning that Ffoulkes and Dewhurst were set upon by what appeared to be a gang of highwaymen, a fairly frequent occurrence on the Dover road; the gang, however, in this instance was composed of men in the pay of Chauvelin. There, between Hollingbourne and Maidstone, the two young men were relieved of all

their possessions including the St. Just letter. The two young men were finally left in the road, bound and gagged, while the ruffians commandeered their coach. Ffoulkes and Dewhurst were forced to walk ten miles into Maidstone where they reported the attack to the police.

When Blakeney discovered that his friends had been set upon and robbed, he realized the dangers which threatened him and the League at every turn. He had, of course, no cognizance before this that Armand St. Just had been in communication with Ffoulkes; and when the latter told him about the letter, he was quick enough to guess what Chauvelin's tactics would be in the future; he would use the compromising letter as a leverage to force Marguerite into helping him discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

It is not absolutely certain how Chauvelin came to discover that the Scarlet Pimpernel and Sir Percy Blakeney were one and the same person. But discover it he did. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes says that it probably occurred at 1 a.m., during the progress of a ball given by Lord Grenville, the Foreign Secretary, at his London mansion! But even he is not sure what happened, though this version seems quite probable. At all events Blakeney must have noticed that his wife held a lengthy conversation with Chauvelin whilst most of the company were engaged in dancing. He himself was at a loss to explain how Chauvelin had come to discover his identity, for amongst Ffoulkes' papers was found the following letter:

"Dear Andrew,

"Our ubiquitous friend has pierced the mask and stumbled upon the truth. Egad, he is the cleverest Frenchman I have ever met in my life. But do not be duly alarmed. It was fate, and perhaps it is just as well. I shall enjoy myself giving Chauvelin the slip and it adds zest to our adventures which were beginning to get a trifle monotonous. His

discomfiture will lead to his downfall and my escape will probably mean his disgrace. I start for Calais to-morrow, to find poor old de Tournay and bring him back here to the bosom of his family. Should any unforeseen event arise during my absence, you know how to communicate with me; same place and time as the last one. Tell the others to be doubly on their guard.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel"

Sir Percy's personal diary throws a little light upon the subject, though here again the explanation is merely surmise on his part.

"I wonder whether the astute little rat realized that I was following him at Dover and purposely spoke loudly in order to draw me. If so, my interest in his movements naturally gave me away to him. On the other hand, I doubt this very much and cannot believe that he saw me. His loud voice was entirely due to anger at M.'s reluctance to aid him. Again at the ball, no member of the League came near me: I had already arranged for that, and begad, I had drunk enough in Chauvelin's presence to convince him that my noisy slumbers were genuine."

The only thing, however, that does appear certain is that Chauvelin's discovery of the truth occurred that night of the ball.

The following afternoon the Blakeney's held one of their celebrated water parties. Two interesting events occurred during the course of that brilliant gala at which the Prince of Wales was present. It seems pretty certain for one thing that Chauvelin gave Marguerite to understand that he was at last on the track of the Scarlet Pimpernel; the identity of the mysterious personage had been most unexpectedly revealed to him and moreover, he knew for a positive fact that the Scarlet Pimpernel was starting to France this very evening.

"And," Chauvelin added, with a deep sigh of satisfaction, "I am following him to Calais, there to effect his arrest and to bring him to justice on a charge of spying."

This conversation which Marguerite had with Chauvelin, coupled with certain things which Suzanne de Tournay told her about the activities of the League and of the Scarlet Pimpernel himself on behalf of the comte her father put her on the track of the truth. Suddenly she saw daylight and realized that the enigmatic adventurer was none other than her husband, Sir Percy Blakeney!

There exists a well-authenticated record of an interview which Lady Blakeney had that selfsame evening with Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. He speaks of it in his diary:

"Lady Blakeney visited me at my lodgings at a late hour yesterday. I was surprised to see her and could not imagine what had brought her ladyship to my rooms at this hour of the evening. Her first words caused me no undue alarm as I already knew that Chauvelin was on Percy's track. But I received a severe shock when she told me she knew the truth. She would not tell me how she came to know it, but there the fact remained. She begged for my assistance and I asked how I could serve her. She asked me to accompany her to France whither she would start early the following morning. What else could I do but obey?"

The continuation of Ffoulkes' journey gives a fairly accurate if not very detailed story of their adventures at Calais.

"We landed safely at Calais," he writes, "and made our way to the 'Chat Gris.' There we came face to face with Chauvelin. Before I could raise a finger on Lady Blakeney's behalf, he ordered her arrest as a spy in the pay of the British Government, and this, under the pretence that she was, despite her marriage, still a French subject. It

was no use in my trying to find Percy and apprise him of the terrible event. Luckily, I met him almost immediately, coming along to the inn. It was wonderful what a hold he kept over himself when I told him the dreadful news. He gave me his instructions with perfect *sang-froid*. I was to keep out of sight and to make my way to the farm-house, where de Tournay and others were in hiding. There I was to wait until heard a certain signal, and then repair with the party straight away to a certain place on the shore which had already been prearranged between us. Percy's idea was that Chauvelin's attention was, for the moment, concentrated on the likely capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel and that I would have no difficulty, given certain elementary precautions, in following these instructions. Having seen the party of fugitives safely stowed away under shelter, I was then to make my way back to the cliffs and there await the usual signal the cry of the sea-mew thrice repeated.

"All those instructions I obeyed to the letter and spent a couple of hours on those dreary cliffs in an agony of mind, impossible to describe. I wrestled with the fear that I would never see my friend or his wife again. What happened at the 'Chat Gris' I have never learnt; all I know is that after those two hours of agonizing anxiety I heard the welcome signal and, guided by the sound, I presently found Blakeney and his lady lying together under the shelter of a boulder. Percy had been severely injured, how, he would not tell me; Lady Blakeney was in tears, but I guessed they were tears of joy, and now and again I caught sight of a twinkle in Blakeney's eyes which told plainly that, despite his injuries, he had derived much amusement from this latest adventure. What he did tell me was that the *Daydream* was already well on her way to England, with the Comte de Tournay and other refugees on board. And that was the end of that adventure, which, in many ways, proved to be the most exciting of all. After this we shall have to watch our movements carefully, since Chauvelin must be beside himself with rage."

This extract in Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' diary must have been written the same evening in some out-of-the-way corner of the coast, for at the end he adds:

"In a couple of days we are to be back in England, and then to discuss with my beloved Suzanne the details of our approaching marriage . . ."

III

There was great joy and feasting on board the *Daydream* that evening; the relief at escaping from the revolutionary inferno was enhanced for the old comte by the happy prospect of reunion with his beloved family. Though a trifle saddened at the thought of losing his only daughter so soon, yet he appeared delighted to think that his future son-in-law was one of that band of heroes who had saved them all from death.

For Sir Percy and Marguerite there was unalloyed happiness at last. The barriers set up against their love by obstinate pride had been broken down; all restraint in one another's presence could in the future be cast aside, and their tongues could give utterance to the love which each had kept secret from the other up to now. As if by magic their estrangement had vanished, vanished more rapidly than the night mists before the morning sun.

Sir Percy that night had told his wife everything; at her sweet insistence he recounted to her every detail of every rescue he had undertaken, so that she might know every phase of his adventures. But though she felt proud and happy in his deeds of heroism, horrible premonitions assailed her of the danger to his precious life, as well as the fear of this new and powerful rival to his affection for her; she dreaded the warring of two natures in him, the romantic love for her

and the passionate devotion to this mad and dangerous sport.

It is more than likely that she did her best to wean him from the League, but only to realize that this attempt had been a tactical error, and that if she wished to retain her new-found happiness she must be content in the little her husband could give her. Sufficient for the day were the dangers thereof! And there were plenty of those.

That Lady Blakeney had fallen in love with her own husband no one could fail to see, and in the more frivolous cliques of fashionable London this extraordinary phenomenon was eagerly discussed. Indeed, latterly, and contrary to all precedent, to all usages and customs of society, Marguerite was seldom seen at routs or at the opera without Sir Percy; she accompanied him to the race-courses and even danced the minuet with him. But it looked a very one-sided affair, for no one could assert that Sir Percy was anything but politely bored and indifferent to his wife's obvious attentions.

His lazy eyes never once lighted up when she entered a ballroom, and many knew for a fact that her ladyship spent many lonely days in her beautiful Richmond home whilst her lord and master absented himself with persistent, if unchivalrous regularity. To all appearances, therefore, Blakeney had not changed from the early days of matrimony, and only his friends understood that now, beneath that selfsame lazy manner, those shy and awkward ways, that half inane and half cynical laugh, there lurked an undercurrent of tender and passionate happiness.

IV

A great occasion now detained Blakeney in England: the marriage of his second-in-command, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, with Suzanne de Tournay. It was a brilliant function, at which the Prince of Wales was present. We may take it, however, that the accredited agent of the

French republican Government was conspicuous by his absence. One wonders what went on in Blakeney's mind when he suddenly found himself thus deprived of his right hand man; obviously, for the moment, he could not associate Sir Andrew in any of his schemes. One cannot tear a young bridegroom from his bride in order to hurl him into untold perils.

Blakeney, therefore, turned to two other equally devoted intimates, Lord Anthony Dewhurst and Lord Hastings. They were newer than Ffoulkes to the dangerous game, but their enthusiasm and courage were every whit as great, and soon their chief felt that his confidence in them had not been misplaced. Against that, the difficulties encountered in Paris were increasing at every turn. Dewhurst had reported that he had been spied upon in the streets of Paris, and that once, having been recognized in spite of his disguise, he had only escaped arrest by the skin of his teeth.

Again, on another occasion, Hastings had been unable to carry out certain instructions which the Scarlet Pimpernel had given him, as his footsteps had been dogged by a couple of ruffians whom he could not manage to shake off. It was evident that Chauvelin had circulated a description of those members of the League with whom he had come into contact in England. Of their leader he feigned complete ignorance. Hate, at having been thwarted by him, had become his dominant passion, even to the exclusion of patriotism, and he had determined that no one but himself should effect the capture of the enigmatical adventurer.

The revolutionary Government had, however, become impatient at the delay in capturing the Scarlet Pimpernel, or any of the English spies, and the failure at Calais had turned their impatience to wrath. The heads of the Government felt that Chauvelin had let slip the easy prey, and by way of punishment they had relegated him to a position

of obscurity.

At this juncture one comes up against a curious turn of events, which owing to fully authenticated records it is impossible to ignore. The facts are interesting because they show yet another phase of Percy Blakeney's character; they show him up for the first time being as less of a hero, and with all the weakness of a man in love. It seems pretty certain that in his newly-found happiness and in the joy of Marguerite's love, he seemed to no longer care whether the League flourished, whether aristocrats were guillotined, or whether the French Government was still bitterly resentful of Chauvelin's defeat at his hands.

This lapse, which did not last longer than ten days, was so entirely alien to his character and in such direct contradiction to his previous activities, that those men who had so readily sworn allegiance to him were, for the nonce, thrown into a state of confusion and doubt. The leader whom they loved and admired for his magnificent and ready sacrifice of self, had apparently deserted them at the very outset of their glorious adventure; their plans were left in the air without guidance or hope for future activity.

There followed a week of intense depression and disappointment. Though Hastings and Dewhurst did their level best, all felt the lack of the inspiration and leadership of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Nothing seemed to go right. The rescues which had been planned before this terrible lapse occurred narrowly missed being turned to failure, and, what was far worse, since that touch of genius which Blakeney infused into all their enterprises was lacking, those who took part in them were often in grave danger of being caught.

Some of the members grumbled audibly and it soon became evident that if matters continued in the same unsatisfactory way, the League would disintegrate and finally cease to be. The magnetic

personality of Sir Percy Blakeney, which had held them all in a vice of devotion and obedience, having been removed, no one could supercede him with any chance of success.

Their indignation soon took an open turn and the discontent which they had kept bottled up for a whole week, gave itself vent in what was nothing short of rebellion. Though neither Dewhurst nor Hastings would act as spokesman in fact, they refused to be associated with the discontented elements, either through loyalty to their friend or through some ingrained idea that such a thing was simply not done yet they secretly sympathized with their grievances and felt Percy's neglect of the League as acutely as the others did. After a debate, during which many bitter words were spoken, they decided, before approaching Blakeney personally, to seek out Ffoulkes in order to ask his advice and help and, if possible, co-operation.

"My dear Ffoulkes," Lord Saint Denys wrote to him, "I am writing to you on a very delicate and difficult subject. Since neither Dewhurst nor Hastings will undertake the task, it has devolved upon me as spokesman for the League. This task is all the more difficult as the subject matter is one that grieves us all mightily, and yet cannot be neglected much longer if we are to continue our activities.

"For the past week we have heard naught from our leader. He seems to have forgotten us and not to care any more whether his League continues to exist or not. It looks almost as if, either through disinclination or sheer idleness (his courage we do not for one instant question), he wishes to renounce its leadership. After all the oaths which we so willingly took at his bidding, this seems to us, to put it bluntly, not playing the game.

"He has been at every ball and dinner party in London whilst we have been almost torn in twain by anxiety and internal dissensions.

"We cannot allow this state of affairs to continue. We, therefore, ask you, though we realize you are still on leave, so to speak, to give us your valuable assistance and, if possible, explain the situation to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

"Saint Denys, on behalf of the League"

"My dear Saint Denys," Ffoulkes answered, "Having been away for the past fortnight, I cannot judge for myself. But, my advice, for what it is worth, is to keep quiet and to make no move in this delicate matter, behaving as if nothing untoward had happened, and I am certain that you will receive the message you are so eagerly expecting from the Scarlet Pimpernel.

"Remember that we promised to obey implicitly. Perhaps this silence is to test your loyalty, and should you fail in the test, our leader would have just cause for offence and anger against you.

"Prudence must dictate your actions in the future, but I pray you not to be in too great a hurry to break away from the oath so solemnly given. For myself, I feel that such an action on your part, as you suggest, would amount to a betrayal of that self-same oath and that you would no longer deserve to be members of the League.

"I naturally must beg you to disassociate my name from any steps which you may judge fit to take. I do not wonder that Tony and Hastings refuse to commit themselves.

"Think it over carefully before acting.

Yours sincerely, Ffoulkes."

Those two letters are self-revealing and no comment is needed on the obvious sincerity of both parties to this correspondence. They

confirm all that is surmised about this affair. Luckily, it went no further, for it was killed by the realization of Sir Percy to the danger in which his lapse had placed the League.

Explanation on one side, understanding on the other was quite easy. The seven members understood and never again referred to that awful time of doubt and suspense. Blakeney may have guessed, but did not actually know that there had been any murmurings against him, and they all carefully avoided the subject, half-ashamed now, perhaps, of their own lapse from the high ideals of obedience and loyalty to which they had pledged themselves. It is, in any way, certain that if Percy had at the time any real knowledge of what his friends' feelings were in the matter, he would have been the first to admit his fault.

The whole incident goes to prove that, after all is said and done, that most gallant gentleman, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., was human, intensely so. Though outwardly he had lived a life in which Marguerite seemed to have no part, he was starved of that love for which his soul craved. In spite of the excitement and the adventures of the League, he had been unable to banish the yearning from his heart. He had hoped that these adventures would bring oblivion and a healing balm to his wounded pride. But the remedy proved inefficacious, and when at long length the breach was healed and love rediscovered, he lost himself in the maze of happiness which followed. From that moment the rest of the world ceased to exist and the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel was temporarily forgotten.

Then came the rude awakening. As a bolt from the blue, one cold October afternoon, 1792, a horseman galloped up the drive of Blakeney Manor as if the devil were at his tail. The horseman was my Lord Stowmarries and he was the bearer of news which awakened the Scarlet Pimpernel with a jerk out of his glorious dreams. Lord

Hastings had been arrested by the French authorities and was even now awaiting trial on a charge of spying. This meant that one of the intrepid band was in danger of death, and through that, the very existence of the Scarlet Pimpernel and the League was at stake.

It was no empty oath nor vain boast on Blakeney's part when he swore on his honour that the safety of his followers would always be his primary concern. In a trice, the delights of the moment were foresworn, the charms of a life of ease cast aside. The lover was once more transformed into the man of action. On Marguerite's part, prayers and entreaties were of no avail. She was forced to submit to this separation and to await her husband's return with as much fortitude as she could muster.

"I could not love you, dear, so much, loved I not honour more."

Blakeney set about at once to make a few hasty preparations and arranged to meet Stowmarries and one or two of the others at a posting house on the Dover Road. The task before him would not, he knew, be a light one, since the French Government would be sure to set its most astute spies on his track; but the spirit of adventure was dominant in him once more; the instinct of leadership, of the chase after noble quarry, with a pack of snarling wolves at his heels, had him in its grip. There was a vast difference between the happiness which he had enjoyed in Marguerite's arms and that which awaited him now. Who shall blame him if, after that last parting kiss, full of a passionate sorrow, regret was merged in the equally passionate love of adventure?

Stowmarries, in the meantime, had ridden away, taking with him Blakeney's letters and instructions. He reported the events to his comrades who received the news to the accompaniment of boisterous cheers. All was well with their beloved leader. Excuses for his apparent desertion were quickly found, each outvying the other in

their inventiveness; but all were heartily agreed that he was a jolly good fellow and that they would make up for their lack of faith by superhuman exertions when called upon for duty.

Those who had been honoured with a call for this journey drove off with Stowmarries, like a pack of schoolboys off for the holidays, the rest could only nurse a transient resentment that they had not been chosen for the work, hoping their turn would soon come round again.

Chapter Four ~ "Those Frenchies Seek Him

Everywhere"

I

Paris once more! With its perils increased a hundred-fold. Chauvelin, though without authority or position at the moment, still nursed his hatred against the man who had baffled him, and did his best to communicate that hatred to all his influential colleagues; Fouquier-Tinville, the newly appointed public prosecutor, had set his mind on capturing the elusive Englishman. Spies in the pay of the revolutionary Government had been promised rich rewards for their zeal in the matter, and well-paid agitators were told off to inflame the minds of the people so that all and sundry should lend a hand in this chase after human quarry.

Marat was induced to write flaring articles in *L'ami du peuple*, urging his readers to bait any foreigner who ventured inside the gates of Paris, and promising holidays, free pardons, sums of money, anything and everything in fact, to any man or woman who succeeded in laying hands on the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Hastings had been unfortunate. Coincidence, luck, fate, call it what you will, had placed him in an unfortunate position. After a strenuous day in the Temple prison, disguised as one of the warders, he had come face to face with Chauvelin, whose suspicions were instantly aroused by something familiar in his walk.

The sudden start which Hastings gave, turned the Frenchman's surmise into certitude. But Chauvelin was far too astute to give any sign of recognition; he passed indifferently by, and Hastings with a sigh of relief thought himself safe. He little guessed that from that

moment his every footstep would be dogged, in the hopes that in time the young Englishman would unconsciously lead the spies who were on his track to the hiding-place of his chief. But two or three days went by and the Englishman did nothing of the sort. Tired and impatient Chauvelin gave a hint to the Committee of Public Safety and Hastings was arrested. This was done as an additional lure to bring the Scarlet Pimpernel over to France for the rescue of his comrade.

The trial of the English spy was fixed for a certain day in October. He was to be tried along with a batch of "traitors" who had been known to have trafficked with the enemies of France and brought about a signal defeat of the republican armies on the frontier. In the official "Moniteur," there is an allusion to a disturbance that occurred outside the Palais de Justice when the prisoners were brought out into the open after their condemnation to death. The English spy was among the prisoners, and he seems to have aroused the execration of a group of ruffians, headed by an ugly customer of immense size and powerful fists, who defied the guard, fought their way to the tumbrels and dragged the Englishman and a couple of women out of them.

In the riot and turmoil that ensued there were several broken heads, for staves and knives soon flew about, and the republican guard had their work cut out to re-establish order. When they finally succeeded it was discovered that the Englishman and the two women had vanished, nor was there any sign of the ugly customer of immense size and his band of roughs.

II

At the beginning of 1793, there were over two thousand French *émigrés* in England, of whom more than 70 per cent owed their lives and liberty to the enigmatical hero.

Blakeney was able during the winter of 1792 to 1793, to take a well-earned rest from his activities. It was during these few weeks of peace and quiet that he made certain alterations in the disposition of the League and its headquarters. In spite of physical inaction, the members of the merry band and their leader were busily elaborating schemes for the future renewal of their efforts, more than ever perilous now that England had declared war against France and thus any privileges Englishmen might have enjoyed over there were at once withdrawn. This rendered the task of the League increasingly difficult; no respect would be accorded their persons in the future and one and all stood in danger of being treated as enemy spies and summarily dealt with according to custom. More accurate staff work would therefore be necessary; the personal safety of the members had need to be specially guarded; their numbers might probably have to be increased.

As a start, Blakeney bought a property on the coast within a few miles of Dover, which had the advantage of possessing a small but effective harbour sufficiently large to allow good anchorage for his yacht; this harbour was also well protected by overhanging cliffs from the view of chance intruders. The actual grounds were of small acreage, well covered with timber and off the beaten track so that they afforded a secure meeting-place, far from inquisitive eyes, where intricate plans and elaborate preparations could be safely concocted. But for Sir Percy, and needless to say for Marguerite, the cottage afforded an addition to their happiness, since it enabled them to meet there far away from their fashionable friends and in its wooded privacy to enjoy a few blessed hours snatched from the days of terror and of perils which had come to fill their life.

Marguerite had made up her mind that whenever her husband was away in France risking his life in the pestilential prisons of Nantes, or

in the streets of Paris where danger of death stalked his every footstep, she would take up her abode in the "Love Nest," so that she could be all the nearer to him and be there, ready to welcome him on his all too few sojourns in England. From here she could also direct and assist any members of the League who might require her help or advice; thus she would be helping in the noble work of the Scarlet Pimpernel and in a measure ease the pain which his frequent and long absences rendered more and more hard to bear.

At a plenary meeting of the League held soon after Ffoulkes had returned from his honeymoon, it was found necessary to increase its numbers. It was agreed that half a dozen young men should be enrolled, bringing the number up to twenty, as originally intended. It was decided these should be recruited amongst the families and intimate friends of already existing members. Armand St. Just was amongst those selected in spite of universal hesitation on the part of the others. It was not forgotten that he had, not so long ago, been a partisan of the revolutionary faction in France and therefore, some thought, not altogether to be trusted, but in the end Marguerite's pleading and his obvious enthusiasm turned the scale in his favour.

The other five, all of whom had equal claims to membership, were ultimately elected by ballot, Sir Percy having the casting vote. The League was then summoned and the new members swore the oath of allegiance to the chief and to the League. Blakeney explained the full purport of the League to them and initiated them into their duties so that they could straightway become active members. He also indicated roughly the methods adopted and the help they would be required to give, demanding of them the sacrifice of their leisure and pleasures, their whole-hearted devotion to the cause and implicit obedience to himself.

(It is interesting to note at this juncture the names of the newly

enrolled. It will be seen that amongst the number was one Michael Barstow of York. It is largely due to the foresight of this member of the League that the truth about the Scarlet Pimpernel was first discovered, and from his notes that the story of Blakeney's whole career came ultimately to be written. This minor member of the League, proud of his association with the gallant leader, handed down to his children the stories of their adventures as far as he himself was concerned in them. Thus, the memory of the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel was kept alive throughout the generations to follow. Shortly after the marriage of the Baroness Orczy to Montagu Barstow, whilst perusing old letters and documents, the original enrollment form was brought to light. This find naturally started the train of thought which led to the discovery of the existence of this romantic personage. Gradually after an intensive search in the archives of two countries, the truth was stumbled upon and the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel with Sir Percy was revealed.)

A sidelight on these new influences within the League from the point of view of the elder and more experienced members, can be glimpsed from a letter that Lord Stowmarries wrote at the time to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes who had returned to his bride at Bath. It will be noted that though the writer carefully avoids any criticism of his leader, yet the letter contains an confidential report together with a warning to the second in command.

"My Dear Ffoulkes,

"The Scarlet Pimpernel has now completed his plans for our future campaigns and though I am fully in agreement with them, I do think that you might drop a hint, should you get a chance, on the subject of the absolute trust which he places in the members of his League once they have pledged their honour to him. For instance, none of us trust Armand St. Just in spite of Lady Blakeney's vigorous defense of

him and the S.P. seems to ignore the danger which might threaten should any of us cross St. Just, who is a Frenchman (not his fault perhaps) and therefore too demmed excitable. The others appear all right but we must wait and see how they behave when under fire. Otherwise we are carrying on very comfortably. The new headquarters are a decided improvement and we feel that there, at least, our secrets are secure in the keeping of Lady Blakeney who has become our most ardent and helpful member. She will prove, I am sure, a veritable tower of strength to the League with her quick wits and feminine intuition. I am off tomorrow with Dewhurst (Hastings being left behind in charge of the newcomers for a rest after his unfortunate experience) and young Fanshaw whose first journey to Paris this will be, in order to reconnoiter the land after our long absence and to collect information as to the Committee's intentions. I think that the S.P. wants to come to grips again with that little swing Chauvelin and take revenge for the whipping he got at Calais when disguised as a Jew last year! There is some talk of Her Majesty Queen Marie Antoinette, but the S.P. looks upon her as an impossible task.

"My kindest regards to Lady Ffoulkes; all the League wish you luck and will be glad of your active return to the ranks.

"Stowmarries"

The answer to this letter is worthy of quotation:

"Dear Stowmarries,

"You need not take the S.P.'s action so much to heart. You know how he always trusts his fellow members as if they were gilt-edged securities. It is a point of honour with him and no one has as yet let that confidence fail. I pray that no one ever will. I wish you joy of young Fanshaw. I myself was on pins and needles when I had to initiate you

and I only hope that he will be such a brick as you were! My duties will be resumed in a fortnight.

"Ffoulkes"

And lastly a note which was received soon afterwards by every member of the League:

"We all meet at the same place to organize a frontal attack on a large scale. Time 9:30 a.m. owing to tide and weather. Date 15th March. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

III

The League was kept very busy from then on, hardly a respite being granted to its members for the next twelve months. The efficiency of Blakeney's new-formed plans was proved to the hilt, increasing the usefulness of the League and minimizing the risks to such an extent that most of its subsequent activities appeared almost too easy to the younger and more enthusiastic members, too free from danger and hardly deserving to be called adventures. Perfection had crowned all the Scarlet Pimpernel's routine work.

During the greater part of the spring of 1793, Blakeney, knowing all there was to know of the political situation in France, continued to insist on the need for extreme caution on the part of his followers. He would not allow any dare-devil escapades or foolhardy ventures, despite the almost miraculous successes and immunity from detection and arrest that they had all enjoyed hitherto. He foresaw a recrudescence of persecution and he feared the storm that was brewing between the different parties then striving for power in France the Extremists and the Moderates a storm wherein the vanquished party would inevitably be crushed out of existence. Hence his ever-increasing vigilance over the too zealous and hot-headed

members of the League and his careful tuition of the newly enrolled. He made a great point of getting hold of as many passports, forged or genuine, as possible either by means of bribery or slight of hand. He invented many new disguises and set to work to imprint upon the minds of the populace of Paris, the characteristics of those who had decided to assume.

From March of that year up to the end of June, Marguerite accompanied her husband to France and remained his constant companion. She had suffered terribly from loneliness in the past and felt that she could not endure these frequent separations any longer. She could not stand the strain of terror by night and sorrow by day and determined to accompany him whenever possible, without further endangering his life. Womanlike, she felt that she would prefer to die with him than live without him. That endless pleading and passionate insistence were necessary to persuade Sir Percy to allow her within the danger zone must be taken for granted; that she gained her point and obtained her heart's desire is certain from Blakeney's correspondence, and also from the commands issued by him to members of the League.

"Lannoy is safe with Marguerite. I want Tony to remain on duty outside Marat's house. Ffoulkes will stay here and carry on until further orders. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

"It is becoming dangerous for Marguerite. Hastings must keep guard for present until I can make other arrangements. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Do not worry about the marquise. Marguerite has her with her and will look after her. Marguerite insists upon helping us with the Abbot family. She will impersonate Madame Abbot at the empty house until we have got the family away. Tony must act the part of young Abbot, the son, and keep the soldiers there, at all costs, for half an hour; after

which we will come and fetch them. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

Marguerite, it appears, was fairly safe in the apartment which had been specially rented for her, and though Blakeney was always uneasy about her presence in France, he had to admit her very great usefulness, since so many of the young girls or women whom he had snatched from death were so overcome with fright that it needed a woman's sympathy and gentle influence to restore some measure of confidence and courage into them before starting on the perilous journey to England. And in spite of the many dangers which stalked their every step, the two of them continued to cull many a happy hour together, hours rendered sweeter in their eyes by knowledge of their swift evanescence.

Sir Percy Blakeney was wont to declare to his followers that in Marguerite he had one of the most faithful, helpful and heroic members of the League. In truth, since the day when mutual confession had brought about their reunion and cleared their love of all mistrusts, Marguerite had tried to help her husband in all his schemes, giving him the benefit of a woman's view of persons and events. She was a safe repository for the League's secrets; a sure messenger between the Scarlet Pimpernel and the members of the band; a loyal co-operator when necessity arose.

Though never allowed to assist at any of those hair-raising schemes for rescue in the Tribunal of Justice, or at the gates of the city, nevertheless, Sir Percy felt her nearness like a tower of strength, urging him on to deeds of valor and self-sacrifice that have remained unparalleled in the pages of history. Now that the provinces had fallen under the ban of such monsters as Carrière of "Noyades" fame, Dr. Laporte, Hébert and others, the League was kept constantly busy.

At one time rumour had it that sixty people had escaped from Lyons;

at another, in Arras, over a hundred were seemingly spirited out of the city; again news was received from Nantes that ten "infamous" traitors had disappeared from the pestilential prison where they had been incarcerated and were awaiting death. As far as Blakeney was concerned, a return to England was now an impossibility and, but for Marguerite's devotion in staying all this time in Paris, husband and wife would have been virtually kept apart for close on two years.

Marguerite after a time became a rallying point for the often tired and sick members of the League, who were drawn to her as if by a magnet and after spending a few hours in her company sallied forth like giants refreshed with wine. On one or two occasions, the Scarlet Pimpernel did actually use his wife as a decoy to draw government spies away from some unfortunate suspected of treason, but this he only did when danger for her had been reduced to a minimum. But Paris, nevertheless, was a risky place for Marguerite St. Just! Their arch-enemy Chauvelin haunted its streets like a restless ghost, suffering from his defeat and humiliation of the previous year, hoping only for another chance to meet the Scarlet Pimpernel again. And of all the bloodhounds on the trail none was more astute or more tenacious; he alone had met the Scarlet Pimpernel face to face; he alone knew his identity.

But Lady Blakeney refused to desert her husband and his gallant band of followers despite their urgent warnings and deep concern. It was pointed out to her, however, that many intrigues were undermining the power of the revolutionary government, that desperate plots were being hatched against its members; and should these be blown upon, all the ingenuity of the Scarlet Pimpernel and the courage of the League might prove ineffectual to cope with the terrible reprisals which would surely follow in the ensuing turmoil, no life would be safe, and Marguerite's presence in Paris would only add to the difficulties and dangers that beset her heroic husband.

Reluctantly, therefore, but with the assurance of him who loved her more than life that she should return anon and that he would always count on her to come to him if such a necessity arose, she returned to England and to safety.

IV

So far, Sir Percy Blakeney had been able to hide successfully his dual personality; this he did partly by means of the mask of the inane fop which he had adopted from the first and which had deceived his most intimate friends, and partly owing to the loyalty of his followers and the oath which he had exacted from them, never to reveal his identity.

Rumour, however, of the League's activities and the heroism of its chief reached England very quickly through the medium of the grateful refugees who owed their lives to the Scarlet Pimpernel. Soon these rumours grew in volume and the doings of the mysterious hero were on the lips of everybody. The ladies sent up daily prayer to the Almighty for his safety; the ministers, men in high position, even the Prince of Wales, were badgered from noon til eve for news of him. But no one knew anything. The Scarlet Pimpernel was as elusive in England as he was in France. But all agreed that he was the most gallant and noble gentleman in England and all were proud to proclaim him as their national hero.

At routs and balls, anyone who could recount his most recent escapade was sure of a flattering and attentive audience. And, strange to say, it so happened that Sir Percy Blakeney whenever he was in town was always the best informed on the absorbing subject and, many, including His Royal Highness himself, declared that the dandy, the *mauvais sujet*, actually knew who the Scarlet Pimpernel was.

Though Marguerite and Suzanne Ffoulkes were in the secret, Sir Percy felt safe from exposure, for he relied on the devotion and love of those two wonderful women even though at times he could almost see the revealing words hovering on their lips. He also did his best to keep the names of the individual members of the League secret but, unfortunately, one or two of them had been stripped of their anonymity.

Indeed, of late, conversation on the topic of the Scarlet Pimpernel had become embarrassing. His name had but to flit as a breath on the perfume-laden atmosphere of a great lady's salon and society broke off its flirtations, men forsook the gaming tables, ladies their gossip, even the servants forgot decorum and stole into the room to listen in the background with breathless interest to the latest story of the hero's prowess.

As for the "Terrorists" over in France, not one of them ever penetrated the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Chauvelin was the lone exception and he kept the secret rigorously to himself for its possession ensured his safety. Whatever glory would be attached to the capture of the enigmatical personage should accrue to him and to him alone. The Committee of Public Safety, on the other hand, allowed the report to gain ground that the mysterious Englishman was possessed of supernatural powers, and this it did in order to explain its own incompetence to effect its capture.

Its members wished the illiterate mob to look upon the so-called Scarlet Pimpernel as a supernatural agent of the devil who could appear or vanish at will, who had the strength of a giant and cunning which surpassed that of Satan himself. No wonder that they crossed themselves piously, and, though religion and all its forms and ceremonies had been officially banned, whenever the name of the Scarlet Pimpernel was whispered there were those who braved

denunciation and invoked their patron saint; while even serious-minded men, men who ruled France by terror and threats, had been known to shudder with a strange sense of foreboding when faced with a scrap of paper containing a doggerel verse and signed with a roughly drawn star-shaped little flower.

Wherein lay his extraordinary powers of evasion, his seeming immunity from wary traps and deep-set schemes, those men could not imagine; nor why their constant and determined efforts to rid themselves of that band of English spies always ended in failure and brought them nothing but humiliation and ridicule.

Chapter Five ~ "Is He in Heaven? Is He in Hell?"

I

It may be confidently asserted that, from July, 1792 to May, 1794 the Scarlet Pimpernel and his League were continually in France, Sir Percy himself only setting foot in England when his presence there was absolutely necessary. He would then rush up to London, for his policy of secrecy demanded his attendance at regular intervals at various fashionable functions and he refused to renounce those duties in spite of his wife's protests.

Naturally, for her, every hour spent at routs and balls was just as much a loss by its separation as time spent by him in France. Even the members of the League considered their leader was apt to push his desire for anonymity too far on occasions, and begged him to take a rest instead of thus always posting up to London in all haste in order to be seen at H.R.H.'s banquet or some other social function. But Blakeney was not to be turned from his ideas, and combined this arduous double life of adventure and social activity with that ease which characterized all his actions; indeed, he appeared to be none the worse in health for it.

Latterly, however, these visits to England became less and less frequent. He hardly ever accompanied his protégés all the way to England, hardly ever, in fact, as far as the coast; he would effect their rescue, conduct them past the city gates and then hand the party over to one of his lieutenants. He would then return straightway to the city.

And, amazing as it may seem, he only suffered capture twice during the entire period of the League's activity. He attributed this

remarkable immunity to the goddess of Chance, who, as he so quaintly put it, had only one hair on her head by which she could be caught and held; and to the fact that he always managed to seize her by that hair as she flew by. The others, if consulted, would have cast their vote in favour of their leader's unsurpassed courage and ingenuity. And they would not have been far wrong.

Blakeney was the possessor of two great assets; a positive genius for disguise and a consummate forethought which left nothing to chance. Each rescue was carefully thought out before it was undertaken and always in accordance with information previously gleaned either by his adherents or through the many spies which he had in his pay. He always had his finger on the pulse of the revolutionary leaders and was thus able to anticipate any arrests that were contemplated and formulate his plans accordingly. The daytime hours, when there was no immediate prospect of adventure, he and his band spent in amassing that fund of knowledge of current events and personalities which so often baffled their pursuers. Before undertaking a task of rescue, Blakeney would weigh carefully its chances of success; but he would abandon it if it seemed to him to be doomed to failure.

"The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel never fails," he would say, "because it never attempts the impossible."

Herein lay the secret of this remarkable man's unvarying success; though far be it from the chronicler to belittle the all-important rôle played by his followers, without whose loyal aid and devotion, his schemes would inevitably come to naught. But it was Blakeney himself, who, by his knowledge of the Terrorists and by his insight into their excitable temperament, was able to nullify their efforts to capture him and to increase the power he possessed of outwitting the officers of the revolutionary party.

The Scarlet Pimpernel succeeded owing to the simplicity of his plans which, often as not, took the agents of the revolutionary Government completely by surprise. The final details were left to the last minute as chance or occasion dictated. On the other hand, it is certain that the immediate cause of the frustration of any attempt to capture him was his supreme talent for disguise, which was the result of infinite patience and of careful study.

Some of these disguises were the invention of his own fertile imagination; others were obvious necessities demanded by the circumstances; but mostly they consisted in the subtle impersonations of actual people favourably known to the revolutionary Government. They were carried out with such consummate skill that the spies sent out to track him could never be certain whether they were in the presence of a true patriot on whom it would have been sacrilege to lay a finger, or in the presence of that mysterious person who went by the name of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

II

Sir Percy Blakeney first assumed a disguise when he was hunted down by Chauvelin on the cliffs near Calais. Made up to look like a Jew dealer of the poorest class, he outwitted his enemy so completely on that occasion that, from that moment, he was determined to utilize his talents in that direction.

He never relied on a disguise unless it was clever enough to deceive his own friends. He never wore the same disguise more than twice in the same district, nor did he use it on two consecutive occasions so that the character was never imprinted sufficiently clearly on his enemies to give them the chance of unmasking him. Nor did he assume a personality until he had thoroughly mastered its original, until he knew that he could imitate the exact intonation of the

voice, display the same gestures and reproduce the gait and habits of his prototype, often studying his man for days on end and practicing the results for nights.

There were two characters which Blakeney enjoyed impersonating more than others: they were citizen Rateau and citizen Lenoir.

In the *Cabaret de la Liberté*, a low-down haunt in the poorest quarter of Paris, the meeting-place of the scum of the city, probably the filthiest, the most loathsome and pest-infected hole in all Paris, Sir Percy Blakeney, the darling of London Society and the most fastidious of all its exquisites, lived in a top attic in the company of human and other foul rats. He took his meals of sour bread, infected cheese and sour wine in their company, laughing at their obscene jests, watching, waiting, ferreting out their many secrets.

Here one day he chanced upon a tall cadaverous-looking creature, with sunken eyes and broad, hunched-up shoulders which were perpetually shaken by a dry rasping cough that proclaimed the ravages of some mortal disease, left the man trembling with ague and brought beads of perspiration to the roots of his hair. A limp impeded his movements. Cupidity shone like a beacon out of his eyes. For three days, Sir Percy studied him attentively. In the privacy of his miserable attic he copied on his face, with the aid of grease paint, the salient features of Citizen Rateau; for three days, too, he practiced the hollow tuberculous cough and the dragging walk of the lame man.

Having achieved a satisfactory result, the next step was to be rid of his prototype, a not very difficult task, for the poor mudlark when he heard the gold jingling in the aristo's hand, and the vision of idle luxury was dangled before his eyes, was only too ready to fall in with whatever this heaven-sent creature demanded of him. The decisive moment for Blakeney would come when he would have to confront his

at the *Cabaret de la Liberté*. But so clever was his impersonation that not one of them ever had a suspicion that he was any other than Citizen Rateau himself.

"I have found a perfect character," he wrote to his band. "Gadzooks, but when I spring it upon you fellows you will have the fright of your young lives. And a cough . . . Begad, it is a wheeze straight from the coffin. One can hear it a mile away. And please to remember, I am Citizen Rateau, at your service, from now on. And if you should want me, I am always to be found at the *Cabaret de la Liberté*. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

Blakeney used this disguise first when engaged on the rescue of Esther Vincent and her English lover, Jack Kennard. This particular incident was one of the happiest recollections of his amazing career and this for two reasons: firstly, because he always loved the idea of reuniting two lovers: this was a weak spot in his armor now that his own love story had been made so perfect; and secondly, because it was the first Rateau episode, the first time in fact that he made use of that impersonation which he adopted later on in the most desperate adventure of all, when he scored his final triumph by saving his own wife from death.

The plan for the rescue of Esther Vincent was an example of Sir Percy's brilliant organization. All the characteristic subtlety of his nimble wit was displayed when, in the disguise of the asthmatic Rateau, he overheard at the *Cabaret de la Liberté* the discussion between a couple of cut-throats of an abominable project to marry the girl to one of them for the sake of her supposed fortune. He egged them on in their project and actually engaged himself to aid those ruffians in their dastardly plot, with the result that not only did he gain their confidence, but he did so to such an extent he was actually left by them in charge of the unfortunate girl, and thus was able to effect her

rescue and that of her lover.

A sidelight on this adventure is shown by a short note of instructions sent to Dewhurst on the evening when he had planned the rescue of the lovers:

"You and Galveston must look after that ass Kennard, who may at the last moment spoil our plans. He will, of course, understand nothing, and may become unmanageable in which case I am afraid you must bash him on the head sufficiently to send him to sleep. My cough the Rateau cough will be your rallying point. It resounds in the dark. Don't forget to deal with citizen Merri and his crowd of cut-throats. Bring some stout rope with you and a lantern. We shall need both. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

From this adventure it will be noted that Blakeney used the trick of appearing to be working with the mob, of aiding and abetting them in their nefarious schemes, so that he should have a chance of access to the unfortunate victims. He invariably trusted his powers of disguise and to his own personal magnetism which often forced some of the worst ruffians to listen to him and even to do his bidding. Over and over again these tactics enabled the League to spirit away condemned prisoners from under the very noses of the Terrorists.

The League activities were now apparently causing the revolutionary Government grave anxiety, so much so in fact that a special decree was promulgated whereby traitors belonging to the same family or classed in the same category of crime, should be tried separately so as to frustrate the wholesale evasions which were beginning to undermine the authority of the Committee of Public Safety. This decree as a matter of fact decreased temporarily the League's efficiency, for Blakeney's favourite plan had been chiefly aimed at saving whole batches of prisoners who happened to belong to one family, to unite lovers whenever possible, to see to it that no

mother was separated from her son, or husband from his wife.

To combat this new difficulty he found his impersonations invaluable. He knew just how best to gain the confidence of a crowd of ruffians, men and women of the type that frequented sittings of the Revolutionary Tribunal, how to dominate them and instill his own ideas into them. He would know how to arouse their ire against an entire family that was awaiting trial and incite them into demanding immediate justice for the lot. He was pastmaster in the art of creating uproars inside the Palais de Justice during the course of a sitting, and many an unfortunate owed his or her life to the confusion attendant on one of his inflammatory harangues.

Citizen Rateau was a personage admirably suited for this work. He soon became known to the *habitués* of the *Cabaret de la Liberté* as a marvelous patriot, a good fellow ready to help in any scheme that shirked the light of day. He earned for himself a name as a firm and militant upholder of the Revolution, and one whom, despite his feeble health, it was unwise to cross. He not only deceived the rabble, but also some of the most astute brains in the secret service of the revolutionary Government. For this reason Blakeney always looked upon this impersonation as one of his very best efforts and frequently referred to Citizen Rateau when recording some of the League's exploits.

"Rateau is a gem of a disguise," he writes in his journal just after the Kennard affair. "I hope that I shall be able to keep him alive for some time to come. I find that he is absolutely invaluable for a hunt after information. I must be careful not to expose him to danger so that he may continue his exceedingly useful lease of life. The *Cabaret de la Liberté* is a splendid retreat and the worthy landlord a safe go-between for my messages."

The other character was Lenoir. The real Lenoir was a giant of a man, a coal-heaver by trade, who lived in a small village a few kilometres from Calais. Many a time had Blakeney watched him shoveling coal from a ship in port into the carts and had been struck by the uncanny resemblance between this man and himself. Oddly enough, through the thin film of coal dust on the lids, blue eyes looked out into the world, and Lenoir's height was within a centimetre of Sir Percy's own. Paris to Calais in these days was a far cry, and it was not likely that the Committee in Paris would have heard of a humble coal-heaver in Calais. An important point also was the question of accent, for though Blakeney spoke French with an astonishing fluency, he retained just a faint trace of English intonation, but, in Paris, the patois of a man from Calais would almost sound like a foreign language.

Having procured a blank identity paper, he filled it in with the name and description of the man. He then set to work to imitate as closely as possible the gait and gestures of the coal-heaver and to copy his most salient characteristics. Satisfied that he had succeeded in this, he ventured into Paris under the guise of Lenoir. Many poor workmen from the country were wont to drift to Paris these days in search of employment, and identity papers apparently in order, the coal-heaver from Calais passed thorough the city gates without any difficulty.

This impersonation the Scarlet Pimpernel used most effectively on more than one occasion, both for the purpose of collecting information and for passing at will in and out of Paris. Sir Percy's commands to members of the League give us a good idea of the manner in which he used this Lenoir disguise.

"Be on the watch for a coal-heaver named Lenoir. At two-thirty he will be in the Palais de Justice where we shall all be needed. Lenoir

is your humble servant the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"I shall require eight of you to be at the Conciergerie at ten to-night. The Committee have decided to transfer a dozen prisoners from there to the Abbaye. We should be able to accomplish their rescue during the journey. I shall use the Lenoir disguise. You will dress as Republican soldiers: I happen to know that extra guards have been drafted to the prison. Stowmarries had better take charge as your officer as he speaks the best French. All you have to do is accompany the prisoners until I give the sea-mew call. Then fall upon the guard. We will then act as best we can. The Scarlet pimpernel."

An extract from Ffoulkes' journal completes the picture:

"Percy is great as Lenoir: his impersonation of the coal-heaver is, in my opinion, far finer than that of Rateau. It is astonishing to see a mob of ragamuffins listening to him while he harangues them in words which have a certain meaning for us and help us to pull off a rescue. He had been a member of one of the workmen's clubs a club the membership of which seems to me to consist for the most part of the lowest scum of the city. The way in which he moves freely in their company and is accepted as one of them is truly amazing. Never yet have I seen him betray himself by word or action: they all trust him. Lenoir has gained an ascendancy over the members of the Club and he can make them do just what he likes, and, moreover, he provides an excellent rallying point; when we are scattered about in a crowd, he is so easily recognizable that we can effect a rapid concentration round him as soon as he gives us the signal. This is to us an advantage as we found the Rateau cough difficult to trace in a crowd."

IV

The Law of Suspect having been promulgated, a new hitch occurred

to stop the work of mercy and a new danger was added to its accomplishment. Firstly, since every denunciation in the future was to be anonymous, it would be impossible to foresee whence it would be likely to come. Entirely innocent people might be in comparative safety one minute and be arraigned before the tribunal the next. The whole thing now became a matter of speculation as to who the future victim might be and who the enemy most likely to denounce them. Obviously the League's tactics would have to be altered to suit these new conditions.

The element of pure chance, it was true, remained their ablest ally and, since the passing of the Law, had to be relied upon more than ever; but risks and dangers had become greater, too. Chance would have to be reinforced with cunning. In order to meet these altered conditions, Blakeney assumed a new personality with the object of forestalling as far as possible the anonymous denunciations.

At the angle of the Quai des Augustins with the rue Dauphine, immediately facing the Pont Neuf, a Public Letter Writer was seen one day to install his booth. He was a funny old scarecrow, more like a great gaunt bird than a human being. He wore spectacles on his nose and a long very sparse and very lanky fringe of beard fell from his cheeks and chin and down to his chest. He was wrapped from head to foot in a caped coat which had once been green in colour, but was now of many hues with age. He wore this coat buttoned down the front, like a dressing gown, and below the hem there peeped out a pair of very large feet encased in boots which had never been a pair. He sat upon a rickety, straw-bottomed chair under an improvised awning which was made up of four poles and a bit of sacking. He had a table in front of him a table propped up by a bundle of newspapers since none of the four legs was completely whole. On the table he had a neckless bottle filled with ink, a few sheets of paper and a couple of quill pens. He was wont to arrive

about ten o'clock in the morning and generally left at five or so in the evening. For five sous he would write a love letter, or indite a business correspondence. He was a placid, silent old man, with nothing reactionary or anti-revolutionary about him, and the general verdict on him was that he could always be trusted to keep a secret.

But, somehow or other, amongst a privileged few, the rumour got about that the old scarecrow knew something of the whereabouts of the English milor of him who was called the Scarlet Pimpernel!

Sir Percy Blakeney was justifiably satisfied with this disguise, for it enabled him to hear much gossip that was very useful whilst many a frightened secret was whispered into his ear. More than once he was asked by some ruffian eager for blood money to write out a denunciation; sometimes he was accosted by a poor girl whose parents or lover had been arrested; at others he would glean scraps of information which would put him on the track of some unfortunate victim. It was while he plied this trade that he learned about Agnes de Lucinnes and Arnould Fabrice; in this way, too, he found out about Chauvelin's dastardly plot to send Fernand Malzieu to the guillotine.

Blakeney wrote a round robin to the members of the League considering his new impersonation. It runs thus:

"Whenever you may require my presence or my help, or wish to have a word with me, come to the Quai des Augustins. There near the corner of the street you will see most mornings a Public Letter Writer named Lepine. Ask him to indite some letter for you and then convey your information. I am Lepine. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

An interesting fragment was found amongst Sir Percy's papers a faded piece of paper signed with the name Madeleine. This pathetic letter turned out to be one which Blakeney wrote at the dictation of a poor girl at the time when he was acting the part of Public Letter

Writer. It is a noteworthy document since from it the authenticity of this disguise is established, and it also fixes definitely the date of the rescue of Agnes de Luciennes.

"Paris, le 3 mars, 1793.

"Ma très chère Agnes. Ce bon Lepine écrit cette lettre pour moi. Tu m'excuseras mais je n'ai jamais appris à écrire, tu le sait bien. Chérie prends bien garde. J'ai tellement peur qu'Arnould soit en danger. Il y a, à Paris, en ce moment, celui qu'on appelle le 'Mouron Rouge.' Il te sauvera ainsi qu'Arnould. Je n'ose pas dire davantage. Aies courage et tout finira heureusement. Ton amie sincère,

"Madeleine."

("Paris, 3 March 1793.

"My very dear Agnes. The good Lepine writes this letter for me. You will forgive me, but I have never learned to write, as you know well. Dearest, take care. I am so afraid that Arnould is in danger. There is, in Paris, at this moment, someone called the 'Scarlet Pimpernel.' He will save you as well as Arnould. I dare not say more. Have courage and all will finish happily. Your sincere friend,

"Madeleine.")

There is a postscript to this letter, added by Blakeney.

"Le mouron rouge s'occupe d'Arnould. Vous aurez bientôt de ses nouvelles."

("The Scarlet Pimpernel is busy with Arnould. You will soon have news of him.")

Another instance of his impersonations of real living people

occurred when Marat was murdered in his bath by Charlotte Corday. Marat's servant, Paul Molé, was in the next room when the girl stabbed his master. As a matter of fact, Paul Molé at the moment was none other than the Scarlet Pimpernel in disguise. He had made a study of the real Paul Molé until he had become a perfect replica of the man. He had purchased for a consideration Molé's identity papers, and induced Marat's housekeeper, Jeannette Maréchal, to introduce him into the household. He soon gained the confidence of his employer.

"I am in Marat's house, disguised as his servant, Paul Molé. Follow me to-morrow and keep a constant watch on the house which you see me enter. Let Stowmarries, Wallescourt and Galveston take it in turns to keep vigil. You yourself return and keep watch on Marat's house until you hear from me again. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

It appears that on this occasion he was trying to come to the bottom of a particularly brutal conspiracy. A girl, Marguerite Lannoy by name, had sought him out and begged him to find her son for her. The boy had been kidnapped from his house some months previously. It was a poignant story that the girl unfolded; she had been Marat's mistress in the days when he had been an unknown and struggling lawyer. After the outbreak of the revolution, Marat had gained for himself a position of some importance in the eyes of its leaders and the paper which he edited, *L'ami du Peuple*, became the mouthpiece of all those who considered themselves most advanced in their views and pursued a policy of no compromise.

To revenge himself upon his former mistress for some imagined wrong, he had her boy kidnapped and hidden away. Marat refused to disclose the child's hiding-place to the distracted mother and caused the wretched woman to be kicked out of his lodgings when she came to plead with him.

"I am on the track of the Lannoy boy," Blakeney writes to his followers, "Marat's ring is the crux of the situation and also the open sesame. The child is with the Lerridans, owners of a brothel in the Chemin des Pantins and they will give access to the boy only to the wearer of this ring. I must gain possession of it somehow or other. Tell Dewhurst to be outside Marat's house at eleven o'clock to-night. He had better dress as an honest patriot. I shall want his help inside later on. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

Then followed the murder of Marat. The false Paul Molé had helped his master to undress and had put him into the bath. He left the house for a few moments to talk to Dewhurst. During his absence Charlotte Corday found her way into the apartment, and when Blakeney returned Marat was dead and the house invaded by an excited crowd. In the general confusion, he contrived to get the ring off the dead man's finger and to pass it on to Dewhurst. Among the crowd who thronged the squalid apartment was the real Paul Molé, and when Chauvelin came on the scene a real comedy of errors ensued, for Chauvelin found himself confronted now with a man whom he recognized as the Scarlet Pimpernel, only to find himself at grips with the real Paul Molé. In the bustle which followed Chauvelin's cry for help, the elusive adventurer quietly slipped away while the wretched Molé was incarcerated at the Abbaye prison.

"They have now guessed that we are after the child. The Lerridans have been visited by Chauvelin who thinks that I am safely inside the Abbaye prison. They will never dare to do to anything to Molé, but if they do I shall have to look after him later on. Meanwhile here is the plan of action. The Lerridans have asked for a special guard for the night. We will provide it. Ten of you be at my lodgings at the rue St. Anne within half an hour of receiving this, dressed as men of the Sûreté. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

It is easy to conjecture from the letter how the Lannoy child was rescued from a life of shame and misery to which it had been condemned. The real Paul Molé had perforce to be set at liberty; one may be sure that he was richer by the adventure!

V

Many were the disguises assumed by Sir Percy Blakeney. Some of them are duly authenticated either from his own writings or from Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' journal. There has been discovered, however, an even more reliable source, namely the papers of Armand Chauvelin himself. These papers form part of a bundle of manuscript which ultimately were published under the title of *Mémoires d'un ambassadeur républicain*, but the extracts relating to the Scarlet Pimpernel were not included in the published memoirs. They were written in English and obviously Chauvelin did not intend them to be made public. They relate to various attempts to capture the Scarlet Pimpernel and consist of data which he had laboriously collected as to Blakeney's whereabouts, his various disguises and methods, all neatly tabulated.

"March 25. George Gradlin, a cobbler. He escaped from La Force.

"March 29. I am suspicious of Bertin, a man who has suddenly appeared at the 'Rat Noir.' He seems inoffensive, yet I wonder.

"March 30. Bertin needs watching. I am afraid that it is Blakeney again.

"March 30 (the same evening). I am sure that it is he.

"April 5. I recognized him as the news vendor Jaccard. He is after the Mont-Choisi crowd who were convicted yesterday.

"April 6. Jaccard has disappeared, and so have the Mont-Choisi!

"April 10. The activities of that accursed League surpass all bounds. And their luck seems to be phenomenal. My spies report the presence of one or other of them at Limours, at Nantes and at Lyons. The Scarlet Pimpernel has effectively tricked that fool Laporte. At last the Committee has asked for my aid. We shall see this time.

"April 20. Someone has blundered. My trap has failed to catch the quarry and he eluded my vigilance. But he managed to rescue the Levasseures none the less. Mayet is a fool.

"April 30. Blakeney has become brazen. I find that he impersonated Mayet at Limours last week and thus hoodwinked the lot of them. Now he has impersonated my humble self at Nantes and tricked that dolt Carrier."

"Note He uses these impersonations only in the remote districts where the citizen deputies are unknown to the inhabitants except by name. And he adopts the disguise only when the said man is announced to be in the vicinity. The Pimpernel is clever, but I have a little plan to catch him out this time."

VI

Soon Blakeney found that it would be a real necessity for him to have regular headquarters in Paris itself. Lavish bribes judiciously distributed had already secured for him the goodwill of several landlords of unpretentious wayside inns between the capital and the coast, where relays could always be counted on for conveying the League's protégés northwards. Blakeney at this time also turned his attention to Belgium, whither many fugitives had a longing to go, chiefly because several members of the Bourbon Royal Family had already found refuge there. It is to be observed that the Belgian

frontier was not quite so difficult to negotiate as the severely guarded northern coast.

One of the League's most favoured rallying points was a small tavern which lay perdu, immediately behind the cemetery of Père Lachaise. The cemetery itself with its alleys of awe-inspiring monuments, a vast city of the dead, overhung by age-old cedars, was one of the most lonely, shunned spots in Paris.

Members of the League not actually engaged inside the city had their headquarters at the inn whose landlord, disgruntled and wretchedly poor, had been amenable to Blakeney's open purse. From this point of vantage which faced the open country, arrangements could be made for the purveyance of chaise or horses, or for receiving definite orders from the chief. The inn lay outside the city gates. The rallying cry from the leader to his followers was invariably the call of the sea-mew repeated three times at stated intervals.

In addition to this, Sir Percy had rented more than one squalid abode in the poorer quarters of Paris where he could find a resting-place in the intervals of activity. Money, as usual, made those retreats secure from denunciation. There was a woman named Brogart who kept a lodging-house of evil reputation in the rue de l'Ancienne Comédie. She was some kind of relation to the man of the same name, the landlord of the "Chat Gris" at Calais, the scene of one of Blakeney's most thrilling adventures. It was through him that the woman, Brogart, heard of the existence of a fool Englishman who paid lavishly for everything he had, asked no questions and was content with any accommodation however squalid.

Her house became a sure refuge for Blakeney and the members of the League. It was a roof over their heads when they needed one, and a convenient meeting-place. It was in itself so wretched and

unclean and was situated in such a poor quarter of the city that it was not troubled very often, if ever, with visitations from the soldiery. Thus it became a storage place for their various disguises; a store-house for provisions; a first resting-place for refugee prisoners who needed courage and a respite before undertaking the journey to the coast.

Another rallying point was at Number 37 rue St. Anne. The ground floor was ostensibly the workshop of a violin-maker, another of Blakeney's most successful impersonations. It backed on another house in the rue Jolivet and Blakeney was able to contrive a means of access from one house to another with extraordinarily good results. Many a time when, disguised as Lenoir, the coal-heaver, he found himself closely pressed by Government sleuths, he would step into the entrance of the rue Jolivet, effect a quick change and re-emerge in the rue St. Anne as the simple, innocent violin-maker.

In all Sir Percy had rented some ten different lodgings in Paris, each one as filthy and tumble-down as the other; some of them were so bedraggled that they barely gave protection against the elements, and all of them were so squalid that it is a marvel how a man of such fastidious tastes could ever bring himself to enter them.

The only apartment which had some measure of comfort in it was the one wherein he installed his wife whilst she stayed in Paris. It was a small house, tucked away in a tiny garden on the outskirts of the Bois and remote from the constant turmoil of the city. Marguerite lived alone there for some time, only seeing her husband very occasionally; she kept no servant and did her own marketing, her own cooking and cleaning. She went about as little as she could and dressed in the shabbiest and poorest of clothes. It was to this house that Blakeney would often bring those unfortunates whom he had succeeded in bringing to safety. Marguerite would have wine and food ready for them and she it was who with her own hands

administered to their wants. Rarely, too rarely alas! Blakeney was able to snatch here a few moments of rest and happiness in the company of his wife.

VII

About this time it is fairly clear that Marguerite returned to England; the reign of Terror was then at its height in France, and roughly speaking, no one was safe from those anonymous denunciations which brought so many innocents to the guillotine. It is practically impossible to follow Sir Percy and his League through their many adventures during the next two strenuous years. Documents are non-existent, records of any authenticity very few. It is only possible to judge by the results, and while 2,625 victims perished on the guillotine during those two years, there are authentic records of over that number of refugees in England who owed their lives directly to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

But it is equally certain that during these same strenuous years Sir Percy must have spent a few days in England from time to time. His presence in London was necessary, for no other reason than the preservation of his anonymity. Marguerite's entreaties must have been a powerful force to bring him now and again to her side. It is not to be supposed that she wished him to give up the League, for she knew he would never do so, but she used all her charms and fascination to lure him to Richmond whenever she could.

He must have listened to her entreaties with a patient ear, but he was never really happy away from his activities in France. He was restive and fretted at his enforced idleness, in spite of her efforts to distract him. He frequented the fashionable routs where his presence was hailed with joy. But though he was a gallant and amusing as ever, he was bored; his taste for society life had been spoilt by the exciting savour of adventure.

There are one or two letters written by Sir Percy to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes which give quite a fair idea of what his feelings were during those periods spent in London. One can feel the longing to be away and up and doing, to revel in the excitement of the chase, with himself as the quarry.

"Dear Ffoulkes," he wrote on one occasion, "God grant you every success and watch over your safety. I am in a constant worry about you all and hope that you manage to keep your suborned crowd in order and that you have a plentiful supply of money. I intend to return to you all within a few days.

"Begad, I shall never be able to return to the old life again. You have no idea how boring London is after the thrills of Paris. Suzanne is beside herself with pride and rage: pride that you are in charge of the League: rage that you are kept away from her side.

"I think that it is about time that you should return to her."

Owing partly to the fact that Bath had lately become more fashionable than ever through the predilection of the Prince of Wales for the famous watering-place, and partly owing to Marguerite's desire to be near Suzanne Ffoulkes whilst their respective husbands were absent in Paris, the Blakeney's took a house there in the Crescent. Thither thereafter did Lord Anthony Dewhurst conduct the latest arrivals from France, protégés of the Scarlet Pimpernel, amongst whom there happened to be an old friend of Marguerite's, one of the *habitués* of the salon in the rue Richlieu.

From a chance word dropped by this friend, Sir Percy learned that wild plots were being hatched in the underground cellars where Royalists foregathered, plots to rescue Marie Antoinette from the Conciergerie and of all sorts of mad plans which would inevitably

bring ruin and death to the foolhardy plotters.

"My dear Ffoulkes," he wrote on September 10th, 1793, "the de Cluny's tell me there is a plot on foot to rescue the Queen and the Dauphin. I hear that the instigator is Paul Déroulède. I do hope that this is just a silly rumour, but I require you to make discreet enquiries as to the truth or falsity of this supposed plot. I like Déroulède. He is honest and loyal and, as you know, he was a close friend of Marguerite's. I should hate him to be embroiled in some of these mad schemes. I beg of you, in all haste, to give me as accurate information as you can on the subject. I am already prepared to come to Paris and only await your news to fix the day of departure. Ever yours. The Scarlet Pimpernel."

The urge was upon Sir Percy; no restraining hand was sufficiently powerful to hold him back. Something lay before him which had to be done now, which represented the heavy price to be paid for those mad and happy adventures, which were as the breath of life to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Marguerite could no longer hold him, her tears and supplications were all in vain; destiny demanded that he should go. He had chosen his path in life, and that choice was now his master. What he had done once, twenty times, a hundred times, that must he do again, all the while that the weak and innocent called to him from across the seas, all the while defenseless women suffered and children were orphaned. The call of honour was louder than that of love.

Marguerite must have suffered terribly at times at others she was supremely happy the measure of her life was made up of bitter dregs and sparkling wine. And gradually that enthusiasm which surrounded her husband's personality and dominated his every action, entered, too, into her soul. The impulses of his vitality were so compelling that she allowed herself to be carried away on the tide of his desires: she

swallowed her tears and learned to say "Good-bye" when she longed to say "Remain."

When he finally went away on this 15th day of September, neither he nor his devoted wife could guess that the greatest trial of strength and endurance and the most acute crisis in his whole career in revolutionary France, awaited Sir Percy at the hands of his most bitter enemy, citizen Armand Chauvelin.

"September 15. I arrived in Paris at my lodgings at the rue St. Anne yesterday evening. Keep an eye on old Déroulède. I have great hopes of a great game with our old friend Monsieur Chambertin! The Scarlet Pimpernel."

Chapter Six ~ "That Demmed Elusive

Pimpernel!"

I

September, 1793! The Fructidor riots! And the massacre that followed; causing the streets of Paris to run red with blood! The terrible reprisals that followed the escape of Paul Déroulède and Juliette Marny! And, calmly, serenely, towering over them all, laughing inanely, the enigmatic figure of the Scarlet Pimpernel and his devoted wife ensconced in the little home by the Bois!

And as soon as Sir Percy Blakeney had been put *au fait* by Ffoulkes and others of the events which the de Clunys had adumbrated, he realized the need for urgent action if a calamity was to be averted. In a moment the foppish ways, the bored, polished elegance of the man of the world dropped away from him, the spirit of daring was awake, insistent and rampant: the lazy blue eyes were steely, the speech deliberate. Sir Percy had sunk his individuality in that of the Scarlet Pimpernel. And within a few hours, the cadaverous Rateau, the blood-thirsty Lenoir, the humble violin-maker were back at their old haunts, and Lenoir, menacing and brutal, was demanding the death of every aristo and that of Paul Déroulède in particular!

Paul Déroulède was one of the few men of culture and refinement who were popular with the mob. It would be difficult to say why this was, or how it came about that this one man remained immune from denunciations and managed to escape the wholesale massacres which had followed the murder of Marat. The reign of Terror was now at its height. "Let us govern by terror," Danton had said, "so only can we purge the land of traitors. Let terror therefore be the order of the day!"

One woke up in the morning and knew not if one's head would be on one's shoulders in the evening, or whether it would be held up by citizen Samson, the headsman, for the sans-culottes of Paris to gape at. But Paul Déroulède was allowed to go on his way unmolested: for citizen Déroulède was not dangerous, so Marat had said; not dangerous to republicanism, to Liberty, to that downward leveling process, the tearing down of old traditions and the annihilation of past pretensions. Nor had he been dangerous to republicanism at one time, any more than Marguerite St. Just had been dangerous, when democracy was still an ideal, and had not yet resorted to butchery. But now: well! Paul Déroulède was up to the neck in a conspiracy to restore the monarchy in France.

"My only friend in revolutionary France is in extreme danger," ran a scribbled note which Marguerite found slipped under her bedroom door in the morning. "Paul Déroulède is doomed, unless I intervene. You will understand, my beloved, why I must away at this hour without saying good-bye."

Of course Marguerite understood. The call was a clarion one to the man who had never failed a friend. She understood perfectly and would not have wished it otherwise. For she owed her present happiness in no small measure to that gentle, refined and generous man, Paul Déroulède. When she came to Paris, an unknown artist, full of ambition and enthusiasm, he had been one of the first to recognize her talent and had been one of her most devoted admirers. Though an ardent adherent of the revolutionary party, his tendencies were non-militant, and he had been considered by many to be far too mild in his views to be called a republican. Others, however, respected him because of the spirit of altruism which animated his harangues to the populace, a spirit far different from that which only incited the ignorant to hatred and revenge.

His high ideals, as well as his learning and refinement, had also caused him to be made welcome in the higher circles of society of pre-revolution days, and to be looked on as a link between the two extremes of thought. Even when the full tide of the Reign of Terror broke over the city, Déroulède was allowed to carry on his profession as an advocate at the Paris bar, and in the exercise of his profession it was more than once his duty to plead for aristos arraigned before the revolutionary tribunal citizen Déroulède, it was tacitly admitted, was not dangerous.

Blakeney had first met Déroulède in Marguerite's salon in the rue Richelieu. By one of those strange coincidences in the laws of attraction, the two men, so unlike outwardly, except for their national characteristics, formed a friendship which bridged over the gulf of political antagonism, and they conceived for one another a sincere regard, strengthened by their common affection for Marguerite.

When the revolution first put an end to autocracy, Déroulède had been in full agreement with the movement. He gave his adherence to the revolutionary programme, put up for election to the Constituent Assembly, took his seat in that house, and subsequently in the National Convention, where he gained the admiration of members on both sides by his eloquence and sane progressive views. He never lent his support to measures of tyranny, and at the very outset of the Scarlet Pimpernel's activities, he gave to the intrepid adventurer, as well as to the protégés of the League, a full measure of sympathy.

Opinions differ as to whether Déroulède ever guessed that his friend Blakeney had a hand in the many evasions that were taking place among the victims of the Revolutionary Tribunal. He certainly saw a great deal of Sir Percy, who made it a rule, whenever he was in Paris, to visit the one friend he had in the enemy's camp. In Déroulède's house the English exquisite could freely indulge his

fastidious tastes in food and wine, in elegant diction and refined surroundings, for Paul's mother who presided over the bachelor establishment, was both, high-born and high-bred, a woman of great culture and refinement.

There is a story concerning the friendship between the two men, which has been fully exploited in fiction. Whether it is absolutely true to fact it is difficult to say. It is certain that some years previously Paul Déroulède, then a young, already distinguished advocate at the bar, had an affair of honour with the young Vicomte de Marny. A duel ensued and the Vicomte was killed in fair fight.

It was said at the time that the young man's sister, Juliette, swore an oath that she would avenge her brother's death, and that, with this object in view, she presently found a pretext for an introduction into the Déroulède household, where she soon became a great favourite with old Madame Déroulède, whilst Paul fell passionately in love with her.

As so often happens in cases like this, where there are only scrappy records of a life so puzzling as that of the Scarlet Pimpernel, there are several versions of what happened subsequently. It seems pretty certain that Juliette Marny's purpose was to spy on the Déroulèdes and to avenge her brother's death by denouncing Paul as a traitor. As a man in love, his instinct was to trust the woman to whom he had given his heart. He was undoubtedly indiscreet, and this at the moment when sickened by the excesses of his former friends and by the chaos and misery which their policy had heaped upon France, he had begun to establish communication with the reactionary, or monarchist party. How Blakeney came to know that his friend became more and more deeply involved in plots for the restoration of the monarchy is difficult to say.

One or two enigmatical entries into his diary almost suggest that

Déroulède actually confided in him, and even gave actual support to the League by allowing his house to be used as a refuge for escaped prisoners who were under the protection of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Owing to his peculiar position in the National Convention and his popularity with the mob, his *volte-face* must have been of immense service to the League; the immunity which he enjoyed, even at the hands of the extremists, enabled him to visit the prisons when he chose; and as a leading advocate at the Bar, he had access to the lists of the accused who were awaiting trial. These names, it may be supposed, he passed on to his English friend, with, in many cases, most fortunate results.

No one could possibly have accused Paul Déroulède of trafficking with traitors or with English spies. His munificent gifts to the nation, his devotion to the cause, were too well known to allow a breath of suspicion to cast a slur upon so fine a patriot.

But it seems that it was this very immunity which finally caused his downfall. His popularity in the National Convention seemed unassailable; his way of life was both so straightforward and so simple that no one could accuse him of aristocratic tendencies. But it was this very freedom to come and go as he chose, unmolested and unquestioned, that decided him in the end to take the fatal step which very nearly brought him to the guillotine. It was due to his friendship with Sir Percy, to his natural honest good sense, and to his sympathy with the unfortunate that he first renounced his revolutionary principles. And now that every eye in Europe was turned towards the Conciergerie, where the unhappy Marie Antoinette was incarcerated, Paul's thoughts naturally turned to her also. Soon he was neck-deep with his Royalist friends in a plot to effect her rescue.

Rumours of this plot reached Percy's ears through the Clunys, a family of *émigrés* who owed their rescue to him. He was in England

at the time, but made immediate haste to come over to France in order to ascertain what truth, if any, there was in these rumours. No sooner had he set foot in Paris than evidence of the truth jumped to his eyes. There was more than once conspiracy afoot to rescue the Queen, and his friend Déroulède was deep in every one of them. Now, no one knew better than the Scarlet Pimpernel that to get Marie Antoinette out of prison and convey her to England or Belgium in safety was an impossible task.

To quote his own words once more: "The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel never fails," he said on one occasion to his followers, "because it never attempts the impossible." His active brain, there is no doubt, had before now tackled the problem of the unfortunate Queen, but had to give up the attempt; not because of the difficulty of dragging a prisoner out of the Conciergerie he had accomplished far more difficult tasks than that, not once, but a hundred times but because of the personality of the Queen, her upbringing, her clinging to the great idea that the persons of crowned monarchs were sacred.

Her Austrian pride would never consent to obey the Scarlet Pimpernel's commands, to hide in a market gardener's coat under a pile of decaying refuse, to sleep in a common lodging-house or to ride astride on a pillion with her arms clinging round the waist of a foreigner who had never had the privilege of a personal introduction to her. Not only her actions, but her every gesture would not only have betrayed her, but also her rescuers.

And what the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel could not accomplish, Déroulède and his enthusiastic, but inept associates could not accomplish either.

II

Blakeney's alert brain now concentrated on a scheme to get

Déroulède himself out of France. He had been the first to suspect Juliette Marny of treachery, but the problem was how to sow the seeds of this same suspicion in the mind of a lover.

At the first hint from his friend, Déroulède became adamant. Nothing would induce him to go back on his friends, he was convinced that given a modicum of good luck the plot to save the Queen was bound to succeed. Blakeney tried to use Paul's mother as a leverage to induce him to come away, but his entreaties on that score only ended in Paul's begging him to convey his mother to England. He himself would only leave France in the suite of the Queen.

There is a brief note in one of Ffoulkes' diaries, which goes to prove that Blakeney's next idea was to kidnap Juliette Marny along with Paul and his mother, and take them willy-nilly on board the *Daydream* and Ffoulkes, it seems, did receive actual orders from the Scarlet Pimpernel for his share in that adventure.

But suddenly the crisis came.

Juliette Marny wrote the denunciation which brought the sleuths of the Committee of Public Safety into Déroulède's house and caused his arrest. She did this at a moment when a good deal of correspondence relating to his activities on behalf of the Queen was in his possession. It consisted probably of letters written by him, or to him, between his fellow conspirators, also plans in writing of how the rescue of the Queen was to be effected.

It is quite impossible to probe into the motives of a woman's actions. At the time that Juliette Marny wrote the anonymous denunciation against Déroulède an authentic document, by the way, still preserved in the archives of the city of Paris she must have hated him. She must have known that she was sending him straight to his death. But less than three hours later she compromised herself

hopelessly by extracting the fateful correspondence from Déroulède's bureau and throwing the papers into the fire, at the very moment when a small detachment of the Republican guard was demanding admittance into the house in the name of the Republic.

She was caught by the men in the very act of burning the last packet of letters; questioned as to their contents she refused to reply; she was accused of treasonable correspondence and put under arrest. But with the destruction of that correspondence there was no longer any proof against Paul Déroulède. With a wealth of apologies, the accusation was withdrawn and he was allowed to go free.

The trial of Juliette Marny on a charge of treasonable correspondence with persons unknown a correspondence which she had perfidiously destroyed and of launching a false accusation against an esteemed patriot, was probably one of the most dramatic and turbulent that had ever taken place inside the Palais de Justice. It lead directly to what is known as the Fructidor riots. Paul Déroulède, one of the most popular advocates at the Paris Bar, was Juliette's defender. His eloquence stirred the hearts of those spectators all too few who had a spark of compassion left in them for the terrible plight in which a refined young girl found herself. But, of course, her condemnation was a foregone conclusion. Not one in a hundred accused passed through the doors of the "Tribunal Extraordinaire" a free man or woman, and the eloquence of a Demosthenes could not have saved Juliette Marny who had been caught red-handed in an act of treason.

The morning of the trial, the members of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel received the following communication from their chief:

"I shall require every one of you to be present at the tribunal to-day. As Lenoir, I shall launch a denunciation of immoral conduct against Paul Déroulède, so as to involve him and the Marny girl in one

accusation. You all know by heart the tactics which you must follow after that, so I need not repeat them now. All you have to do is make as much noise as you can. Remember Lenoir. Rue Jolivet first. Then Père Lachaise. I will let you have final instructions during the sitting."

The false Lenoir and his gang of cut-throats succeeded in their ruse. During the course of the trial the coal-heaver began by murmuring his accusations against the advocate, then against the girl, demanding their death on the grounds of immorality rather than treason; the challenge was taken up by his friends: France must be purged of sluts and loose fish. Their demands grew louder and louder and soon caused such an uproar that neither prosecutor nor defender could make himself heard. The judges vainly tinkled their bell, demanding silence. Soon the mob, excited by the turmoil, became uncontrollable: The League had succeeded in rousing its hatred against Juliette and Déroulède. With loud cries of execration, the crowd demanded *mise en accusation* of citizen Déroulède and citizeness Marny.

In the meanwhile every member of the League there present had received a brief communication:

"Be outside on the quay-side exit a quarter of an hour after we have started the tumult. I will keep the mob at fever heat until then. Watch for me as Lenoir with the two either on my shoulders or in the tumbrel. Stick around me as close as you can. Only give a hand if you see me hard pressed, in which case concentrate on the prisoners and leave me to shift for myself."

"We did as we were bid," writes Ffoulkes in his journal, "and made our way to the quay-side entrance where the usual crowd of quidnuncs were already gathered to see the condemned prisoners come out. The tumbrel was waiting and it looked as if a special guard had been hastily summoned for the occasion. Soon we saw Percy

gesticulating wildly and shouting his usual bloodthirsty cry. Juliette and Paul were carried out by two soldiers and pushed into the cart which started off immediately. We pressed close to it and, although it was dark, we could see Percy striding along.

"After a few minutes he contrived to speak to me. He told me that the mob had gone mad; and that all we need to do is fall on the soldiers who were guarding the two prisoners and he would give me the usual signal for this.

"Soon after that, we heard the signal, and we fell upon the soldiers to such good effect that we were left in possession of the tumbrel. We carried the two prisoners to the rue Jolivet and here Percy presently joined us and explained to us his plan for reaching the Porte St. Antoine and for passing through without being challenged. In the first place, we were to join in with the mob. The prisoners dressed in the same sort of rough clothes as we ourselves were wearing, were to come with us. Percy then, still wearing his Lenoir disguise, would continue to incite the mob to rioting, and to create as much noise and confusion as possible. The escape of the prisoners would be a pretext for a regular tumult. We were, of course, to keep as close to him as possible, remembering that the cry of the sea-mew as usual would be the rallying call.

"It was not very difficult in these days to arouse the excitement of the populace and Percy knew all the tricks that would do it. He knew how to wave his arms, his voice became raucous and stentorian at will, and he had a string of invectives at his command which would have given points to the lowest cut-throat in the city. On this occasion he surpassed himself. 'We are betrayed,' he shouted, 'the aristos have escaped!' and when the cry had been taken up by the mob and cries of execration had been hurled at aristos and traitors, at the Government and the Committees, he went on still shouting 'Aux

barrières! Citoyens! Comrades! Let us catch the traitors at the gates of our city!

"One knows what an excited crowd is like at moments like this. It will follow, like sheep, any leader who shouts loudly enough. Led by Percy in the direction of the Porte St. Antoine, the mob followed blindly, never pausing to think whether the prisoners were more likely to escape through the Porte St. Antoine rather than through any other city gate. The town guard did not make any serious attempt to interfere. The officers thought, no doubt, that less harm would be done by letting the ebullient tempers have their way, than by trying to repress a tumult which would soon degenerate into rioting and bloodshed.

"There was a bit of a bagarre at the Porte St. Antoine. The mob, not knowing exactly what it did want, worked off its excitement by falling on the guard who, very wisely, only offered perfunctory resistance, making a rush through the gates in order to loot the stacks of provisions that were piled up outside, ready for entry into the city. Then it was that we heard the cry of the sea-mew. Dewhurst, Galveston and I were taking the prisoners between us, rallied round our chief. We kept up our rôles of mudlarks and gradually worked our way to the fringe of the crowd. The shades of evening were now drawing in: under their cover we turned off in the direction of Père Lachaise and soon were able to make for the 'Pleine Lune,' the small inn behind the cemetery, where the landlord and his family, who were in Percy's pay, made us all welcome."

Thus ended the Fructidor riots and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' notes go no further, but it may be surmised that the party of fugitives did not remain long in the vicinity of the city; whether they continued their way on foot, on horseback or in country carts, we know not, but what is a fact is that Paul Déroulède and Juliette Marny came safely to

England, for they were married in the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Soho, on January 10th, 1794.

III

Fiction has dealt with further adventures of the Scarlet Pimpernel, but as a matter of fact there are very few authentic records of his doings during the nine months following the Fructidor riots.

There are one or two scraps of paper, however, that can be vouched for, for they are in Percy Blakeney's own handwriting. Two of these scraps are parts of letters obviously addressed to his wife, and both seem to suggest that, at any rate, on two occasions the Scarlet Pimpernel was actually a prisoner in the hands of the revolutionary Government and looking forward to summary death at the hands of his enemies.

One of these letters was apparently written in Boulogne: it is almost illegible and the date is missing: although it must have been written at a time of great stress, it breathes that marvelous optimism and confidence which is so characteristic of the gallant adventurer.

"I have very little time before me," it says, "for my friend C. seems in a demmed hurry to see me dangle at the end of a rope. But do not take this as a last farewell, my beloved, for of a certainty I shall hold you in my arms before very long."

This letter may or may not have any connection with the account given in an English society journal of the time of a quarrel over the card-table, which occurred in the presence of H.R.H. the Prince of Wales, between the accredited agent of the French Government and Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart. a quarrel which ended in a challenge to a duel to be fought between the two gentlemen at Boulogne. To the searcher after truth it seems more likely that the quarrel and

challenge were a ruse on the part of Armand Chauvelin to make sure of Blakeney's presence at a given time on an agreed spot in France. This theory is also confirmed by another curious document which is preserved in the archives of Boulogne. This is a roughly printed proclamation promising pardon and freedom on a certain day and at a given hour to all prisoners incarcerated in Fort Gayole and the old Château.

"Demain Decadi," it says, "à sept heures du soir, au son du canon venant de vieux Beffroi, les portes de Fort Gayole et du Château seront ouvertes, et tout prisonnier aura droit à cette présente amnistie, en vue de la déroute du plus vicieux ennemi de la partie."

("Tomorrow, the tenth day of the decade," it says, "at seven o'clock in the evening, at the sound of canons coming from old Beffroi, the doors of Fort Gayole and of the Château will be opened, and all the prisoners will be pardoned at that time, in view of the overthrow of the most vicious enemy of the party.")

The words "plus vicieux ennemi" clearly indicate the Scarlet Pimpernel, who was often thus referred to in Documents Historiques of the two previous years. [1]

[1. *Documents Historiques. Tome XXVII. L'an de la République*, Collection Dubois et Herrot.]

There is a further short allusion to Boulogne in another letter written by Sir Percy to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes a letter which is doubly interesting, for it refers to the marriage of one of the most prominent members of the League, Lord Anthony Dewhurst, to Yvonne, daughter of the duc de Kernogan, a Breton nobleman who had emigrated to England at the outbreak of the revolution. The letter is dated December 1st, 1793, from 15 The Crescent, Bath.

"Dear Ffoulkes," it says. "As you will perceive from the above address, we have moved from Richmond. I wanted to stay at the 'Nest,' but I was ordered away from the sea by my beloved wife, who was afraid that I might slip away in the night to join you.

"During the *mêlée* on the ramparts at Boulogne, I received a slight injury to the right thigh. In the ordinary course of events, I would not have allowed it to worry me, but if I am to continue as an active leader of the League, I must give it careful doctoring. The learned leeches say that the waters here are excellent and will ensure a speedy cure.

"Of course, our choice was influenced by H.R.H., who had recently made Bath fashionable, having adopted the place, so to speak, as his favorite spa. Naturally, he induced us, as soon as he knew that we should be in England for a while, to accompany him there.

"Well, my dear Ffoulkes, once again the leadership of our League depends temporarily on you, and I have no qualms about your devotion to your wits.

"I think that Tony will be happy with his Yvonne.

"Yours ever, Percy."

IV

Early in 1794 i.e. January 6th or the 17th Nivose in the year II of the Republic the Assembly of the Convention voted a new law, giving fuller powers to the two Committees of Public Safety and of General Security. This law enabled domiciliary searches to be made at the discretion of the Committees and authorized them to proceed summarily against all enemies of the republic. It also assured the sum of thirty-five sous to any of the Committee's spies who had been instrumental in "beating up game for the guillotine."

Blakeney and at least ten members of his League were in Paris at the time, though it is not known what their activities consisted in for the moment. Dangers attending these activities must have increased an hundredfold, for by this time the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, as well as that of some of his followers, must have been known to a number of the Committee's spies. All the same, the selfless devotion of the little band of adventurers had become more of a necessity than ever, and there seems to be no doubt that the Scarlet Pimpernel and most of the members of the League remained in France during the whole of '93 until the great crisis of Thermidor in '94.

There have been many contradictory tales told of the rescue of the little Dauphin the uncrowned king of France from the Temple prison, and many have claimed to have effected that rescue. But only one account bears the hall-mark of authenticity. It is not to be supposed that the Scarlet Pimpernel did not at some time or other of his adventurous career, turn his eyes to that most pitiful and pathetic sight in all Europe the child martyr in the Temple. And as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel never attempted the impossible, it remains an undisputed fact that the child's rescue was effected by Percy Blakeney and by no one else.

Already, on January 16th, he adumbrated his plans before the most trusted members of his League. A meeting was held in a house on the Quai de l'Ecole, and it is to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' journal that history owes the knowledge of what took place on that occasion.

"On one point, I am quite clear," Percy declared to us," Sir Andrew says in his journal, "and that is that His Majesty, Louis XVII, will come out of that ugly house in my company next Sunday, the nineteenth of January, in this year of disgrace, seventeen hundred and ninety-four. That day, the gaoler, Simon, and his wife, are moving out of the Temple, bag and baggage, and a new turnkey will take their place.

For some time now, I have anticipated this event, for I have often talked with Simon and drunk sour wine with him at the Cabaret. I have made him understand that I own a cart and a donkey and that I earn my living by doing odd jobs of furniture removal for a few sous per hour. He has engaged me to move his furniture for him this next Sunday. Chance has indeed played into my hands.' We were," Sir Andrews goes on to say, "dumbfounded at this news."

Further, there is a letter written by Blakeney to Sir Andrew which finally disposes of any doubt the serious student may have on the subject of that historic episode.

"Tony and Hastings," Sir Percy wrote to his friend, "will await me outside the Barrière du Trône at six-thirty to-morrow afternoon. I shall want you with me as my mate. The stage is set. I am Dupont, the removal man, and this I know, that those murdering blackguards will not lay hands on me while the most precious life in France is in my keeping."

Nothing could be clearer than that and it is absolutely inconceivable that the Scarlet Pimpernel, having formulated his plans, should have failed in its accomplishment. That it was not the Dauphin, the uncrowned king of France, who died of neglect and starvation in the Temple prison, the following has been proved over and over again beyond a doubt by French and English historians. The child who died in the Temple was two years older than the Dauphin, his hair was darker, his eyes of a different colour. He was substituted for the Dauphin as soon as the latter's disappearance from prison became known to the heads of the revolutionary Government, who feared public opinion and denunciations for connivance from their political adversaries.

The only fact susceptible of being controverted, is, what became of the boy afterwards? But this question has been dealt with so often [2]

and at such great lengths by writers of divergent views on the subject, and is, in any case, so complicated that it cannot find a place in the biography of his rescuer. It is more than probable that Sir Percy Blakeney, after he had brought the most precious life in France to safety, placed it in the care of de Batz who was the accredited agent of the Emperor of Austria, the boy's nearest relative.

[2. *La question Louis XVII de M. Otto Friedrichs, chez H, Daragon, rue Blanche, Paris.*]

V

In spite of the fact that only young men in the entourage of Sir Percy Blakeney, who were of unquestioned integrity, were enrolled as members of the League, it occurred on two occasions that the Scarlet Pimpernel was betrayed by one of them.

The best known case, and one which nearly cost the gay adventurer his life, was engineered by Marguerite's own brother, Saint Just. It occurred directly after the escape of the Dauphin from the Temple. What led Armand to this abominable deed is in the domain of fiction, but the letter written by Sir Percy Blakeney in the Conciergerie prison to Armand St. Just, who partly burned it, is authentic. It was written at the dictation of Chauvelin, and was obviously a ruse, and part of a plan which, despite his terrible predicament, he had already begun to formulate.

"Mon état présent, mon cher ami, est devenu tel qu'il m'est impossible de le supporter. Le citoyen Héron ain . . . M. Chauvelin ont transformé . . . en un véritable enfer. De . . . nous quittons ces lieux et . . . guiderai le citoyen Hé . . . connu de nous où se . . ."

("My present state, my dear friend, has become unendurable. Citizen Héron thou . . . M. Chauvelin has transformed . . . into a true

Hell. To . . . we leave this place and . . . will guide citizen Hé . . . known by us where he . . .")

Which scraps make it obvious that Héron and Chauvelin were offering Blakeney his release on condition that he led them to the place of refuge where he had hidden the Dauphin. In the letter he asks of St. Just to accompany him on that expedition. Marguerite was already in France. She had learned the awful news of her husband's incarceration from Ffoulkes.

"Our leader," Ffoulkes wrote to several members of the League, "is in the Conciergerie. God knows what is in store for him and for us all. No one has been allowed to see him, only his wife. The devils are trying to worm out of him the secret of the Dauphin's hiding-place. To break his resistance they are depriving him of sleep. But you know what he is. He will endure Hell rather than give in."

Later on, Ffoulkes appears to have been in communication with St. Just. The latter presumably showed him the letter he had received from Blakeney and which he had tried to burn. Only a few fragments of it remained, but Ffoulkes, the most loyal of friends, does not seem to have doubted for a moment that the letter was nothing but a ruse to throw dust in the eyes of those who thought that they had at last brought the Scarlet Pimpernel to dishonour and death. He sent another brief communication to the League, a communication which breathes that optimism which Blakeney had the power of infusing into his followers.

"It is a hellish situation," Sir Andrew wrote to Anthony Dewhurst: "but I, for one, do not despair. I may not be able to write again, so keep the League together in case instructions reach us from the chief. But this could only happen by a miracle."

Many chroniclers especially those whose sympathies tended

towards the revolution have averred that the miracle never took place, and that "the English spy" was duly hanged on the Place de Grève like a common criminal, unworthy of the guillotine. There certainly is not a scrap of evidence to show how the Scarlet Pimpernel got out of a seemingly hopeless situation, but that he did so is amply proved by the many allusions to him and to his lady and to his friends in the English society paper of the next few years. There is constant reference to Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney being present at one or another brilliant social function, to Sir Andrew and Lady Ffoulkes, to Lord and Lady Anthony Dewhurst, and to the wedding of "M. Armand St. Just, brother of the beautiful Lady Blakeney, to Mademoiselle Jeanne Lange, the one-time brilliant player of *ingénue* parts in the House of Molière."

Whether Marguerite ever knew or guessed that it was her brother's hand that nearly brought her husband to his death is, of course, impossible to determine. Sir Percy would naturally do his best to keep that awful revelation from her. It is undoubtedly characteristic of the Scarlet Pimpernel that he should have increased the difficulty of his own escape by taking his betrayer with him.

After that episode, Paris became practically an impossible place in which to continue the activities of the League. Prudence did, at any rate, this once, gain the day, and suggested another sphere of action for the joyous band of adventurers. At any rate, during February and March, '94, Provence hears of the Scarlet Pimpernel for the first time. Deep in the black books of the revolutionary Government after his many failures, Chauvelin was sent south: with what aim or for what purpose is not known. Anyway, he went and took up his headquarters at Orange; and Blakeney straightway turned his back on Paris and took up his residence in the same town.

The change of district called for new methods. The coast of England

Was now too remote; a journey right across Paris too perilous. From Orange, the Swiss or Italian frontier afforded safer avenues for escape. A certain amount of time must have been spent in reorganizing the means of transport, but plans never took long in maturing in the Scarlet Pimpernel's lively brain and presently we find in Ffoulkes' journal several references to the League's activities in Provence.

"February 10th. Percy has worked out a plan. We are to convey our protégés by coach to Grenoble and thence over the pass to Lausanne in Switzerland. We are enjoying ourselves hugely since our old friend Chauvelin is in the neighbourhood.

"February 15th. Percy and Hastings contrived to rescue ten men and women from Avignon to-day. They are safely on their way to the frontier under the care of Barstow and Mackenzie. We have no difficulty with the inhabitants as most of them are in favour of their old seigneurs. They are a great help to us."

How long the Scarlet Pimpernel remained in the south it is impossible to say. Three months certainly, because there are records of over two hundred Frenchmen and women and children who passed through into Switzerland or Italy during this time; all of whom during the course of their life abroad testified that they owed their lives to "a mysterious band of English gentlemen, who, under the leadership of a supernatural being, known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, risked their lives and fortunes in rescuing us from the murderous clutches of our enemies."

But in the spring of '94 he was back again in Paris and remained there until after the fall of Robespierre. Marguerite was with him then, most of the time, and there are scraps in Ffoulkes' journal which seem to suggest that she fell into a trap laid for her by Chauvelin, and was actually a prisoner in his hands until the great day in July, which

saw the fall of Robespierre and the end of the reign of Terror.

It was during this period that a little incident occurred which is worth while recording. Through some means or other Chauvelin must have stumbled upon the truth as to Blakeney's impersonation of the asthmatic Rateau, and with some ulterior object in view, which is not quite clear, he either bribed or ordered the real Rateau to be branded on the forearm with the letter M. As soon as he became aware of this Blakeney, with characteristic thoroughness of method, promptly repaired to the veterinary surgeon who had done the branding, and had the same process repeated on his arm.

"Chauvelin ran into me the other day," he says in a letter to Ffoulkes, "I am doing scavenger work in the neighbourhood of the Rue de la Planchette on alternate days with my friend the real Rateau. The first thing C. did was to push up my sleeve and examine my arm. By Gad! but I am having a lovely game with him over this."

It can be easily presumed from that letter that it was in the same house in the Rue de la Planchette that Marguerite was held in durance. This is all the more likely as one of the houses in that street was inhabited by a woman named Théot, who was a supposed necromancer and fortune-teller, and an intimate of Robespierre, who often came to consult her. In the exercise of her nefarious trade, she had rendered valuable assistance to the Committee by listening to and reporting the often indiscreet conversations of her clients. It was owing to her denunciations that the two ladies Ste. Amaranthe were brought to the guillotine, and that Thérésia Cabarrus, the mistress of Tallien, was under arrest and awaiting trial, a few days before the dramatic fall of Robespierre.

Whether it was owing to this same great political upheaval, or through the direct agency of the Scarlet Pimpernel that Marguerite

regained her freedom, it is impossible to determine: that she did escape the fate that Chauvelin had destined for her, is however, an undisputable fact.

During the whole of the day that followed the overthrow of the Terrorist Government, she and her husband remained perdu in their lodgings in the Rue de L'Anier, for it was not safe to venture out while the tumult in the streets was at its height. The reaction was bound to come soon and then they could slip quietly away.

Paris was crazy with joy; the tyrant had fallen, broken, maimed, bullied, insulted. And at four in the afternoon the end came, in the midst of the acclamations of a populace drunk with joy acclamations which reached the ears of the gallant Scarlet Pimpernel and his wife.

When the shades of evening had gathered in over the jubilant city, a market cart, driven by a worthy farmer and his wife, rattled out of the Porte St. Antoine...

Part Three: "Happily Ever After..."

Chapter One ~ Routs and Riots

Chapter Two ~ "Daydreams . . . and Nightmares!"

Chapter Three ~ The Last Adventure

Chapter One ~ Routs and Riots

I

Blakeney, having conveyed Marguerite back to England, left almost immediately for France once again. The last rescue which the Scarlet Pimpernel undertook, though perhaps less spectacular than the others, was nevertheless one of the riskiest, for it entailed the rescue not of a Frenchman this time, but of an Englishman who had got himself entangled with the New Republican Government.

Young William Wordsworth, at that time an undergraduate at Cambridge, had joined a society known as the "Young Oxford Republicans," and was one of the moving spirits of that fellowship of young political enthusiasts whose spirit is expressed in his remarkable poem on the French Revolution. As a member of this society, Wordsworth made three trips in all to France, only two of which are recorded in his biographies, namely in 1790, 1791 and lastly in 1794. It appears that he viewed the political situation through the rosy spectacles of those young Oxford republicans, and that on his second visit he showed open sympathy with the party known as the Girondins.

On his third visit in 1794, he seems to have thrown all moderation to the winds and formed a friendship with Robespierre and his gang a friendship which naturally involved him in their downfall. After the revolution of Thermidor, he was arrested along with all the other members of Robespierre's party and would no doubt have shared their fate, had not his relatives made a direct appeal on his behalf to the Scarlet Pimpernel.

As to the exact details of the rescue of Wordsworth by Sir Percy Blakeney, there is but scant information available, for Blakeney went

to France unaccompanied and effected the rescue unaided. That it occurred through his instrumentality is proved by a letter which he wrote to Ffoulkes soon after the event and which runs:

"Dear Ffoulkes,

"I felt that I could not leave the young fool to that horrible fate though, as you know, I have no sympathy for those idiotic clubs which have sprung up mushroom-like in England and Germany, in imitation of the foul nests in Paris we know so well. By Gad, it was one of the toughest nuts I ever cracked. The young man was no easy protégé for he breathed fire and brimstone at me. He seemed as if he wanted to be guillotined! They are all alike, those hot-heads, when, ostrich-like they bury their heads in new creeds they do not understand. But rescued he was, though do not ask me how. Chauvelin, as you know, has suffered the death penalty for his many misdeeds. My only regret is that I shall never measure wits against him again. He was an engaging scoundrel."

II

The winter of 1795, saw the Blakeney's definitely established in their house in the Crescent at Bath.

Sir Percy was now faced with the sad duty of releasing his followers from their oath. That gallant band of sportsmen who had so ably, so fearlessly, so selflessly seconded his adventurous expeditions, the wild rides through the night with trembling children or frightened women in one's arms, the hair's-breadth escapes and perilous gallops across country would henceforth be but memories.

The Scarlet Pimpernel would be only a name a glorious and noble name, it is true the name of a small wild flower, faded, and pressed among the leaves of the book of the past. Little did Sir Percy dream

that a century later the mere mention of the name, the mere sight of the tiny five-petalled flower in the hedgerows would recall to every romantic mind the glories of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel and of its gallant chief: that the records of his deeds would be eagerly read and recounted all the world over, as an example of courage and of daring, without parallel of self-sacrifice and of humility.

Sir Percy Blakeney felt the poignancy of this last meeting, which had been fixed for an afternoon in April, more deeply than he himself cared to admit. He was loath to let his little band of stalwarts go, hoping, perhaps, that some day in the near future they could unite once again for other daring adventures. But, for the nonce, they must be relieved of their oath of obedience and loyalty and a hand-clasp would be the final signal for the disbandment of the League: and with it, of all that it had stood for in his mind, the joy of living, unswerving courage and absolute loyalty.

His friends had of late begun to notice that Blakeney's character had altered during these months of inaction; the change, they felt, was apparent in the absence of his former unfailing good temper and gaiety. Except when in company or at cards, he seemed to have lost that spontaneous good humour which had, in the past, contributed so greatly to his enormous popularity. Not that he ever grew morose or behaved with less charm than before, but his joyous laugh was heard to echo less and less frequently and it often struck the ear as harsh and forced. He was obviously fretting for those thrills which had for so long been the very breath of his life and he now found himself utterly unable to envisage a future which did not hold, if not danger, at least adventure.

Bereft of the exciting interest in life, he was like a man who has been forced to retire from active business and who has no hobbies or work to take the place of strenuous occupation. Those who knew

him most and those who loved him the most could discern a far-away look in the lazy blue eyes when insistent memory caused him to relive the past, or imagination conjured up fresh visions of exploits as thrilling as they had been in the past. And ever and anon he would surreptitiously glance at the scar, in the shape of an "M," which had been branded on his right forearm.

All the morning of that fateful day, he was in a fever, pacing up and down the room like a caged lion, hardly realizing that, indeed, this was the end of all that he had held so dear. Even the tender solicitude of his wife, and her efforts at cheerfulness, failed to alleviate his heartache and pain of a bitter regret. By the afternoon, he was in a state of real misery and for once felt a coward, dreading to meet his friends.

Marguerite wrote apropos of this final interview to Lady Anthony Dewhurst.

"My dear little Yvonne,

"Do not grieve any more for my lord Anthony. He will be with you anon, never, please God, to desert you again. You, so wrapt up in the idyll which gives you so much happiness and which the Scarlet Pimpernel made possible, have, it seems, not yet realized that those ghastly horrors are now but nightmares of the past and that, therefore, your husband is safe from those dangers that at one time threatened his life. As you know, the members of the League met here yesterday for the last time. Their chief had summoned them in order to bid them all good-bye Good-bye that is as fellow-adventurers, but never good-bye as friends.

"Sir Percy is in a pathetic state and I hardly dare to say aught to rouse his drooping spirits. I, who love him so well, and suffered such terrible heartache every time he left me, could almost wish myself

back in the days of peril. On more than one occasion, I have discerned suspicious moisture in his eyes! Sir Andrew told me after the interview that they were all deeply moved and that Sir Percy was hardly able to speak. It is now all over, a thing of the past, but I, for one, shall keep the memory of the Scarlet Pimpernel alive, and I shall hope to recount, one day, to his as yet unborn child, the prowess of his father.

"Sir Andrew and his wife are to remain with us here in Bath for a few days, a happy inspiration which I heartily support; perhaps the presence of his greatest friend will tend to soften the blow and help to bring him back to everyday life.

"I pray that we shall meet shortly at Richmond, whither we shall return as soon as the climate permits, but I fear me that Bath will hold our attraction for some time yet, since H.R.H. is still here and continually commands our presence.

"You very affectionate friend,

Marguerite Blakeney."

There is also an interesting extract in the journal of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes.

"April 17th, 1795. Of course, we all knew that the summons would come sooner or later. The S.P. (I cannot help calling him that still) had touched upon the subject of the League's dissolution on the fateful day when he sallied forth on that great adventure which helped to bring about the downfall of Robespierre. But I must admit that I did not expect the blow to fall quite so soon. Found that I was one of the last to arrive with Hastings, Barstow and Mackenzie. Blakeney appeared to be his usual self. We handed him back the copies of our signed agreements, and in a few words, the S.P. told us that we were

now free of any oath or obligation to which we had pledged ourselves. We drank to the past, the present and the future. I do not think that Percy spoke more than ten consecutive words after that. So ends our glamorous life of adventure! If it were not a blasphemy I would almost wish for another revolution, that would call us back to arms under the leadership of the Scarlet Pimpernel. I am now mightily glad that I kept some of his notes and papers so that our son, when he comes, shall know about him!"

III

The year 1795 ended with the London disturbances in which Sir Percy Blakeney played a not inconspicuous part. The Royal opening of Parliament was fixed for ten in the morning of October 29th and Blakeney, moved partly by his friendship for Pitt a friendship which had never suffered by the years between and partly by the insistence of the Prince who desired his presence on that occasion, drove out in the wake of the Royal procession. The crowd, however, was out of hand; whistles and cat-calls greeted the approach of the Royal cortège, and stones were actually thrown at the carriages.

On the return of the cortège from the House of Parliament, more stones were hurled and one broke the window of Sir Percy's coach and landed on Marguerite's lap. Sir Percy rose to the occasion. Having stopped the carriage, he stepped out into the road and faced the angry crowd with a smile on his lips and a glint in his eyes which boded ill for the culprit. Surveying the spectators through his spy-glass, he loudly demanded to know who had the demmed cheek to hurl a stone at his coach and to frighten his lady, and whether the culprit would care to oppose him for three rounds. There was a murmuring, much giggling and a few boos and shouts. At last a veritable giant of the typical cockney type stepped forth from the crowd, mocking the dandy and shaking his fist in Sir Percy's face.

With a sudden dexterous movement, reminiscent of citizen Lenoir, Blakeney picked the man up with one hand as if he were a sack of potatoes and, advancing a few paces towards the row of now silent and awestruck spectators, he threw the body back to them, knocking many down with the sudden impact.

"La, my fine fellows," he cried, laughing; "you will have to find a more worthy champion of your cause if you hope for success. Try again! My offer still holds good for three rounds!"

But no one took up the challenge. They all stood agape, gazing open-mouthed at the dandy as he stepped back into his coach, not having turned a hair in the swift encounter; and the carriage drove away amid cheers!

That Christmas saw the Blakeney's still at Bath, gracing with their brilliance and their wit the many balls and routs of the season. Sir Percy, no doubt, chafed often at the routine and boredom of this social round of functions for which he had invented in the past such an effective antidote. He contrived, however, to recapture some of its glamour when, at the request of the Prince of Wales, he was made to recount some of the now almost legendary feats of the Scarlet Pimpernel whom he was supposed to have known intimately.

"Thus did he relieve the monotony of these dull days," says Sir Andrew Ffoulkes of his life-long friend, "by living again in the stories which he told, some of our most exciting adventures. He told them with that wonderful restraint and sense of humour which was his most delightful characteristic, always exalting the prowess of the League as a whole and belittling that of its leader. So much so, indeed, that spiteful tongues began to wag, and accuse him of jealousy, and even went the length of hinting that the mysterious adventurer whom Blakeney was at such pains to disparage, had incurred his displeasure by arousing a sense of hero-worship in the heart of his

beautiful wife."

All of which must have been a source of delight to Blakeney himself. In his usual indolent way, he allowed those spiteful shafts to be aimed at him in public, for it gave him an opportunity of sharpening his ever-ready, caustic wit at the expense of his detractors.

But it was not to be wondered at that this intimate knowledge which Sir Percy Blakeney seemed to have of the Scarlet Pimpernel caused a veritable storm of gossip in social circles. He was pestered with enquiries anent the identity of the enigmatic hero; bets were made as to whom would be the lucky one to extract information from him. But though the necessity for anonymity was now past, neither Blakeney himself, nor any of his followers, ever betrayed the secret to which they had at one time pledged themselves. And it was a strange fact, though obviously a true one, that the skipper and crew of the *Daydream* guarded that secret every bit as jealously as did the members of the League.

Thanks to Sir Percy's wonderful generosity, these men were no doubt more than well-off and well provided for: the skipper, by now, was probably a rich man: but even so, tribute must be paid to the discretion of, perhaps, half a hundred men, every one of whom could have gained immense popularity in public bars and eating houses, by recounting some of the adventures in which the *Daydream* had a share.

To the repeated enquiries leveled at Blakeney in all classes of society, he gave evasive replies. So did the members of the League, and so did the skipper and the crew of the yacht. The only true information they one and all condescended to give to the gossip mongers was that the Scarlet Pimpernel did not, as many supposed, and as the upholders of the late revolutionary Government tried to

make out, perish on the guillotine. But, as was perhaps inevitable, as gossip grew in volume, some people more astute than others came, perhaps, very near the truth; and there is no doubt that the Prince of Wales knew more than he cared to admit. His usual curt replies to respectful enquiries were often quoted in the society journals of the time: "Ask Blakeney about your hero; he knows him."

The first days of the new year were destined to be eventful ones in Sir Percy's subsequent life, for they undoubtedly paved the way for the new trend of thought which led him to further adventures. On January 3rd, Sir Percy met Commodore Horatio Nelson at a banquet given by the Lord Mayor of London.

"Our talk," Blakeney records in his diary, "was chiefly of that demmed Scarlet Pimpernel. The little sailor would talk of nothing else. H.R.H., he told me, had referred him to me and he would give me no peace till I had described some of the League's most successful efforts in outwitting the revolutionary spies. We spoke together for over an hour, and I was waxing more and more impatient. In the end he said with a sigh: 'Well, Sir Percy, we must live in hopes that your hero will continue his prowess by sea. England hath still need of such men as he!'"

No doubt a keen student of human nature like Blakeney would quickly discern in "the little sailor" as he calls him, the same joy of adventure, the same recklessness when faced with overwhelming odds and the same determination to see a thing through that had animated him throughout his career in revolutionary France; whilst Nelson's few words, spoken with that rare charm and earnestness which had the power of arousing patriotism and loyalty in every man who heard him speak, did undoubtedly infuse the hope in Blakeney's heart of renewed activity in the cause of humanity and for the glory of his country and his King.

The immediate effect of this momentous meeting was Sir Percy's generous gift of a large sum of money for the benefit of disabled and aged sailors.

The terrific expenditure of the war had depleted the Exchequer to an alarming extent. The strength of the army and the navy, having been reduced the year before, both were now inadequate for the preservation of England's safety on sea and land and funds were sorely needed for their upkeep. The Heir to the Throne made a personal appeal to the generosity of private individuals who were rich enough to contribute from their surplus wealth something towards the defense of their homes and the very source of their prosperity.

The result of this appeal was that Blakeney's fortune provided a man-of-war for the service. The ship, the building of which had at the time been nearly completed, but had been suspended owing to the lack of funds, was rapidly commissioned and, having been rechristened *The Marguerite* by Lady Blakeney herself, sailed away to her ultimate destruction at the battle of the Nile.

IV

A great event in the annals of the Blakeney family occurred early in February, 1796, an event which not only astonished society in general, but also the debonair Sir Percy himself, who, having noticed his wife's sudden distaste for dancing and the amenities of the social round, did not guess the real cause. He himself was earnestly encouraged by Marguerite to go off on a fishing expedition, which he did, and to his amazement on his return to Bath a few weeks later, he was met at the door by a leech and a midwife who imparted to him the joyful news.

Sir Percy was never able to analyze his own feelings when first he gazed down upon the lump of living flesh which was his first-born son.

Fatherhood, as such, had never touched him. His own indifference to Sir Algernon and their unfortunate estrangement had distorted the paternal outlook to such an extent that he could not, at first, visualize the fact of his own position as father. In the beginning, as was perhaps only natural, he flew to his wife. He felt like the majority of men, that the new-comer was an interloper between himself and his love, so that it was with mixed emotions that he greeted the advent of his son.

Gradually, however, out of that perplexed state of mind there emerged the sensation of pride. The congratulations of friends gave the event a note of importance. And it presently dawned upon him that, as a matter of fact, this was exactly what he had been waiting for all his life; the birth of one who would perpetuate his name and race had all along, and unbeknown to himself, been the true purpose of his existence and the mainspring of his actions. It stood for the only true immortality!

"Dear Ffoulkes," he wrote, on February 10th, in answer to the letter of congratulation from his friend, "you tell me that the same happy event is in store for you. I wonder whether you will experience the same emotions and feelings as I did when the birth of George was announced to me. I confess that I have not got this fact very clear in my dull mind as yet, but this much I do know; that all I did, all that I have ever thought, was merely an anticipation of this event. For the first time since the end of our adventures together I am proud to have been the Scarlet Pimpernel; proud that I have something in my past to bequeath to the future."

"What will become of George? This is now my only thought. All my energies will be concentrated on this problem. To its solution I shall apply all my faculties. Perhaps I shall be able to make something of him; something which his father never could have realized. I pray God

that it will be so!"

George Blakeney was christened at Bath Abbey, the Prince of Wales standing Godfather for the infant.

There was an amusing sidelight to the event. Coincidences seemed to be busy in the social set which revolved around the Blakeney. The gossip mongers were confounded by the birth of a Blakeney heir, for they had laid down the axiom that the quarrel between them, begun so soon after their honeymoon, had never been patched up, whilst Sir Percy's wanton and open desertion of his wife during the greater part of the previous four years did, in the opinion of these tittle-tattlers, exclude any possibility of a reconciliation having ever taken place.

And all of a sudden now, not only was Sir Percy Blakeney a proud father, but most of his elegant friends followed suit. Children were born about this time to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Anthony Dewhurst. As the latest *bon-mot* from the mouth of the Prince had it: "The Scarlet Pimpernel must have given one last and imperious summons to his League ere disbanding it!"

Now that Blakeney was forced into a more or less passive life, he required a new interest to arouse him from the attack of melancholy which seemed at one time to have taken a fatal hold on his spirits. Young George provided that necessary distraction. Within a few weeks of his son's birth, his old time gaiety had returned to him. The streets of Bath resounded with his infectious laugh and he brought good cheer wherever he went. The croakers who had dolefully shaken their heads and declared that Sir Percy Blakeney, the elegant dandy, was on the way to melancholia, were happily disappointed, whilst the ladies bemoaned the fact that Sir Percy had become a model husband and a veritable stay-at-home. His excuses for appearing late at balls; his lame apologies for unpunctuality, were now all connected to George, and were received with leniency and

good humour.

"George was laughing, madam," he would say, "Egad, he can laugh as heartily as his father. Faith, you should come and hear him one of these days. It would do your digestion more good than all these demmed waters you drink. My wife declares that he will be as inane as I am! So you understand, I could not interrupt the concert!"

And Society had to be content with these excuses, or else incur Sir Percy's displeasure, and it was better to have the attendance of Sir Percy, however late he might choose to turn up, than count the failure of one's rout by holding it without him.

V

In spite of all the joys and responsibilities of fatherhood, however, this same year saw the end of Blakeney's enforced idleness.

Though England was, as a whole, desirous of continuing the war with France, Pitt and his immediate followers were inclined towards peace. He made, about this time, a determined effort to procure a cessation of hostilities. To this end, he was backed up by the King himself. As a first attempt, negotiations were opened up through the Danish ambassador in Paris, but the high-handed tone which the Directoire adopted towards the British Government left very little hope of a reconciliation between the two countries. It appeared that the French, as a nation, were as anxious to continue the war as were the people of England and the voices of one or two of their citizens which were raised in favour of peace were drowned by the popular clamor for more bloodshed. And as far as England was concerned, it was, perhaps, unfortunate that at the very moment when Pitt was striving to initiate negotiations for peace and had almost succeeded in bringing round to his views a majority in Parliament, victories, both on sea and land, awoke in the masses a thirst for further conquests.

A few months later, however, France, finding herself exhausted of men and short of money, declared herself willing to resume negotiations for peace with England, but she would only receive overtures through direct diplomatic channels and not through an intermediary. To this end she would provide the English plenipotentiaries with the necessary passports.

Pitt, delighted at these overtures, appointed Lord Malmesbury to head the English delegation to France. He was an experienced and tactful diplomat and obviously the right man to choose for the task. But, like most Englishmen, he was conversant with no other language but his own, and his knowledge of the aims and ideals of the new French Government was practically nil. He was first to suggest to the Prime Minister that he should be accompanied on his mission by someone who possessed that knowledge and who spoke French fluently. In casting round for such man, Pitt's thoughts naturally turned to his Harrow friend whom he knew to have been in constant touch for years with French affairs and who had before now done good work on diplomatic missions.

"Dear Blakeney," wrote Pitt on February 11th, "I expect that H.R.H. has already informed you of our projects for reopening peace negotiations with France. Though her terms have all along been impossible of acceptance, she is undoubtedly in a humbler frame of mind to-day; all the same I would greatly value your views on our chances of success since your knowledge of French people and of their present Government has probably supplied you with facts such as are not in our possession, and I feel that you have been able to gauge more accurately than any one else in England the attitude of the French nation towards war. Our intermediaries have either been duped or else have relied more on their imagination than on actual facts.

"Naturally this communication, my dear Percy, is strictly confidential and I rely upon your discretion in this matter. If we are to reopen communications with Paris, perhaps you would care to join the Embassy."

Blakeney's answer was characteristic of the man.

"My Dear Pitt,

"You should have realized by now that that demmed French Government is still composed of a pack of murdering blackguards, despite the relaxation of their reign of Terror. On my journey to France at the end of last year, the populace was certainly in favour of peace, but the Directoire is filled with hatred for our country and I do not think would receive any reasonable overtures of peace in the right spirit. That Italian upstart, General Bonaparte, is very hostile towards us and it appears as if he was destined to rise to a prominent position in the Government. He dreams so I heard tell of invading England and setting one of his brood upon our throne! Should any offers of peace be received from that quarter, beware! They would be merely a cloak for further hostile actions and a breathing space to enable them to reorganize their army and to plan further campaigns; the ultimate result would be a war more bitter and more strenuous than the last one. Naturally I do not expect you to give credence to my humble observations, but I do beg of you to watch your every step before you proffer the olive branch.

"Should any conclusion be arrived at, I would willingly help you to the best of my poor capacities."

Pitt for some unexplained reason was annoyed by the tone of Blakeney's letter. Whether he was merely angry at reading Percy's unfavourable opinion of his own hopes of peace or whether his resentment was actuated by jealousy at finding that Blakeney upheld

the view of the opposition on the subject, it is difficult to say, since there was no answer to this letter; certain it is that for a brief period there was a distinct coolness between the two friends.

At functions which Pitt and Blakeney both attended, scandalmongers soon noticed that the once fast friends seemed to avoid each other and that the coolest greetings passed between them when chance brought them face to face. Needless to say, neither of them satisfied the curiosity of the quidnucs by divulging the cause of their apparent estrangement which, by the way, was more of Pitt's making than Blakeney's. The former refused to patch up the differences between them and bore his resentment with very bad grace.

However, a few months later, yielding to the King's earnest wish, Pitt again appealed to the French Government to reconsider the question of a cessation of hostilities. This time the outlook was much more hopeful for a successful reopening of negotiations, since the drain in men and money caused by the war was affecting both belligerents equally.

Forgetting his show of temper, Pitt once more approached his friend Blakeney.

"Dear Percy,

"The King has authorized me to open negotiations with the French Government and they, in their turn, seem quite as anxious as we are to discuss a treaty of peace. I have been informed by the French Foreign Minister that safe conducts will be granted to a mission coming from us, and that the personnel of such a mission will receive adequate protection and consideration.

"I have once more approached Lord Malmesbury on the subject and

he declares his readiness to head the delegates. I hope that your offer to accompany his lordship in a private capacity still holds good, and that you will place yourself at our disposal for this purpose. You will, should you be so inclined, accept this letter as your official invitation to join the mission.

"If you are free to-morrow, come and dine with me *à deux*, and I will put you in full possession of the facts and also of the questions which we hope will be answered affirmatively by the French Government.

"Yours sincerely,

William."

"My Dear William,

"I am flattered that you should deem me a useful person to join the peace delegation. I shall be only too honoured to accompany Malmesbury, whom I know personally, and who will, I think, prove the right person for this delicate work.

"I shall look forward to to-morrow evening and pray that you will enlighten me as to my rôle in the business.

"Yours sincerely,

Percy."

This delegation set out soon after, buoyed by extravagant hopes of success which were not destined to be realized, even in part. Blakeney's prognostications were fulfilled. As soon as Paris was reached, the delegates were met with rebuffs at every turn, and with nothing but arrogance on the part of the French Government. Sir Percy tried to pour oil on the troubled waters of national pride and

prejudice whenever the French commissioners effectively put an end to negotiations.

The fault of the impasse must be laid at the door of Marat, afterwards Duc de Bessano, the head of the French commission. It was evident that there was a want of cordiality and sincerity on the part of this man who seemed incapable of seeing the English point of view. He seemed purposely to aggravate the situation and, whenever some headway had been accomplished, he would throw a bombshell into the assembly in the shape of some new and impossible demand. Malmesbury, too, was apt to vacillate and refuse to come to any decision without first submitting every question and every answer to his own Government. Blakeney was constantly traveling to and fro with various messages since the *Daydream*, his yacht, was faster and surer than the ordinary packet boats, and thus the minimum of time wasted. He also expressed himself very forcibly to Pitt in a letter.

"Matters are going from bad to worse," he writes, "unless some miracle happens, I fear me that we shall return empty-handed. For some reason or other, the French are deliberately dragging out the negotiations and will not listen to our point of view. From remarks which I have overheard, I have reason to believe that the Directoire are secretly making great and extensive preparations for the invasion of Ireland and they are counting on a separate and very advantageous peace with Austria.

"I think that you should send someone else to parley with Marat. This astute Frenchman is leading Malmesbury up the garden path and as soon as the negotiations finally break down the rupture will be ascribed to us."

Thus the conference dragged itself out until well into December without any definite results. There were reports that the English were hissed in the streets of Paris and that on more than one occasion

stones were hurled at them. At last, the French Government came into the open and invited Lord Malmesbury and his suite to quit French soil within twenty-four hours. Thus ended ignominiously all the English wholehearted attempts at peace.

On the return of the delegation, Pitt was so disappointed at the frustration of his cherished hopes, that it required all Blakeney's tact to avoid another breach of their friendship. But events were proving too strong for Pitt. The public was glad that the negotiations had been broken off. At the Lord Mayor's Show, which was as brilliant as usual, Pitt who drove in the procession was insulted by the crowd, whilst Fox, the favourite of the day and leader of the Opposition, was heartily applauded.

War was soon ravaging Europe again. At the opening of Parliament, His Majesty was obliged in his speech from the throne, to inform his faithful Commons that all attempts at negotiating peace with the French Government had failed. Pitt, violently attacked over his new scheme of taxation, was threatening to resign. This news reached Blakeney's ears via the Prince of Wales, and he went straightaway to his friend to argue the point with him and to dissuade him from so drastic a step.

"Saw old William," Blakeney writes in his diary, dated December 16th, 1796, "and told him not to be a demmed fool over those new taxes of his, especially as H.R.H. has informed him that the King would be very grieved to accept his resignation. War is the popular cry of the moment and all Pitt need do is bottle up his desire for peace at any price and approve the war to secure an overwhelming majority. Begad, thank heavens, I am no politician."

VI

A somewhat curious incident occurred about this time, one to which

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes makes a somewhat cryptic allusion in his diary, and which Sir Percy Blakeney in a letter to his friend treats with his usual flippancy.

On December 28th, the weather being exceptionally mild that year, Sir Percy, having returned to Richmond with his wife from a dinner-party in London, lingered in the stables as he very often did to fondle his favourite horses, talk to them and give them tidbits out of his pocket. He was walking back towards the house when his ears caught the sound of a whispered conversation which seemed to come from behind a line of shrubs that bordered the lawn on the river-side.

Poachers, thieves and racing cooks abounded in the district, and Blakeney, thinking that some of these louts were sneaking round the premises with nefarious intent, made his way cautiously across the lawn in the direction whence the muffled sound had come. But evidently the ruffians had sensed his presence, for when he drew near stealthily, and paused in order to listen, every sound was stilled. He went on, however, still cautiously and had almost reached the line of shrubs, when his quick ear detected a stealthy footstep coming this time from behind him. He paused, peering into the darkness before him, as if uncertain whether to retrace his steps or to continue on. That pause probably saved his life as the assassin had undoubtedly counted on attacking him from behind, whilst a confederate drew his attention away in the opposite direction. As it was, Blakeney was still facing the shrubbery when he caught sight of a vague form springing at him, one hand holding up a knife.

In an instant, Blakeney had caught hold of the upraised arm with such a grip of steel that the miserable wretch gave a squeal of pain. With a twist of Blakeney's iron wrist, the knife, a murderous weapon with a hunting blade, fell out of his hand. The accomplice in the

meanwhile, hearing the screams and thinking no doubt that the nefarious deed had been accomplished, hurried on the scene of action only to be greeted by the terrifying sight of his confederate writhing in the powerful grip of their intended victim. The new comer, half mad with terror, hurled himself on Sir Percy, but a straight left from the most powerful fist in England soon disposed of this second assailant, who collapsed unconscious on the ground. Blakeney then called to his stablemen and ordered them to lock the two miscreants up in the hayloft and there to leave them until the police came to retrieve them the next morning.

"I'm demmed flattered!" is all Sir Percy wrote about the event. "Someone has honoured me by finding me a worthy subject for assassination. Begad, it's a good story and I pray that the unknown one will not be too disappointed at the blundering of his minions."

The next morning, Blakeney in a moment of idleness thought he would interview the two wretches. He found them in the hayloft reduced to a state of abject cowardice. At the sight of Sir Percy, they immediately fell to pleading for their lives. The humour of the situation made a strong appeal to Blakeney. It soon transpired that the two men were only tools in the hands of another, who had paid them well to do his dirty work for him. By dint of alternate threats of the hangman's rope and broad hints of possible pardon, Blakeney gradually wormed a true account of the conspiracy out of the men, as well as the name of their task-master. Whereupon, with that magnanimity which he always displayed towards the underdog, he gave each man who had tried to murder him five guineas and sent them about their business, with a final kick, and more threats of the gallows if they blabbed.

"Begad, the whole affair is priceless," he wrote to Ffoulkes on the subject of the incident. "Those wretched men were in terror lest I

should hand them over to justice, but such an idea never entered my head. My one thought was to discover the author of the delicate attention. And the revelation was not long in the forthcoming. When I did hear what was obviously the truth it astounded me and I burst out laughing, for their instructions had been to put a knife into your humble servant and the poor brutes who knew something about me were half paralyzed with fear even before they embarked on their little excursion.

"Of course I had suspected all along that the author of the pleasant incident belonged to our own set in society. And unless I am very much mistaken you will have guessed his name by now. All the same, it seems incredible that our mutual friend of the League should have nourished such bitter resentment against me all this while for the slightly mischievous trick which I played on him that night at Nantes. I might have understood his hate if I had left him in the lurch then, but as it was . . . well, I give it up.

"Of course, my dear Ffoulkes, you will keep this absurd incident a secret. I have not mentioned it to Marguerite, nor do I want her to get as much as an inkling of the matter.

"I shall personally not refer to the subject again, but his lordship had better keep his own knowledge of it to himself as I fear I would lose my temper should he make public allusion thereto. As it is, I hope that he will detect no difference in my manner towards him, for I do not intend to take any official notice of his murderous attack upon yours truly.

"But all the same, it was demmed amusing and I am vastly flattered."

Blakeney kept his word; he never divulged, beyond the hint contained in the above letter, the identity of the enemy, or the reason

for the latter's revengeful jealousy for an imagined grievance.

But as a consequence (and the inference seems obvious), a mild sensation was caused in society early in January of the following year when it was learned that one of its most brilliant members, son of a peer of the realm and the heir to a vast fortune, Lord Kulmstead by name, had suddenly disappeared from his usual haunts without giving any reason for his abrupt departure, nor any indication of his probable destination. The Prince of Wales asked Blakeney for an explanation, but the latter seemed as ignorant as every one else, only vouchsafing an elegant shrug of his shoulders and a polite yawn. A few remarked a slightly malicious twinkle in the blue eyes and vowed that he could enlighten their curiosity had he so willed.

And that was the only sequel to the event as far as Sir Percy Blakeney was concerned.

Chapter Two ~ "Daydreams . . . and

Nightmares!"

I

In the summer of 1797, Pitt, in spite of his former check, tried once again to conclude the peace with the French, which seemed to him more imperative than ever. England's maritime supremacy was menaced on all sides. True, the naval victory of Cape St. Vincent somewhat minimized the danger, but the general optimism which had been raised by it was more than counteracted by the mutiny which broke out first at Spithead and soon spread to the Nore.

By the end of May, the entire fleet was in a state of insubordination and on the twenty-third of the month the red flag was hoisted on board Admiral Buckner's flagship, to which every man-of-war sent delegates. These delegates held meetings, went on shore and paraded the streets of Portsmouth with banners and music. Panic was now in the air. The public felt that the country's security was being menaced by a worse enemy than the French. It was also felt that news of the mutiny would filtrate through across the Channel and encourage General Bonaparte to spring a surprise attack upon the country.

The Government was apparently too weak to take any decisive step that would put an end to this disastrous state of affairs. And it was stated positively in official circles that, at best, it would take several months to reorganize the navy into an efficient engine of war. Ever since the meeting with Nelson, Blakeney's thoughts had turned towards the sea and he had often wondered whether he could use both his wealth and his peculiar talents in that direction. True, he had never seriously contemplated seeking adventure on the ocean up to

the present, he had merely toyed with the idea. But the mutiny in the fleet, with its disastrous results upon English maritime supremacy, gave his thoughts that impetus which ultimately drove him to adopt the sea as the scene of further activities.

As soon as the news of the mutiny reached the ears of the French there began a series of raids on unprotected English merchant shipping, and later on, forays against isolated costal townships. This menace continued for many months, and while it lasted, caused severe damage to shipping. Naturally, this new peril added to the general apprehensiveness. It was with the idea to combat this danger that Blakeney conceived the notion of transforming his yacht, the *Daydream*, into a ship of war.

With this end in view he left London and took up residence at the "Nest," which, it may be remembered, was situated conveniently near Dover. The minute harbor which adjoined the property was, from then on, a scene of violent activity. Workmen swarmed over the beach: mechanical appliances lay strewn on the sands; the sky was lit up with the glow of fires. *The Daydream* was hauled out of the water and now rested on a cradle, like some fabulous monster brooding on its nest. There she was, her ribs bare to the elements, whilst expert constructors refashioned her hull. The tall, massive figure of Sir Percy could be seen at all hours of the day, striding up and down, giving words of command, supervising the work, helping to haul timber and metal with the best of them. This feverish activity continued throughout the summer and autumn.

Gradually, the intended transformation took place; the elegant slim lines of the fast sailing yacht were replaced by heavily protected flanks: the tall, tapering masts gave way to businesslike ones, capable of putting up a good fight against storms and rough seas. Instead of the sumptuous cabins which had been her owner's delight,

lockers, powder magazines and gun carriages filled her structure. Ugly nosed cannon pushed their muzzles through the portholes which no longer gave on elegant dinging-room or sumptuous sleeping-berths, but rather on workmanlike cabins. And when the preparations were completed, no one would have recognized in the war-like corvette which now rode the waves, the luxurious yacht which had been the admiration of all experts, when she lay gracefully balanced in the Dover Roads.

II

But Blakeney, as was his wont, kept these activities secret. Not even to Marguerite had he revealed his intentions with regard to the *Daydream*, and all his friends were kept in ignorance of the cause of his frequent absences from London and Richmond.

Now that preparations on the ship were completed, there came the question of the crew. Blakeney had never ceased to keep in touch with the original skipper and men of the *Daydream*. He had dismissed and pensioned them off with his usual liberality as soon as circumstances put an end to the activities of the Scarlet Pimpernel. But naturally at this juncture his thoughts turned at once to those faithful and loyal seamen. He sent a summons to every one of them to attend him on a given day at the old "Fisherman's Rest" at Dover, and there, over mugs of home-brewed ale he promised them work and adventure more exciting and more perilous than the mere piloting of a gentleman's yacht across the Channel. The proposal so appealed to them that the lot there and then agreed to enlist in his service again. Here, too, he took on some extra hands, for his projects were now maturing, and he knew that he would require more men both for boarding and to fill casualties.

But Blakeney was not satisfied with the arrangements as they stood. A new turn of ideas had taken hold of his imaginative brain. At the

outset he had only intended to use the newly conditioned *Daydream* as a defensive vessel against the French raiders. But, as the work progressed, he conceived the notion of using her as a warship and to retaliate against the enemy by undertaking similar raids on the French coast. This new idea required skilled co-operators for he was not himself an expert sailor, and he deemed the hazards too complicated for a mere sportsman.

True, there was the skipper, Arthur Greaves, a skilled seaman who had sailed round the world before the mast and had gained a high reputation in the merchant service as a reliable navigator, but, owing to the prospective adventures, Blakeney felt that he needed a man who had some experience of naval warfare, a man capable of taking command when facing an enemy ship at sea. With this end in view, he turned to his former companions, Sir Edward Mackenzie and Sir Philip Glynde, both of whom had been among the original members of the League, and therefore men whom he knew well and could trust implicitly.

Sir Edward Mackenzie's father had been a famous sea-captain whose ancestors had sailed the Spanish Main with Drake and Raleigh, and whose family had been, from time immemorial, connected with the sea. Naturally enough, the father had intended that Edward should adopt the navy as a career, and, indeed, the young man had already served a useful apprenticeship during the Seven Years' War, but the sudden death of old Sir Anthony had caused Edward's premature retirement from the navy when only a lieutenant and he had been leading a useless and idle life until the formation of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

During the League's activities, Blakeney had soon discovered that Mackenzie was one of those thoroughly reliable and steady men who are invaluable in the face of any crisis. His brain worked slowly, it was

true, but this was because it weighted every odd most carefully, and never took unnecessary risks, but once the man's mind was made up, he went straight and fearlessly for his goal.

As a contrast to Mackenzie, and as it were his compliment, Sir Philip Glynde was the ideal lieutenant for Blakeney's needs. Glynde could claim an equal length of service and tradition in the navy as Sir Edward, but he had attained a higher rank owing to his exceptional talent for seamanship which was almost in the nature of an instinct with him, so innate was it. Here was a man after Blakeney's own heart, a man who could seize chance by the forelock without weighing the consequences; a man who acted on impulse rather than on calculation, who did not wait for orders or count the probabilities. These two men, Blakeney thought, would counterbalance each other and compose the perfect duet on board the *Daydream*.

"My dear Edward," Blakeney writes to Mackenzie on June 12th, 1797, "would you care to join me in another little venture? I am afraid that this time there is no question of another League or of such joyous adventures as those in the past, but I think that we might scrape some fun out of the idea. I have reconditioned the *Daydream* so that she is now as good a fighting vessel as money can make her and I have been lucky enough to engage our brave old friend Greaves and most of the original crew. But I am helpless without your skilled co-operation since I am no sailor and Greaves is no warrior.

"It is obviously impossible to outline my plan in a letter, but I am inviting Glynde to join us. Should this appeal to you, come and stay at the 'Nest' next Monday, to-day week, when we can discuss details and also inspect the *Daydream*. Bring with you any advice which you may deem necessary. Your old friend, Blakeney."

A similar letter was dispatched to Sir Philip Glynde with the result that both men accepted the invitation and duly arrived at the "Nest"

on the appointed day. Not only Blakeney himself, but his wife was also there to receive them. When first she heard of Sir Percy's projects she was utterly dumbfounded. Already she had guessed from his mysterious activities that something was afoot, but she was the last woman in the world to let her husband know of any anxiety which she felt. That in those activities and in the invitation sent to Mackenzie and Glynde to meet Percy at the "Nest," she foresaw not only anxiety but sorrow, is evidenced by a letter which she wrote on the following day after the arrival of the visitors.

"My dear Suzanne," she wrote to Lady Ffoulkes on the twenty-fourth of June of that year, "My heart is heavy within me. Percy has engaged himself on some new and mad adventure, the nature of which has been kept secret from me. He has invited Mackenzie and Glynde, former members of the League, to assist him. All I can guess at is that his new enterprise is connected with the sea, as the *Daydream* has been refitted and it appears that he is contemplating raiding the French coast in her.

"I, of course, have no say in the matter. I cannot prevent it nor can I participate in it. The early days of the League will be recalled to my mind, with all their attendant horrors and suspences. And once again I must contrive to smile and to joke whilst Percy is risking his life."

Truly, she must have been a remarkable woman, this wife of Sir Percy Blakeney, for she was always ready to endure sorrow and to bear tribulation, and did it with supreme courage. And, like all wise and loving women, she never attempted to turn her husband from his avowed purpose, nor did she question his motives. She had learnt her bitter lesson in the past and was now too wise to prejudice the future with recriminations. In this instance also, as soon as she learned his project she welcomed the news with a brave smile, and did her best to encourage him and his friends, and to assist them

with counsel and advice.

III

Glynde and Mackenzie went into raptures over the new *Daydream*. Those two severe critics could find no flaw in the construction and agreed that the equipment was the finest possible, rivaling the government contracts in the high standard of workmanship and materials.

But, just as everything seemed ready for immediate action, a hitch occurred which delayed sailing for thirty-six hours.

It was Glynde who brought the problem up. What was to be their position? Should Blakeney take out "Letters of Marque" from the Government, thus legalizing their position, or should they just sail away as the fancy took them? The former procedure, whilst giving official approbation to their enterprise, would place them on approximately the same footing as an ordinary warship, and in case of capture, they would be treated as legitimate prisoners of war.

Blakeney was averse to this scheme. And this for three reasons. Firstly, because of the inevitable notoriety and publicity which it would entail and which he cordially detested. Secondly, he felt that it would restrict the field of their activities since, in a great measure, he and his lieutenants would no longer be free agents. They would be subject to the whims of a higher command which might not see quite eye to eye with them nor view their possible exploits from a favourable angle. And thirdly a thirdly which counted most in Blakeney's imagination it would be too tame, too commonplace, minimizing that very attractive spice of risk and danger which was so dear to his heart.

On the other hand, should they act on their own initiative, the

Daydream could be looked upon as a pirate. They could not claim the protection of their Government and technically could be fired upon by their own countrymen. But, as Blakeney pointed out, those naval men who did take out Letters of Marque did not seem to have obtained any very important results, nor were they any the better off, since to his certain knowledge, one such ship, if not more, had been abandoned to her fate by the home Government. Percy argued that the difference was only one on paper, that in reality the French did not distinguish between a pirate and a man-of-war: and as their enterprise would only be directed against French warships, they would have no need to fear a counter attack from their own countrymen.

Discussions between the three men lasted all night, and the early morning sun threw diagonal streaks of light across the carpet before a decision was arrived at. At length, Blakeney's point of view prevailed, and it was decided that the adventurers would act on their own initiative and rely upon their own cunning and powers to escape capture.

It was now too late to catch the tide that same morning, so they postponed sailing until the following evening. This allowed thirty-six clear hours for the provisioning of the corvette. In the meanwhile, Sir Philip Glynde reviewed the men and put them through gun-drill, cutlass and pike practice, at which exercises the men seemed quite proficient, and Glynde was able to express himself eminently satisfied with their capabilities.

IV

At sunset, on July 5th, 1797, the *Daydream* glided gracefully out of the miniature harbor, curtsying to the wind, whilst a solitary figure from the shore waved a handkerchief in farewell.

Blakeney's objective, fully approved by his lieutenants, was, on this first adventure, to patrol the coast of France as far as Brest in the hope of spying a French frigate on the prowl or making for the English coast, to intercept her and to engage her with the determination to capture or scuttle her. But as their ideals were the same as those that actuated the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel in the past, the *Daydream* would put out her boats and land the survivors somewhere on their native coast.

But man proposes, and God disposes!

For five hours the *Daydream* ran before the wind, but no sign of an enemy was sighted. Blakeney waxed impatient; he hated being thwarted though the other two tried to convince him that it was as difficult a matter to discover a French ship on the Narrow Seas as to rescue an aristo from a revolutionary prison. But night followed day and day, night, and still their thirst for adventure remained unappeased. They were now off the Continent and Blakeney presently decided to heave to off Cherbourg in the hope of catching a small Frenchman. However, as some of the elder sailors thought that dirty weather was brewing, they ran into one of the small well-hidden coves which are a feature of the coast to the westward of Cherbourg.

Fortunately, there was ample water for secure anchorage and, as soon as the shades of evening began to draw in, Blakeney, not content to wait patiently on board, insisted upon making a landing in order to reconnoitre the coast. In spite of the protests of his companions and their arguments against the foolhardiness of such an undertaking, he ordered a boat to be hoisted out and had her oars muffled. He left instructions that he would use the old sea-mew call thrice repeated as a signal of his presence in the vicinity but that the *Daydream* was on no account to leave before daybreak. Should they not hear the call by then they were to sail, and keep out of sight until

evening when they were to return and again await the signal. He then bade them all a cheery farewell, slipped over the side into the boat, took the oars and was soon swallowed up by the darkness.

Blakeney, so he subsequently told his friends, rowed to the shore, and left the boat under an over hanging cliff. Creeping cautiously over the rocks, he succeeded in reaching a path which wound upwards to the top of the cliffs. After a stiff climb he emerged on a small plateau whence he could command a view of the surrounding country. On his left, about a mile away, he perceived a village and the tower of a church. Far away on his right a narrow stream meandered through the valley and was lost in the sea down below. At the mouth of the stream his eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, made out a cluster of cottages and a miniature port, in which a couple of vessels lay moored to a wharf. The cottages, the port and the vessels fascinated him, and he set out at a brisk pace for the valley, hoping, if nothing more, to glean some information which might lead to an adventure.

From the top of the cliff, the lights of the small harbor had appeared to be distant only a couple of kilometers or so down the coast to the South. But the distance in the uncertain light proved elusive. It turned out to be more like five kilometers than two, over sandy soil which was dry and gave under the foot, making progress both slow and wearisome. Eventually after about an hour, he reached a road which lead directly to a hamlet. The little harbor was so well screened from view owing to the configuration of the shore that the *Daydream* must actually have sailed fairly close to it during the day without spotting it.

Now that he was within measurable distance of his objective Blakeney had not the vaguest idea as to what he intended to do or what he had hoped to find. The desire to land and to pry round had been irresistible and he had obeyed it trusting to chance to provide

him with an opportunity for something exciting or adventurous. And the opportunity lay close at hand.

For a few minutes Blakeney stood silently surveying the scene. The darkness around him, the silence and above all his passion for adventure prompted him to draw nearer. Stealthily he reached the edge of the water. The tide was coming in with gentle murmurings, the sky was overcast, the wharf tantalizingly near. In a moment Blakeney had stripped to the skin and after wading for a few yards, he plunged noiselessly into the sea. Swimming with powerful strokes, he reached the ship that lay moored to the wharf and, sighting a rope's end which hung over the nettings, he clamored aboard.

As he had suspected from the first, the decks were deserted save for the sentry on the forecastle. Creeping on hands and knees, as soundlessly as a cat on the prowl, Blakeney approached the man and suddenly sprang on him, taking him wholly unawares, and together the two men rolled over and over on the deck. A blow between the eyes from Blakeney's powerful fist caused the man to lose consciousness.

Leaving him to lie there for a moment, Blakeney now made his way down the ladder to the lower deck. Here were two men, sitting at a table playing cards in the light of a feebly guttering candle. Their consternation when confronted by the apparition of a gigantic naked man who suddenly rose before them like an incarnation of the devil, must have been very great indeed for, according to Sir Percy's narrative, they uttered no cry, but merely gaped at him in fright and horror. Two punches straight on the jaw before they had recovered their scattered wits, sent the men rolling on the planks, senseless. A coil of rope lay close at hand. Rapidly and dexterously Blakeney gagged and bound the two Frenchmen together, and, heaving this inert bundle over his powerful shoulders, he carried them up the

ladder and across the upper deck, and down to the wharf, and thence over to the beach.

Back he went to get the still unconscious sentry, and this man he also carried down to the beach to join his two pinioned mates. Satisfied that all three men were powerless for the moment and would be so for a good many minutes yet, he went back to the ships. They were lying alongside one another: both completely deserted now; indeed Blakeney made sure of that, by clambering over to the other vessel and exploring her from end to end. In one of the cabins below he saw on a table a scrap of dirty paper and beside it an ink bottle and a pen. The temptation was irresistible. Though he knew that every minute, every second was precious, he took up the pen and on the scrap of paper he wrote: "Le rêve du jour est le cauchemar de la nuit." ("The daydream is the nightmare.")

With a grim chuckle of delight and holding the paper tightly in his hand he made his way back to the first ship, went aft to the powder magazine, laid a trail of powder, set it alight and clambered back to the wharf, by the way he had come.

With a few giant strides he was down on the beach. Here the two pinioned men were struggling desperately to free themselves from their bonds, while the third still lay unconscious. With another happy chuckle Blakeney thrust his scribbled message inside the shirt of one of the men; he then ran to rescue his cast-off clothes, and was in the act of picking them up when a loud explosion quickly followed by another, and another, proclaimed the destruction of the French frigates. At once the night became alive with shouts and people running from the village in the direction of the harbor.

Blakeney found the secluded corner under the cliffs where he had left the boat. Here he dressed himself, and from here the cry of the sea-mew thrice repeated echoed through the night. Within the next

half-hour all traces of the *Daydream's* visit to the French coast had disappeared, save for the fact that a couple of French frigates lay on the bottom of the little harbor of Carteret.

V

The only report of the destruction of those ships which reached England came via the Government spies, who had heard the news in Paris some two weeks after the event. Rumour had it that the presence of the two French frigates at Cateret formed part of a plan for a raid on the Irish coast, there being ships of the same class hidden in other well-screened coves along that part of the French coast. The ships were to have set sail simultaneously, the troops that were to sail in them having been billeted in the villages close by. There seems to be no doubt that Blakeney's action did run athwart the French plans, for the Directoire Government appeared to have come to the conclusion that news had somehow or other leaked out and prudently decided to abandon them.

Blakeney himself confirms this point of view in his journal. He seems at one time to have paid a return visit to that particular portion of the French coast in the hopes of repeating his adventure, with other French vessels, but was bitterly disappointed to find that the birds had already flown.

"July 20th. We searched every possible nook, but not a trace of a ship did we find. I ventured on shore, in disguise, and mingled with some sailors drinking at an inn. I led the conversation round to the topic of the sunken ships and was told that those frigates formed part of a fleet, the object of which was to make a concentrated attack on the English coast or else to carry troops to Ireland. It all depended upon circumstances and the weather."

It was also said that the epigram found inside the shirt of one of the

unfortunate sailors had caused a sensation among the staff officers and that the French Government had suppressed the news of the disaster. Rumours of a more or less sinister character flew from hamlet to hamlet and from village to village and created a feeling akin to panic. The crews of the frigates and their officers were all under arrest awaiting court martial. They were accused of dereliction of duty in that they had been careless of the safety of their ships. The men's defense was that they were attacked by a superhuman being of unnatural size, who hurled thunderbolts at them in the manner of Jupiter and rendered them senseless by the mere raising of his hand.

"The *Daydream* has indeed turned into a nightmare, methinks," Sir Percy further commented on the incident, "and it damn well serves the enemy right for raiding unfortified English townships. I hope that my feeble endeavours will teach them better manners. With good luck we might attempt further exploits, which would tend to aggravate the position and lead French sailors to emulate our fellows in engineering a general mutiny in their fleet. By this means we might obtain peace at last."

The full details of this adventure were brought to the notice of the English Government through an ex-petty officer in the navy, who had joined the secret service. This man, by the way, managed to convey the impression among his superiors that he himself had been the hero of the remarkable exploit.

England was agog with the news and the public demanded full details and the name or names of the gallant men who were the heroes of the wonderful adventure. In its eagerness it asked the King to honour these men in some signal way. But, officially, nothing appeared to be known and even the Admiralty feigned complete ignorance, so that people began to make enquiries on their own account. However, as reliable information was entirely lacking, it was

generally agreed that the exploit had been carried out by a pirate, whereupon speculation became rife as to whom must credit for the daring feat be ascribed. Oddly enough, the only guess which approached the truth came from an unexpected quarter. Many months later, when His Majesty was on board the Royal Charlotte, Sir Percy Blakeney, who was a guest in the Royal yacht, when in conversation with the King, showed such a knowledge of seamanship that His Majesty was quite astounded and remarked casually:

"Sir Percy, I remember that you own a yacht yourself. *The Daydream* is she not called? I hope that you are not overcome by nightmares when on board?"

Blakeney gave his infectious laugh. "Begad, Sire, that's demmed amusing. Your Majesty was ever pleased to joke at my expense."

The subject was pursued no farther at the time, and Blakeney, much relieved, hoped that Royal interest in his affairs would end with this embarrassing conversation.

VI

Blakeney and his two companions were delighted with the success of their first adventure and were eager to be off again in quest of more. But circumstances forced a delay. Their stock of provisions had run low. So they ran into Deal, and Blakeney was able to spend a few days with Marguerite at the "Nest."

On landing, however, a surprise awaited him for he found that his old friends of the League had guessed the connection between *Daydream* and Nightmare, and had come posting down to Dover, eager to be associated with him once again in the pursuit of adventure. It appeared that most of them had read the reports of the

sinking of the French frigates and had put two and two together. They had assembled and discussed the ownership of the Nightmare and had come to the conclusion that Blakeney was at the bottom of the business. Without knowing the full facts of the case, they raced down to Dover in the hopes that a new League was in formation under Blakeney's leadership and that he would enroll them once more under his banner, even if their duties should only be those of cabin boy or ship's cook.

Blakeney, however, was forced to disappoint them. He told them that there was no question of an organization similar to that of the old League; that the *Daydream* could accommodate only enough men for their purpose; and that, though he knew them to be daring and fearless, he had this time only need of men who were familiar with the sea and with naval matters.

Ffoulkes tells us that they all pleaded with him, but in vain.

"We were bitterly disappointed that Percy would not allow any of us to accompany him in the *Daydream*, though most of us realized that his arguments against our pleading were justified. I suppose most of us, ever since the disbanding of the League, had nurtured hopes of further adventures under Percy's leadership and clung to the idea that one day he would devise another scheme as exciting, as soul stirring as were those happy days in France. However, it is not to be and we must remain content with the memories of those wonderful unforgettable adventures."

Having reprovisioned the *Daydream*, Blakeney and his band weighed anchor on September 3rd and sailed before the wind towards an unknown destiny.

For two days, according to the corvette's log, the wind was favourable. It blew them down the Channel and out into the Atlantic

Ocean. On the fourth day out they hauled to the wind and made the French coast opposite Bordeaux.

There was no question this time of forcing a way into a port for the purpose of spying. The adventure was to fall principally to the credit of the sailors, as it was hoped to meet a French frigate on the open sea and to engage her. But, if the adventurers expected to sight any portion of the enemy fleet near Bordeaux, they were certainly disappointed, for there was no sign of a sail anywhere on the horizon. After hanging about for a couple of days, they hauled off and headed south towards the South of Spain, keeping well off the coast. It almost seemed as if the "Pimpernel" luck had deserted them, for many more days went by and not a single enemy vessel hove in sight: as their provisions were running dangerously low they were reluctantly forced to put about and returned to home waters without encountering anything more exciting than a shoal of dolphins.

After rounding the Ushant, however, a sail was sighted to starboard heading up Channel. Both Glynde and Mackenzie pronounced her to be a French frigate. This sudden change in their luck cheered the spirits of all on board the *Daydream*, and their troubles were forgotten in the excitement of the chase. Every minute the *Daydream* gained on her enemy, and the next hour brought her within measurable distance of the French ship.

The frigate, preferring to fight nearer her own coast, went about and stood to the southward. The *Daydream*, having the heels of her enemy, closed rapidly and approached her from astern. As soon as the vessels were within range Glynde ordered all guns which would bear to be fired at their greatest elevation in the hope of bringing a mast down, or at any rate, damaging the enemy's rigging. The frigate at first was able to rise her stern chaser, and, though a shot struck the deck of the *Daydream*, nobody was hit.

Soon the *Daydream* was too close for the stern chaser to be able to hit her full and her swaying mast made but a pore target for the frigate. Glynde now ordered every gun to be double shotted and every man to prepare to board. Yawing first to larboard and then to starboard, every gun in the ship was fired upward into the frigate's stern at a range of but twenty-five yards. The double shot coming up through the poop spread death among the afterguard and smashed the wheel, causing the ship to broach and the mizzen topmast, which had been partly shot through earlier, fell on the quarter-deck.

Seizing the opportunity offered by the confusion thus engineered, the *Daydream's* crew sprang up the side, and in a few moments were masters of the poop. Training the stern chaser forward and loading it with langrage, of which there were several lying by the gun, Blakeney called on the crew to surrender. Flabbergasted by the daring of these *cochons d'Anglais*, the few surviving French officers tendered their swords and *Le Rousseau* was in the hands of Blakeney and his band.

The question now arose as to what they should do with their prize. Blakeney, who was the actual commander of the *Daydream*, proposed that the ship be scuttled and her officers and crew be landed at the nearest French port. But the crew, delirious with success, were reluctant to adopt this plan, and were all for towing the prize into Portsmouth and handing the crew over to the competent authorities.

"I expect that they wished to be received with a salvo of hurrahs and a salute from the guns," as Blakeney wrote to Sir Andrew Topham a few days later, "as if we were celebrating the Prince's birthday. But I could not find it in my heart to blame the poor devils and it really was the deuce to forgo the fruits of victory, or rather, the thunders of victory!

"However, I was obliged to agree to this course in the end, but on two conditions. Firstly, I insisted that one of the French crew should be landed under cover of darkness at a French port so that he could convey the glad news to Paris, and that on reaching Portsmouth the strictest anonymity should be maintained. I have commanded Glynde to invent any plausible story so that my part in the affair shall remain a strict secret."

That evening, therefore, after an hour's sailing, the coast of France was neared, Blakeney ordered a boat to be hoisted out and a couple of seamen rowed one of the French sailors ashore. To this latter he gave a written message to be delivered to the Ministry of Marine in Paris. It read:

"Le Rousseau a recontré Le Cauchemar." ("The Rousseau has met the Nightmare.")

After that Blakeney took no further part in the proceedings, leaving the command of the ship in the capable hands of Glynde.

That this act, which was really one of piracy, had no unpleasant consequences for the owner and crew of the *Daydream* may be gathered from the official records of the incident which merely state that "a privately owned yacht, having espied a French vessel in distress, went to her assistance and towed her into Portsmouth harbor where her entire crew were forthwith made prisoners of war." No mention of the *Daydream* or of Sir Percy Blakeney in those records, though it subsequently transpired that the authorities were extremely suspicious, and it required the entire stock of Glynde's tact and diplomacy to keep Sir Percy's name out of the whole affair.

Soon after the little party's return to Dover, violent storms kept the *Daydream* locked in harbor, but for once Blakeney did not chafe against the vagaries of the weather which held him a prisoner in

England, being well content to abide for a few weeks at Richmond, since another important event in the annals of the Blakeney family was daily expected.

VII

But Blakeney was not content to be idle long, and soon he was aching to be off once more on adventure bound, his heart, as always, thirsting for excitement. Wherefore, he wrote to his two friends to join him again if they felt so inclined and he warned the crew of the *Daydream* to be ready for duty at a moment's notice. Within a few days, he had left London for the "Nest."

On October 14th he once more set sail in the *Daydream*. The weather was stormy; the *Daydream*, close reefed and buffeted unmercifully by the gale, made little progress in the raging seas. In consequence, the adventurers were forced to keep away from the shore and were not able to make much headway towards the field of adventure, which they had hoped lay in wait for them out in the Channel.

After a few hours Glynde grew anxious and advised putting into harbor until the storm abated. This in fact they did, and Sir Percy, as soon as Portsmouth had been safely reached, posted in all haste back in Richmond in order to allay his wife's fears lest the bad weather had caused her anxiety.

Strangely enough, Marguerite had been extremely anxious for her husband's safety. Her intuition, rendered doubly sensitive by her motherhood, had given her a strange presentiment of danger which would befall Percy on this voyage if he persisted in it. During the few days he stayed by her side, she tried to persuade him to abandon the project. Almost he was turned from his purpose and would have given in to her insistence had not a special messenger arrived that evening

from Glynde, informing him that weather conditions were now favourable and the *Daydream* ready to make a fresh start.

As before, they sailed south heading for the coast of France. Blakeney's plan, favoured by Glynde, was to fall on enemy ships as they left harbor for raiding expeditions. They espied various French ships upon the horizon, but they did not attempt to intercept these as their intention was to surprise the enemy near his own home waters nor were they molested by them.

Thus they proceeded on their way until they reached the shores of Brittany where the coast line is serrated, and forms a hundred coves in which a ship could easily lie concealed secure from waters from the sea. In one of these the *Daydream* cast anchor.

It was now an hour after sunset and darkness was rapidly gathering in. As soon as the night was sufficiently dark for his purpose, Blakeney ordered a boat to be hoisted out and started with muffled oars in order to spy out the vicinity. Hardly had he rowed a few strokes when suddenly a flare from the top of a nearby cliff illuminated the entire scene. Obviously the *Daydream* had been caught in a trap. The ship which they had sighted on their way out had been sent to watch their movements and had carefully avoided combat while enticing the *Daydream* into the pitfall which they had laid for her. And sure enough after the first flare which revealed her presence to other look-out posts, points of light began to gleam at intervals all along the coast line, whilst random shots, fired from the top of the cliffs, fell about them with dull splashes into the water: some of them unpleasantly close to the little boat in which Blakeney sat.

"For a few seconds," Blakeney wrote to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, describing his adventure, "I thought that we were condemned to a watery grave. My first feeling was the indignity of being sent to drown

in foreign waters, French waters to boot, without the chance of a nice little fight. Then it was that my wits came to my rescue. I rowed round to the port-side of the *Daydream* so that the dinghy was screened from view of our enemies on shore. I managed to scramble on board without being hit. After a brief consultation with Glynde and Mackenzie, we decided that there was only one thing to do, and that was to run for it. We weighed anchor. The wind was blowing off shore and we decided to beat off and on thus lure the French ships out into the open. There were two frigates close by which we thought might pursue us, but we hoped that we would prove the faster vessel."

The *Daydream* turned and fled to seaward. Under the circumstances, it was the only possible course to pursue. It was evident that the enemy's intention was to attach *Le Cauchemar*, and if possible, to capture her.

The *Daydream* kept on a steady course. Now and then a boom, followed by a dull splash astern, proclaimed that the French were still in active pursuit. It was then about eleven o'clock at night. Some three hundred yards astern the two frigates could be discerned, their sails straining in a vain effort to lessen the distance between themselves and the *Daydream*. At Glynde's suggestion they now started to work windward, making long reaches. The heavier French ships could not follow these tactics so swiftly and at each tack they lost ground and presently their firing ceased.

An hour later, still pursuing the same tactics, the *Daydream* seemed well out of danger. At that moment three British ships were seen approaching from a northerly direction. They had evidently heard the firing. Also it was evident that they had espied the French ships for they were heading for the enemy.

The *Daydream* went about once more for Blakeney naturally wished to avoid meeting the British men-of-war! Within a few minutes the

sound of a furious cannonade proclaimed that the English ships had met and engaged the French frigates. The *Daydream* was safe, and what was more important to her crew, forgotten. She made haste towards England which was reached at three o'clock in the morning.

The end of this adventure dumbfounded Blakeney and his lieutenants. For them, it was an adventure spoiled and a humiliation. But the French apparently took a different view of their exploit. The *Moniteur* was furious at the news of this third disaster to isolated units of the fleet. Its leading article fulminated against the Ministry of the Marine and demanded a court martial for those who had so signally failed to bring the *Cauchemar* to book.

But what infuriated the French Government more than anything else was the tactics of the English, who apparently made use of a pirate to help them in contriving an ambush. In official circles it was thought that the *Cauchmar* had purposely led the French ships across the path of the British men-of-war.

"Begad, I was astounded when I heard this tid-bit of news," Blakeney wrote in the same letter to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. "If only the French had known the real truth! But I am vastly flattered that they should deem us so clever and I think that it will enhance our prestige. The *Daydream* is beginning to become a greater nightmare than I ever dared to hope.

"Do call on Marguerite whenever you get the chance. She would dearly love to see you and your wife at Richmond. Besides, you must become acquainted with Violet Yvonne. I was delighted that you acted as godfather to the infant and I am sure she will live to thank you for the honour . . .!"

In England the reports were vague. The three men-of-war, the *Royal Princess*, *The Intrepid*, and the *Devonport*, which had so opportunely

appeared upon the scene, had captured both the French frigates. Apparently their commanders had not sighted the *Daydream*, because in their reports they made no mention of the yacht, but as they must have heard the firing, it may be supposed that only so much of their reports were published as was expedient at the time. Anyway, nothing was made public that could possibly connect the episode with a privately owned yacht; and Blakeney was free from the tittle-tattle of gossip-mongers for which, no doubt, he was heartily thankful.

But, now that winter was fast approaching, Blakeney felt that the enterprise was becoming too foolhardy to be continued. He and his lieutenants had seen in this last adventure that the *Daydream*, in spite of her efficiency, could not withstand the mountainous seas which were to be expected during the winter months. She was also in need of a general overhaul and a few minor repairs, and for this purpose was taken to Southampton, Blakeney himself returning to London and to Marguerite.

Chapter Three ~ The Last Adventure

I

With the approach of spring, the old longing for adventure returned with increased intensity. Marguerite had tried to keep Percy content at home, but it was no use; the spirit of adventure was already stirring in him. All of a sudden he would leave London for a few days and return with that far-away look in his eyes which told her as no words could, what was going on in his mind. *The Daydream*, after her overhaul, was back once more in the Dover roads, and during those excursions Blakeney would spend his days on board, dreaming, planning and longing to be up and doing once again.

Then one day, as he sat staring out across the Channel over towards the French coast, he felt a hand on his shoulder. Without looking up at the intruder, he knew that the call had come and that he was powerless to resist it. With a quaint sigh he rose and clasped the hand. The die was cast. Turning round he faced Glynde and Mackenzie. It appeared that they, too, were bored with life in London and were as eager as Blakeney himself to be up and doing. They had posted down to Dover with the hope that they would find him at the "Nest." They had sauntered down to the harbor to have a look at the sea, and thus the chance meeting came about. Within a few minutes the harbor was the scene of furious activity. The crew of the *Daydream* were summoned from their homes and the preparations for an early departure were straightway begun.

Whilst Glynde supervised the embarkation and Mackenzie collected the necessary provisions, Blakeney wrote a hurried note to Marguerite.

"I beg to be excused, my dear. 'Tis, I know, the most shameful

conduct and well-nigh unforgivable. But what would you with a husband who can never stay still? How many times have I promised, I wonder, never to go off a-wandering again? This time it will be the last time I assure you. I feel somehow that these words are prophetic and that it is to be our last adventure. Goodbye."

Lady Blakeney's diary bears testimony to this expedition and her entry has the great merit of assigning a date to this adventure.

"April 4th, 1798. A courier has just brought Percy's letter from Dover. How I had hoped these last few delightful months had eased that need for excitement and had subdued that restless heart. He swears that 'twill be the last time. How often have I heard those words before! How often have my fallen hopes been revived only to be dashed down once more into the cruel torture of suspense. And I must be brave, suffering the terrible anxiety without a word of protest. It is in my heart that Percy shall fail, so that he may return to me in all haste. But my prayers are never answered."

But, as events turned out, her words were prophetic.

The preparations were completed by the next day, the fifth of April. On the morning of the sixth, towards ten o'clock, orders to weigh anchor were given and the *Daydream* set sail on a perfect sea. There was just enough off-shore breeze to carry her along at five knots and the sun shone brilliantly over them. It must have seemed a propitious start to the adventurers. They crossed directly over to the Straits. So peacefully did the seascape appear that it seemed hardly possible that bloody war should be ravaging the fair land and that they themselves, instead of on pleasure bent, were searching out means for adding to the horrible destruction. Lying just outside the harbor, fishing smacks leisurely floated on the waves whilst the men hauled the nets. No one appeared to pay the slightest attention to the intruders: for all the attention which the *Daydream* aroused, she

might have been some friendly yacht out for a morning's cruise.

Glynde turned and, keeping a league's distance from the shore, slowly beat down the coast. After another five hours had passed by it was decided, since the sea seemed empty of the enemy, that it would be impossible to expect a meeting and that it would be more advantageous to steer for the open ocean and sail South in the hope of sighting either a French or Spanish frigate attempting to leave the harbor.

Nothing untoward occurred for many hours. It was close on midnight when two strange shapes loomed out of the darkness. These turned out to be small French frigates. The sudden boom of cannon followed by harsh snappy shouts from the captain caught those who were below unawares. When they reached the upper deck their eyes met the sight of a desperate situation indeed. The *Daydream* was being attacked from both sides. her only advantage lay in her handiness and her speed.

Two French men-of-war were closing on each other and thus bearing down on the *Daydream* at an acute angle. Desperate situations require desperate remedies. The alternatives which faced the commander of the *Daydream* were unpleasant. To bear up and try to escape was one of these, but such an action was out of the question: not one of them on board would have permitted it. To fight seemed equally hopeless, the odds being too heavily weighted against them.

Blakeney suggested that, if they stood on, they would pass between the enemy ships which, being now but a little more than a cable's length from each other, would scarcely risk firing on the *Daydream* as she passed between them for fear of hitting their friends. This maneuver was carried out and, as soon as the *Daydream* was

between the French ships, Glynde ordered the helm to be put up so as to pass close under the stern of the ship on his starboard hand. As he did so, he fired a broadside aimed at her rudder which, owing to the *Daydream's* low free-board, was almost at the level of the guns. The Frenchman's rudder head was shot away and she broached to as Glynde hauled to the wind and put about. Some musketry from the Frenchman answered them and there were three casualties on board the *Daydream*. But the other French ship now seized the opportunity when the *Daydream* was clear of her sister, and opened with her larboard broadside, the English vessel replying as fast as her guns could be loaded. The rudderless frigate was now in irons and drifting to leeward out of the action. The other hauled to the wind thus bringing her starboard broadside to bear. Though the shooting was somewhat wild at the fairly long range, several shots struck the *Daydream* and some more casualties occurred. Unfortunately two shots hit the hull between wind and water, about a couple feet from each other. These smashed the timbers and stove the side in for a distance of nearly four feet and the hull was badly shaken and sprung several other leaks. Fortunately, the Frenchman, unaware of this, had borne up and run down to the help of his comrade and the *Daydream*, by going about, was able to keep the hole in her side higher above water and make some attempt to repair the damage. It was soon realized, however, that this was a waste of time for vigorous pumping failed to keep the water under. By partially stopping the worst of the leak, it was hoped to keep her afloat until the English coast was reached, but, nevertheless, whips were rigged and the undamaged boats got ready for hoisting out in case the end should come earlier.

The wind was slowly backing and, though this allowed the *Daydream* to close the English coast more rapidly, for Glynde dared not put her on the starboard tack, it was a threat of bad weather, and, if they had to take to the boats, this might make their situation

precarious.

The enemy ships being now far to leeward, there was no further danger of being attacked, and another pump which had been damaged in the action was repaired and manned by the gun's crews. It seemed that it might be possible to keep the water under, but the men were tiring, for work at the pumps is heavy. Sir Percy, with his customary optimism, suggested that they should heave to and, after making such repairs as were possible, should run down towards the enemy and try to inflict further damage on them.

Both Glynde and Mackenzie vehemently asserted that it would be rank madness to attempt any further fighting now that such a respite had been granted to them, and they both insisted that an endeavour should be made to reach safety. A rapid calculation showed them that they were making good progress towards the English coast, and that there was a distinct hope, ere the *Daydream* sank, of getting within reasonable distance of shore.

After three hours, an uneasy swell, forerunner of a storm, began to work up from the westward, causing the ship to roll. The labouring opened the seams of the weakened hull and the end of the *Daydream* was in sight. Water had reached the gun-deck, she was practically water-logged and no further progress could be made. Reluctantly the boats were hoisted out and she was left to her watery grave. A few minutes later, in a swirl, the *Daydream* disappeared below the surface of the sea.

II

The first rays of dawn lit up an expanse of leaden sea. Stepping their masts and making sail, side by side, the four boats of the *Daydream* forged steadily ahead. They were alone; no sail was in sight: no faint haze proclaimed the vicinity of land. In each boat there

were enough provisions to last them twelve hours or so. The only real danger which faced the men was that of a sudden storm of heavy sea.

The best description of the experiences of the adventurers is to be found in a letter written by Blakeney to his friend, Lord St. Denys, some few weeks after the events.

"After a few hours' sailing," he writes, "the tempest which we feared was gathering in the west and it was approaching us rapidly. The sky ahead of us darkened, great clouds began to gather and the wind came in gusts. A few heavy drops of rain splashed down and as quickly ceased. The storm seemed to withdraw as if to husband its strength for a more furious outburst. An unearthly hush brooded over sky and sea which both took on a leaden hue. We close-reefed our sail and soon the wind burst on us in fury, driving spume into the air. This and the murkiness due to the heavy clouds made it difficult for the boats to keep together, for we could seldom see each other at a cable's length.

"The boats were now fast being separated from each other and I lost sight of Mackenzie's; Glynde was about twenty yards in front of me. Perhaps it was lucky for me that I am not a sailor born as I remained impervious to the general tension, until heavy rumbles in the distance and sudden flashes of lightening proclaimed that the storm was growing in violence and approaching us rapidly. At the same time the sea started to stir and troubled waves got up first with a slow roll, as of unaccustomed passengers upon a ship's deck then faster rolling billows as the wind increased its strength. These beat against the boat, throwing white spume over the men and drenching us all in sprays of ice-cold water. The wind tugged at our clothing, flinging our laces and shirts into our faces so that we were nearly blinded.

"The sky darkened still more. The sea heaved, responding to the wrath of the storm, demanding vengeance upon us humans who thus dared to defy the elements.

"Any steady progress was now well-nigh impossible. The men were impotent to keep the helm and to bail out the water at the same time, water which struck our frail barks and almost swamped them. Within a few minutes we were drifting helplessly at the mercy of the wind and waves. My boat was by now half-filled with water and in the intervals of keeping the level down by bailing the boat, we tried to keep ourselves cheerful by telling silly stories!

"By now I had lost sight of the other boats. It seemed as if we were entirely alone on this surging sea and I was sure that my last moment had come . . .!"

When the end seemed inevitable and all hope of being rescued was given up, their luck held. Through a murk of the storm a ship hove into sight, bearing down upon them through the deep troughs of the wind-tossed waves. A British frigate, which had been driven off her course earlier in the day, had seen the plight of those helpless sailors and had made all haste to their rescue.

Most of the men were too weak and exhausted to realize that their lives had been saved. Even Blakeney's magnificent physique had crumpled up under the terrific strain. It also happened that their rescue was marred by the loss of the boat in which was Mackenzie. Though search was made for her for many hours, they were never found and it is supposed that she must have been swamped earlier on in the day.

As soon as Blakeney was sufficiently recovered from the ordeal to answer questions, he was greeted by none other than Nelson himself. The Admiral, as soon as he knew the identity of the man he had

saved, refused to remain content with the lame story of a pleasure cruise and an accident, since he had intercepted a battered French frigate towing a rudderless ship. The firing had been reported to him and the exploits of the *Cauchemar* were common knowledge.

It appears evident that Nelson entertained no doubts as to the identity of his guest, for he is reported to have told a friend that he rescued the Scarlet Pimpernel from a watery grave, but, on being asked for further details, refused to reveal any names. Sir Percy was grateful for the preservation of his secret and he had the honour of presenting the little Admiral with a beautiful tie-pin, composed of rubies and diamonds in the shape of the famous device.

III

It had indeed been the final adventure. The after consequences of it kept Blakeney helpless for many a weary week, owing to an attack of pneumonia caused by long immersion in the water coupled with exposure for hours to cold, biting winds.

He was now brought face to face with the realities of life; he realized how near he had been to depriving his son of a father; he found that time had flown on swift wings and that he was not so young as he was. He was forced reluctantly to give up his many activities and concentrate on more sedate pleasures. And he turned his mind to family affairs which had become terribly involved during his many absences. The bailiff was not satisfactory; the stables had been neglected and his personal affairs had got into a hopeless mess. Therefore, with all that work on his hands, he had no time to think: the regrets which he felt were allayed by the activities of family life and he found his pleasures in his home and the company of his wife and children.

The quietude of this new life after the tempestuous days of the past

filled his heart with that sense of peace and contentment, which is so often the privilege of intrepid souls and which no amount of glory or excitement can give. The love of adventure and daily risks which had possessed him to the exclusion of all other emotions had gradually yielded to a richer and deeper love. The passionate interludes of a few years back, so intense and yet so brief, merged in the riper, fuller affection of later years. He still laughed uproariously; he still dressed in the height of fashion. Richmond in the summer and Bath in the winter found the Blakeney's always leading the fashion, gracing society balls with their presence.

And so the years passed and with their passing so did the memory of former delights slowly fade away. His outlook on life he left to posterity in a long letter which he wrote to his erstwhile companion and lifelong friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, on the occasion of the birth of the latter's son:

"Dear Andrew,

"My heartiest congratulations to Suzanne and yourself on the arrival of the hoped-for heir. I am truly delighted at the news. He will be George's fag at Harrow. I wonder whether they will prove such a pair of lazy rascallions as we were. Heigh-ho! How long ago that time seems now. Egad, at all events, we can truthfully say that we have lived. What price the old 'Chat-Gris' again, you dog, and those marvelous rides through the dark country road with women and children clinging to us for dear life. Well, remember to visit the *Cabaret de la Liberté* when your regiment captures Paris.

"Looking back, I often wonder myself whether the Scarlet Pimpernel was not a myth, dreamt about after the third bottle of port. Nay, my dear Andrew, I am not a sentimentalist, but, all the same, as I ride round Richmond with young George, those days do verily seem but a romantic illusion: the scar, that magic 'M' on my forearm, is the only

concrete reminder that, once upon a time, we really and truly indulged in that kingliest of all sports.

"Should another chance come, you ask, would I repeat? 'Tis an unanswerable question, my friend. I hardly know and I should hate to commit myself. There are others now to consider. Would you leave your Suzanne and young Anthony (that is his future name, is it not?) in order to follow the will-o'-the-wisp of anonymous adventure? I doubt it. Yet the heart would urge and the spirit tug. Methinks that the flesh would be too demmed weak!

"Frankly, I cannot deny the lure of the old life. This all seems paradoxical and contradictory it is true, but I thrill now to the joy of seeing young George develop. I love to teach him the tricks of boxing and fencing; I enjoy training his muscles and inculcating in him the ideals of an English gentleman.

"Begad, its demmed amusing when I really think about it and realize the vast abyss which now separates the Scarlet Pimpernel of yore from the Sir Percy Blakeney of to-day.

"Do you ever have twinges of regret?

"Tony has become uxorious in the extreme. Nevertheless, both you and he owe somewhat of a debt to those charming people who nearly cut off the heads of your adorable wives! As for me, I must own to an eternal debt of gratitude which I owe our one-time engaging friend, Monsieur Chambertin, who must, even now, be writhing in a very hot furnace down below!

"Well, dear old comrade, I have talked enough nonsense for one letter. All that remains to us in the future is in the hands of our two bits of flesh whom we call our sons.

"London seems pretty much the same, though the war fever is still at its height. H.R.H. is very furious that he cannot command a regiment that was only yesterday evening cursing the luck which allowed you to be away on campaign whilst he was forced to stick at home. We form the same merry old whirligig as of yore, though I deem we are more sedate and one hates the grey hairs which appear on one's head!

"And on that remark, which will doubtless shock you more than any other in this long rigmarole, I will bid you farewell."

Appendix I: Members of the League

This list has been drawn up as accurately as existing documents permit.

A. The original League or Founder Members who formed the party on August 2nd, 1792, nine in number:

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes (second in command) Lord Anthony Dewhurst

Lord Edward Hastings

Lord John Bathurst

Lord Stowmarries

Sir Edward Mackenzie

Sir Philip Glynde

Lord Saint Denys

Sir Richard Galveston

B. Members enrolled in January, 1793, ten in number:

Sir Jeremiah Wallescourt Lord Kulmstead (the only traitor to the band) George Fanshaw

Anthony Holte

John Hastings (Lord Edward's cousin) Lord Everingham

Sir George Vigor, Bart.

The Hon. St. John Devinne Michael Barstow of York

Armand St. Just (Marguerite's brother)

Appendix II: Those Rescued

A list of the noblemen, women, children and prisoners of the revolution, as far as has been varified, who owed their lives to the Scarlet Pimpernel, with approximate dates.

It is estimated that Sir Percy and his League rescued close on a *thousand* men, women, and children in all: unfortunately, however, all are not recorded. Many narratives of the *émigrés* to England whose escape from revolutionary France have been attributed to the Scarlet Pimpernel, were found to be conjectures or later additions, and therefore untrustworthy.

	The first rescue carried out by Sir Percy Blakeney and one which lead to the formation of the League.
Comte de Bonnefin	July 28, 1792
An Unknown Girl	
The Comte de Tournay, his wife and daughter	
Armand St. Just and three others	August 4, 1792
Esther Vincent and Jack Kennard	September 3, 1792
Lucille Calmette	
Valentin Lemurrier	
Comte de Sucy	October 10, 1792
Comte de Tournon d'Agenay and wife	
Dr. Désèze, wife and daughter	
Duc de Montreux and family of eight	
St. Luc and family	November 5th
Bishop of Clarenceaux and eight priests	January 20, 1793
Agnes de Lucinnes	
Celeste and Ferdinand Malzieu	February 28, 1793
Lénègre and family	
Victome de Mortain and family (Lyons)	
Paul Déroulède, Juliette Marny, Anne Mie and twenty others	
Abbe Mesnil	
Chevalier d'Egremont	April 12, 1793
Cherneuil, Delleville, Galipaux, sixty women, twelve priests, and about forty children	
Madame Lannoy and her child	July 8, 1793
Curé de Venelles	
Madame Lenoir Mailly, her sister and two children	
De Montignac	
The Dauphin of France	1794
Fleurette Chauvelin	January 16, 1794
Comte de Cluny	
De Frontenac and family	
Yvonne de Kernogan	
Jeanne Toutgin, George Racheter, de Menetray and families	
Lady Blakeney	July 27, 1794

Appendix III: References

Reminiscences and Personalities. Sir Edward Egmont.

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Sir Percy Leads the Band

Book I – THE ABBÉ

Book II – THE DOCTOR

Book III – MADEMOISELLE

Book IV – THE TRAITOR

Book V – THE CHIEF

Book I – The ABBÉ

1 The King on His Trial

2 SENTENCE

3 THE LEAGUE

4 JANUARY 21ST

5 THE LEVETS OF CHOISY

6 NEWS

7 MONSIEUR LE PROFESSEUR

8 MAURIN THE LAWYER

9 ORDERS FROM THE CHIEF

10 THE ABBÉ EDGEWORTH

11 THE MORNING AFTER

12 A FALSE MOVE

1--THE KING ON HIS TRIAL

The Hall of the Pas Perdue, the precincts of the House of Justice, the corridors, the bureaux of the various officials, judges and advocates were all thronged that day as they had been during all the week, ever since Tuesday when the first question was put to the vote. "Is Louis Capet guilty of conspiring against liberty?" Louis Capet! Otherwise Louis XVI, descendant of a long line of kings of the Grand Monarque of Saint Louis, himself the anointed, the crowned King of France! And now! Arraigned at the bar before his fellow-men, before his one-time devoted subjects, or supposedly devoted, standing before them like any criminal, accused not of murder, or forgery or theft, but of conspiring against liberty.

A king on his trial! And for his life! Let there be no doubt about that. It is a matter of life or death for the King of France. There has been talk, endless talk and debate in the Hall of Justice ever since the eleventh day of December over a month ago now when Louis first appeared before the bar of the Convention. Fifty-seven questions were put to the accused. "Louis Capet, didst thou do this, that or the other? Didst thou conspire against liberty?" Louis to all the questions gave the simple reply: "No! I did not do that, nor did I do the other. If I did, it was in accordance with the then existing laws of France."

For a whole month and more this went on during the short December days when the snowfall, rain or fog obscured what there was of daylight, and the shades of evening wrapped the big hall, and all that it contained of men's passions and men's cruelty, in gloom. Then the candles were lighted and flickered in the draught till the clerk went the round with the snuffers and shipped off from each candle a bit of the thread that held the light. And the light flickered on, till judges and jury and advocates were weary, and filed out of the Hall of Justice, and the candles were finally snuffed out, extinguished by

destiny and the vengeful hands of men.

A king on his trial! Heavens above, what a stupendous event! One that had only occurred once before in history a hundred and fifty years ago when Charles I, King of England, stood at the bar before his people and Parliament, accused by them of conspiring against their liberty. What the end would be, no one doubted for a moment. The paramount significance of the tragedy, the vital importance of what was at stake was reflected in the grave demeanour of the crowd that gathered day after day inside the precincts of the House of Justice. Men of all ages, of all creeds, of every kind of political opinion foregathered in the Salle des Pas Perdus, waited mostly in silence for scraps of news that came filtering through from the hall where a king once their King was standing his trial.

They waited for news, longing to see the end of this nerve-racking suspense, yet dreading to hear what the end would be.

On the Monday evening, one month after the opening of this momentous trial, the fifty-seven questions were finally disposed of. Advocate Barrère in a three-hours' speech, summed up the case and then invited Louis Capet to withdraw. And Louis the unfortunate, once Louis XVI, King of France, now just Louis Capet, was taken back to the Temple prison where, separated from his wife and children, he could do nothing but await with patience and resignation the final issue of his judges' deliberations, and assist his legal counsels in the preparation of his defence.

And on Tuesday the 15th of January, 1793, the question of whether a King of France was guilty or not guilty of conspiracy was put to the vote. Not one question but three questions were put forward, each to be voted on separately and by every one of the seven hundred and forty-nine members of the National Convention. Is Louis Capet guilty of conspiring against liberty? Shall the sentence pronounced by the

National Convention be final, or shall appeal be made to the people? If Louis Capet be found guilty, what punishment should be meted out to him? The first two questions were disposed of on the Tuesday. By midday Louis Capet had been voted guilty by an immense majority. The second question took rather longer; the afternoon wore on, the shades of a mid-winter evening blotted out the outside world and spread its gloomy mantle over this assembly of men, gathered here to indict their King and to pronounce sentence upon him. It was midnight before the voting on this second question was ended. By a majority of two to one the House decided that its verdict shall be final and that no appeal shall be made to the people. Such an appeal would mean civil war, cry the Extremists, the loud and turbulent Patriots, while the Moderates, the Girondins, will have it that the people must not be ignored. But they are outvoted two to one, and at the close of this memorable Tuesday, Louis Capet stands definitely guilty of conspiring against the liberty of the people, and whatever sentence the National Convention may pronounce upon him shall be final, without appeal.

The loud and turbulent Patriots are full of hope. Marat, the people's friend, has apostrophized them from his bed of sickness, lashed them with his biting tongue: "O crowd of chatterers, can you not act?" And they are going to act. Let the third question be put to the vote, and the whole world shall see that Patriots can act as well as talk. So on this Wednesday, January 16th, 1793, they muster up in full force and swarm over the floors of the Salle des Pas Perdus, and of the corridors and committee rooms of the House of Justice. But somehow they are no longer turbulent now. Certain of triumph they appear almost overawed by the immensity of the tragedy which they have brought to a head.

Beyond the precincts of the Hall of Justice, the whole of Paris stands on the tiptoe of expectation. It is a raw midwinter day. The city

is wrapped in a grey fog, through which every sound of voice or traffic becomes muffled, as if emitted through cotton-wool. Like the noisy elements inside the hall, the people of Paris wait in silence, hushed into a kind of grim stupefaction at this stupendous thing which is going on inside there, and which they, in a measure, have brought about.

In the hall itself the seven hundred and forty-nine deputies are all at their posts. After some talk and "orders of the day" put forward by one Patriot or another, Danton's proposal that the Convention shall sit in permanent session till the whole business of Louis Capet is finished and done with, is passed by a substantial majority. After which the voting on the third question begins. It is close on eight o'clock in the evening. The ushers in loud shrill voices call up the deputies by name and constituency, one by one: summon each one to mount the tribune and say, on his soul and conscience, what punishment shall be meted out to the accused. And one by one seven hundred and forty-nine men then mounted the tribune, said their say, justified their verdict and recorded their vote. The whole of that night and subsequent days and nights, from Wednesday evening until Friday afternoon, the procedure went on. Evening faded into night, night yielded to day and day to night again while a king's life hung in the balance. In the grey light of day, through the weary hours of the night, the three portentous words came muffled through the thin curtain of fog which pervaded the hall and dimmed the feeble flickering light of candles. Death! Banishment! Imprisonment till peace with the rest of Europe be signed. The word that came most often from the tribune was death, though often tempered with weak recommendations for mercy; but all day Thursday and most of Friday the balance trembled between banishment and death. Through the curtain of fog or through the gloom of night the deputies looked like phantoms moving from their seats to the tribune and back again to their seats, there to snatch a few moments of restless sleep. Some of

the votes were never in doubt, Robespierre's for instance, or that of Danton who disdained to justify his verdict; he stood only for one minute on the tribune, just long enough to say curtly: "La Mort sans phrases!" then resumed his seat, folded his arms and went quietly to sleep. "Death without so much talk!" Why talk? Louis Capet has got to die, so why argue?

Was there ever so strange a proceeding? Eyewitnesses, men like Sieyès and Roland, have described the scene as one of the most remarkable ever witnessed in the history of the Revolution, and the moment when Philippe d'Orléans, now nicknamed Philippe Égalité, and own kinsman of the accused, boldly voted death on his soul and conscience, the most tense in any history. A strange proceeding indeed! Philippe d'Orléans the traitor, the profligate, casting his vote against his kinsman; and up in the galleries among a privileged crowd a number of smartly dressed ladies, flaunting their laces and tricolour cocades and munching chocolates, while the honourable deputies who had already recorded their votes came to entertain them with small talk and bring them ices and refreshments. Some have cards and bins and prick down the deaths or banishments or imprisonments as they occur, something like race-cards on which with many a giggle they record their bets. Here in the galleries there is quite an element of fashion. No gloom here, no sense of foreboding or impending tragedy. Smart ladies! The beautiful Téroigne de Méricourt, the austere Madame Roland, the youthful Teresia Cabarrus. But down below men grow more and more weary, more and more like phantoms in the hazy light. Many have fallen asleep and the ushers have much ado to shake them and send them up to vote.

At dusk on Friday evening the voting was done. The secretaries sorted the papers and made the count. When this was over President Vergniaud demanded silence. And in a hush so profound that the

rustle of a silk dress up in the gallery caused every one to give a start, he made the solemn declaration: "In the name of the Convention I declare that the punishment it pronounces on Louis Capet is that of death."

2 SENTENCE

Scarcely were the words out of the President's mouth than the King's advocates came running in. They lodged a protest in his name. They demanded delay and appeal to the people. The latter was promptly rejected unanimously. Appeal to the people had been put to the vote last Tuesday, and been definitely settled then. Delay might be granted, but for the moment nothing more could be done. Every one was sick to death of the whole thing. Nerve-racked. Tomorrow should decide.

And it did. Delay or no delay? Patriots said "No." Philippe d'Orléans, kinsman of the accused, said "No!" A few said "Yes!" But finally, during the small hours of Sunday morning, that point perhaps the grimmest of the lot-was also settled. "No delay! Death within twenty- four hours." The final count showed a majority of seventy.

The Minister of Justice was sent to the Temple to break the news to the accused. To his credit be it said that he did not like the errand. "What a horrible business!" he was heard to say. But Louis received the news calmly, as a king should. He asked for a delay of three days to prepare himself for death, also for a confessor. The latter request was granted on condition that the confessor should be a man of the Convention's own choosing: but not delay. The verdict had been: "Death within twenty-four hours." There could be no question of respite.

Paris that Sunday morning woke to the news and was appalled. It had been expected, but there are events in this world that are expected, that are known to be certain to come, and yet when they do come they cause stupefaction. And Paris was stupefied. The Extremists rejoiced: the rowdy elements went about shouting "Vive la Liberté!" waving tricolour flags, carrying spikes crowned with red

caps, but Paris as a whole did not respond. It pondered over the verdict, and shuddered at the murder of Lepelletier, the deputy who had put forward the proposal: "No delay! Death within twenty-four hours!" His proposal had been carried by a majority of seventy. It was then two o'clock in the morning, and he went on to Février's in the Palais Royal to get some supper. He had finished eating and was paying his bill, when he was suddenly attacked by an unknown man, said to have once belonged to the King's Guard, who plunged a dagger in the deputy's breast shouting: "Regicide! Take that!" and in the confusion that ensued made good his escape. Paris asked itself: "Why this man rather than another?" And the six hundred and ninety-six deputies who had voted for death without a recommendation for mercy shut themselves up in their apartments, being in fear of their lives.

The cafés and restaurants, on the other hand, did a roaring trade all that day, Sunday. Paris, though stupefied, had to be fed, and did feed too, and talked only in whispers but talked nevertheless. Groups lingered over their coffee and fine, and said the few things that were safe to say, in view of those turbulent Patriots who proclaimed every man, woman or child to be a traitor who showed any sympathy for the "conspirator" Louis Capet. There was also talk of war. England... Spain. Especially England, with Burke demanding sanctions against the regicide Republic. It could only be a matter of days now before she declared war. She had been itching to do so ever since Louis Capet had been deprived of his throne. Ambassador Chauvelin was still in London, but soon he would be recalled and his papers handed courteously to him, for undoubtedly war was imminent. English families residing in France were preparing to leave the country. Many, scenting trouble, had already sent their wives and children home and the packet-boats from Boulogne and Havre had been crowded day after day this week past.

But a good many stayed on: men in business, journalists or merely idlers. They mostly dined at Février's in the Palais Royal, the restaurant à la mode, where those deputies who were most in the public eye could always be met with on a Sunday. Robespierre and his friend Desmoulins, the elegant Saint-Just, President Vergniaud and others dined there regularly, and foreign newspaper correspondents frequented the place in the hope of picking up bits of gossip for their journals. On this particular Sunday there were about a dozen strangers gathered round the large table in the centre, where a somewhat meagre dinner was being served in view of the existing shortage of provisions and the penury that already stalked the countryside and more particularly the cities. Certainly here in the heart of Paris it would have been very injudicious to spread a rich repast in a frequented restaurant, in full view of hungry vagrants who might gather outside, under the arcades, smash windows and grab what they could off the tables. But in spite of the meagreness of the fare, good temper was not lacking round the board where the strangers were sitting. Most of them were English and they tackled the scraggy meat and thin wine put before them, with that happy-go-lucky tolerance that is so essentially English.

"What say you to beef with mustard?" one of the men quoted while he struggled with a tough piece of boiled pork garnished with haricot beans.

"I like it passing well," his neighbour completed the quotation, "but for the moment I have a fancy for a Lancashire hot-pot, such as my old lady makes at home."

"Well!" broke in a man obviously from the north, "Sunday at my home is the day for haggis, and with a wineglassful of good Scotch whiskey poured over it, I tell you, my friends..." He did not complete the sentence, but by way of illustrating his meaning he just smacked

his lips, and attacked the tough bit of pork with almost savage vigour.

Two men were sitting together at a table close by. One of the said, speaking in French with a contemptuous shrug:

"These English! Their one subject of conversation is food."

The other, without commenting on this, merely remarked:

"You understand English then, Monsieur le Baron?"

"Yes. Don't you?"

"I never had any lessons," the other replied vaguely.

The two men were a strange contrast, both in appearance and in speech. The one who had been addressed as Monsieur le Baron it was not yet a crime to use a title in Republican France was short and broad-shouldered. He had a florid face, sensual lips and prominent eyes. He spoke French with a hardly perceptible guttural accent, which to a sensitive ear might have betrayed his German or Austrian origin. His manner and way of speaking were abrupt and fussy: his short, fat hands with the spatulated fingers were for ever fidgeting with something, making bread pellets or drumming with obvious nervousity on the table. The other was tall, above the average at any rate in this country: his speech was deliberate, almost pedantic in its purity of expression like a professor delivering a lecture at the Sorbonne: his hands, though slender, betrayed unusual strength. He scarcely ever moved them. Both men were very simply dressed, in black coats and cloth breeches, but while Monsieur le Baron's coat fitted him where it touched, the other's complete suit was nothing short of a masterpiece of the tailor's art.

Just then there rose a general clatter in the room: chairs scraping

against tiled floor, calls for hats and coats, comprehensive leave-takings, and more or less noisy exodus through the swing-doors. Robespierre and Desmoulins as they went out passed the time of day with Monsieur le Baron.

"Eh bien, de Batz," Robespierre said to him with a laugh, "I have won my bet, haven't I? Louis Capet has got his deserts."

De Batz shrugged his fat shoulders.

"Not yet," he retorted dryly.

When those two had gone, and were immediately followed by Vergniaud and Saint-Just, he who was called de Batz leaned back in his chair and gave a deep sigh of relief.

"Ah!" he said, "the air is purer now that filthy crowd has gone."

"You appeared to be on quite friendly terms with Monsieur Robespierre anyway," the other remarked with a cool smile.

"Appearances are often deceptive, my dear Professor," de Batz retorted.

"Ah?"

"Now take your case. I first met you at a meeting of the Jacobin Club, or was it the Feuillants? I forget which of those pestiferous gatherings you honoured with your presence; but anyway, had I only judged by appearances I would have avoided you like the plague, like I avoid that dirty crowd of assassins...."

"But you were there yourself, Monsieur le Baron," the Professor observed.

"I went out of curiosity, my friend, as you did and as a number of respectable-looking people did also. I sized up those respectable people very quickly. I had no use for them. They were just the sort of nincompoops whom Danton's oratory soon turns into potential regicides. But I accosted you that evening because I saw that you were different."

"Why different?"

"Your cultured speech and the cleanliness of your collar."

"You flatter me, sir."

"We talked of many things at first, if you remember. We touched on philosophy and on the poets, on English rhetoric and Italian art: and I went home that night convinced that I had met a kindred spirit, whom I hoped to meet again. When you entered this place an hour ago, and honoured me by allowing me to sit at your table, I felt that Chance had been benign to me."

"Again you flatter me, sir."

The Professor had hardly moved a muscle, while de Batz indulged first in reminiscences and then in flattery. He appeared unconscious of the other's growing excitement, sat leaning back in his chair, one slender hand framed in spotless cambric resting on the table. And all the time his eyes watched under heavy lids the exodus of the various clients of the restaurant, as one by one they finished their dinner, paid their bill, picked up hat and coat and passed out into the fast gathering gloom. And somehow one felt that nothing escaped those eyes, that they saw everything, and noted everything even though their expression never changed.

The room in the meanwhile had soon become deserted. There

remained only de Batz and the Professor at one table, and in the farther corner a group of three men, two of whom were playing dominoes and the third reading a newspaper. De Batz' restless eyes took a quick survey of the room, then he leaned over the table and fixed his gaze on the other's placid face.

"I propose to flatter you still more, my friend," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper. "Nay! I may say to honour you...."

"Indeed?"

"By asking you to help me...."

"To do what?"

"To save the King."

"A heavy task, sir."

"But not impossible. Listen. I have five hundred friends who will be posted to-morrow in different houses along the route between the Temple and the Place de la Révolution. At a signal from me, they will rush the carriage in which only His Majesty and his confessor will be sitting, they will drag the King out of it, and in the mêlée smuggle him into a house close by, all the inhabitants of which are in my pay. You are silent, sir?" De Batz went on, his thick, guttural voice hoarse with emotion. "Of what are you thinking?" he added impatiently, seeing that the other remained impassive, almost motionless.

"Of General Santerre," the Professor replied, "and his eighty thousand armed men. Are they also in your pay?"

"Eighty thousand?" de Batz rejoined with a sneer. "Bah!"

"Do you doubt the figure?"

"No! I do not. I know all about Santerre and his eighty thousand armed men, his bristling cannons that are already being set up on the Place de la Révolution, and his cannoneers who will stand by with match burning. But you must take surprise into consideration. The unexpected. The sudden panic. The men off their guard. As a matter of fact, I could tell you of things that occurred before my very eyes when that dare-devil Englishman whom they call the Scarlet Pimpernel snatched condemned prisoners from the very tumbrils that took them to execution. Surely you know about that?"

"I do," the Professor put in quietly, "but I don't suppose that those tumbrils were escorted by eighty thousand armed men. There is such a thing in this world as the impossible, you know, Monsieur le Baron: things that are beyond man's power to effect."

"Then you won't help me?"

"You have not yet told me what you want me to do."

"I am not going to ask you to risk your life," de Batz said, trying to keep the suspicion of a sneer out of his tone. "There are five hundred of us for that and one more or less wouldn't make any difference to our chance of success. But there is one little matter in which you could render our cause a signal service, and incidentally help to save His Majesty the King."

"What may that be, sir?"

A pause, after which de Batz resumed with seeming irrelevance:

"There is an Irish priest, the Abbé Edgeworth, you have met him perhaps?"

"Yes! I know him."

"He is known by renown to the King. The Convention, as perhaps you are aware, has acceded to His Majesty's desire for a confessor, but those inhuman brutes have made it a condition that that confessor shall be of their own choosing. We know what that means. Some apostate priest whose presence would distress and perhaps unnerve His Majesty when he will have need of all his courage. You agree with me?"

"Of course."

"Equally, of course, we want some one to be by the side of His Majesty during that harrowing drive from the Temple, and to prepare and encourage him for the coup which we are contemplating."

De Batz paused a moment, his restless eyes still studying the placid face of the Professor. At one moment it almost seemed as if he regretted having said so much. But the mood only lasted a moment or two. De Batz prided himself on his knowledge of men, and there was nothing in the grave demeanour and laconic speech of this elegant personage before him to arouse the faintest suspicion of Jacobinism. So after a time he resumed:

"The Abbé Edgeworth is the man we want for this mission. His loyalty is unquestioned, so is his courage. Cléry, the King's devoted valet, has tried to get in touch with him, and so have His Majesty's advocates, but they failed to find him. He is hiding somewhere in Paris, that we know. Until fairly recently he was a lecturer at the Sorbonne. I understand that you too, Monsieur le Professeur, have graced that seat of learning. Anyway, I thought that you might make inquiries in that direction. If you succeed," de Batz concluded, his voice thick with excitement, "you will have done your share in saving our King."

There was a moment's pause while de Batz, taking out his handkerchief from his pocket, wiped his moist hands and his forehead which was streaming with perspiration. Seeing that the Professor still sat silent and impassive he said, with obvious impatience:

"Surely you are not hesitating, Monsieur le Professeur! A little thing like that! And for such a cause! I would scour Paris myself, only that my hands are full. And my five hundred adherents--"

"You should apply to one of them, Monsieur le Baron," the other broke in quietly.

Monsieur le Baron gave a jump.

"You don't mean to say that you hesitate?" he uttered in a hoarse whisper.

"I do more than that Monsieur le Baron. I refuse."

"Refuse?...ref-"

De Batz was choking. He passed his thick finger round the edge of his cravat.

"To lend a hand in dragging the Abbé Edgeworth into this affair."

De Batz' florid face had become the colour of beet-root. He stretched out his hand and clenched his fist as if he meant to strike that urbane milksop in the face. However, he thought better of that. A fracas in a public place was not part of his programme. His hand unclenched, but it closed round the stem of a wineglass and snapped it in two. The Professor scarcely moved. In the far corner the man who had been reading put down his paper and glanced round lazily, while

one of the domino players paused in his game, with one piece between his fingers and a look of indifferent curiosity in his eyes.

De Batz was striving to control his temper: under his breath he muttered the words "Poltroon! Coward!" once or twice. Aloud he said:

"You are afraid?"

"I am a man of peace," the Professor replied.

"I don't believe it," de Batz protested. "No man with decent feeling in him would refuse to render this service. Good God, man! You are not risking your life, not like I and my friends are willing to do. You can help us, I know. You must have a reason a valid reason for refusing to do so. As I say, you wouldn't be risking your life...."

"Not mine, but that of an innocent and a good man."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"You are proposing to throw Abbé Edgeworth to the wolves."

"I am not. I am proposing to give him the chance of doing his bit in the work of saving the life of his King. He will thank me on his knees for this."

"He probably would, for he is of the stuff that martyrs are made. But I will not help you to send him to his death."

With that he rose, ready to go, and reached for his hat and coat. They hung on a peg just above de Batz' head, and de Batz made no movement to get out of the way.

"Don't go, man," he said earnestly, "not yet. Listen to me. You don't

understand. It is all perfectly easy. In less than an hour I shall know who the apostate priest is whom the Convention are sending to His Majesty. I know all those fellows. Most of them are in my pay. They are useful, if distinctly dirty, tools. To substitute our abbé for the man chosen by the Convention will entail no risk, present no difficulties, and will cost me less than the price of a good dinner. Now what do you say?

"What I said before," the other rejoined firmly. "Whoever accompanies Louis XVI to the guillotine, if he be other than the one chosen by the Convention, will be a marked man. His life will not be worth twelve hours' purchase!"

"The guillotine? The guillotine?" De Batz retorted hotly. "Who talks of the guillotine and of Louis XVI in one breath? I tell you, man, that our King will never mount the steps of the guillotine. There are five hundred of us, worth a hundred thousand of Santerre's armed men, who will drag him out of the clutches of those assassins."

"May I have my coat?" was the Professor's quiet rejoinder.

His calmness brought de Batz' temper to boiling-point. He jumped to his feet, snatched down the Professor's coat from its peg and threw it down with a vicious snarl on the nearest chair. The Professor, seemingly quite unperturbed, picked it up, put it on and with a polite "Au revoir, Monsieur le Baron!" to which the latter did not deign to respond, he walked quietly out of the restaurant.

3 THE LEAGUE

It was about an hour or two later. In a sparsely furnished room on the second floor of an apartment house in the Rue du Bac five men had met: four of them were sitting about on more or less rickety chairs, while the fifth stood by the window, gazing out into the dusk and on the gloomy outlook of the narrow street. He was tall above the average, was this individual, still dressed in the black, well-tailored suit which he had worn during his dinner in company with the Austrian Baron at Février's, and which suggested a professional man: a professor perhaps, at the university.

The outlook through the window was indeed gloomy. Dusk was quickly fading into night. A pitiless north-easterly wind drove the shower of sleet against the window-panes and howled down the chimney, driving the smoke from the small iron stove in gusts into the room. The five men were silent for the moment: indeed the only sound that penetrated to this dreary-looking apartment just now was the howling wind and the patter of the sleet against the windows. But outside depression did not apparently weigh on the spirits of the men. There was no look of despondency on their faces, rather the reverse, they looked eager and excited, and the back of the tall man in black with the broad shoulders and narrow hips suggested energy rather than dejection. After a time he turned away from the window and found a perch on the edge of a broken-down truckle bed that stood in a corner of the room.

"Well!" he began addressing the others collectively, "you heard what that madman said?"

"Most of it," one of them replied.

"He has a crack-brained scheme of stirring up five hundred

madcaps into shouting and rushing the carriage in which the King will be driven from prison to the scaffold. Five hundred lunatics egged on by that candidate for Bedlam, trying to reach that carriage which will be escorted by eighty thousand armed men! It would be ludicrous if it were not so tragic."

"One wonders," remarked one of them, "who those wretched five hundred are."

"Young royalists," the other replied, "all of them known to the Committees. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that most of them, if not all, will receive a visit from the police during the early hours of the morning, and will not be allowed to leave their apartments till after the execution of the King."

"Heavens, man!" the eldest of the four men exclaimed, "how did you know that?"

"It was quite simple, my dear fellow, and quite easy. The crowd filed out, as you know, directly the final verdict was proclaimed. It was three o'clock in the morning. Everybody there was almost delirious with excitement. No one took notice of anybody else. The President and the other judges went into the refreshment-room which is reserved for them. You know the one I mean. It is in the Tour de César, at the back of the Hall of Justice. It has no door, only an archway. There was still quite a crowd moving along the corridors. I got as near the archway as I could, and I heard Vergniaud give the order that every inhabitant of the city, known to have royalist or even moderate tendencies, must be under police surveillance in their own apartments until midday."

"Percy, you are wonderful!" the young man exclaimed fervently.

"Tony, you are an idiot!" the other retorted with a laugh.

"Then we may take it that our Austrian friend's scheme will just fizzle out like a damp squib?"

"You had never thought, had you, Blakeney, that we..."

"God forbid!" Sir Percy broke in emphatically. "I wouldn't risk your precious lives in what common sense tells me is an impossible scheme. It may be quixotic. I dare say it is; but what in Heaven's name does that megalomaniac hope to accomplish? To break through a cordon of troops ten deep? Folly, of course! But even supposing he and his five hundred did succeed in approaching the carriage, what do they hope to do afterwards? Do they propose to fight the entire garrison of the city which is a hundred and thirty thousand strong? Does he imagine for a moment that the entire population of Paris will rise as one man and suddenly take up the cause of king-ship? Folly, of course! Folly of the worst type, because the first outcome of a hand-to-hand fight in the streets would be the murder of the King in the open street, by some unknown hand. Isn't that so?"

They all agreed. Their chief was not in the habit of talking lengthily on any point. That he did so on this occasion was proof how keenly he felt about the whole thing. Did he wish to justify before these devoted followers of his, his inaction with regard to the condemned King? I do not think so. He was accustomed to blind obedience that was indeed the factor that held the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel so indissolubly together and three of the four men who were here with him to-day, Lord Anthony Dewhurst, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Hastings, were his most enthusiastic followers.

Be that as it may, he did speak lengthily on this occasion, and placed before his friends a clear exposé of the situation on the morrow as far as any attempt at rescuing the King was concerned.

But there was something more. The others knew there was something else coming, or their chief would not have given them the almost imperceptible signal when he left the restaurant to wait for him in this squalid apartment, which had for some time been their accustomed meeting place. They waited in silence and presently Sir Percy spoke again: "Putting, therefore, aside the question of the King whose fate, of course, horrifies us all, the man we have got to think of now is that unfortunate priest whom de Batz wants to drag forcibly into his scheme, and who will surely lose his head if our League does not intervene."

"The Abbé Edgeworth?" one of them said.

"Exactly. Edgeworth is of Irish extraction, which adds to our interest in him. Still! that isn't the point. He is a very good man, who has worked unremittingly in the slums of Paris. Anyway, we are not going to throw him to the wolves, are we?"

They all nodded assent. And Ffoulkes added: "Of course not, if you say so, Percy."

"I shall know towards morning whether de Batz has arranged to substitute him for the man whom the Convention has chosen as confessor for the King. As soon as I do get definite information about that I will get in touch with you. We will take our stand at seven o'clock on the Place de la Révolution, at the angle of the Rue Égalité which used to be the Rue Royale. That will be the nearest point we can get to the guillotine. After the King's head has fallen there will be an immense commotion in the crowd and a rush for those horrible souvenirs which the executioner will sell to the highest bidder. It makes one's gorge rise even to think of that. But it will be our opportunity. Between the five of us we'll soon get hold of Edgeworth and get him to safety."

"Where do you think of taking him?" Lord Tony asked.

"To Choisy. You remember the Levets?"

"Of course. I like old Levet. He is a sportsman."

"I like him too," Sir Andrew added, "and I am terribly sorry for the poor old mother. I don't mind the girl either, but I don't trust that sweetheart of hers."

"Which one?" Blakeney queried with a smile. "Pretty little Blanche Levet has quite a number."

"Ffoulkes means that doctor fellow," here interposed the youngest of the three men, Lord St. John Devinne, who had sat silent and obviously morose up to now, taking no part in the conversation between his chief and his other friends. He was a good-looking, tall young man of the usual high-bred English type, and could have been called decidedly handsome but for a certain look of obstinacy coupled with weakness, which lurked in his grey eyes and was accentuated by the somewhat effeminate curve of his lips.

"Pradel isn't a bad sort really," Sir Andrew responded. "Perhaps a little too fond of spouting about Liberté, Égalité, and the rest of it."

"I can't stand the brute," Devinne muttered sullenly. "He is always talking and arguing and telling the unwashed crowds what fine fellows they really are, if only they knew it, and what good times they are going to have in the future."

He shrugged and added with bitter contempt:

"Liberté? Égalité? What consummate rot!"

"Well!" Sir Percy interposed in his quiet, incisive voice, "isn't there

just something to be said for it? The under-dog has had a pretty bad time in France. He is snarling now, and biting. But Pradel I know him is an intellectual, he will never be an assassin."

Devinne shrugged again and murmured: "I am not so sure about that," while Lord Tony broke in with his cheery laugh and said: "I'll tell you what's the matter with our friend Pradel."

"What?" Sir Andrew asked.

"He is in love."

"Of course. With little Blanche Levet."

"Not he. He is in love with Cécile de la Rodière."

This was received with derision and incredulity.

"What rubbish!" Sir Andrew said.

"Not really?" Hastings queried.

But Blakeney assented: "I am afraid it's true."

While Devinne broke in hotly: "He wouldn't dare!"

"There's nothing very daring in being in love, my dear fellow," Sir Percy remarked dryly.

"Then why did you say you were afraid it was true," the other retorted.

"Because that sort of thing invariably leads to trouble even in these days."

"Can you see Madame la Marquise," was Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' somewhat bitter comment on the situation, "and her son François, if they should happen to find out that the village doctor is in love with Mademoiselle de la Rodière?"

"I can," Devinne remarked spitefully. "There would be the good old story, which I must say has something to be said for it: a sound thrashing for Monsieur Pradel at the hands of Monsieur le Marquis, and..."

He paused, and a dark flush spread over his good-looking face. Chancing to look up he had met his chief's glance which rested upon him with an expression that was difficult to define. It was good-humoured, pitying, slightly sarcastic, and, anyway, reduced the obstinate young man to silence.

There was silence for a moment or two. Somehow Lord St. John Devinne's attitude, his curt argument with the chief, seemed to have thrown a kind of damper on the eagerness of the others. Blakeney after a time consulted his watch and then said very quietly: "It is time we got back to business."

At once they were ready to listen. The word "business" meant so much to them: excitement, adventure, the spice of their lives. Only Devinne remained silent and sullen, never once looking up in the direction of his chief.

"Listen, you fellows," Blakeney now resumed in his firm, most authoritative tone, "if you hear nothing from me between now and to-morrow morning, it will mean that they have roped in that unfortunate abbé. Well! We are not going to allow that. He is a splendid chap, who does a great deal of good work among the poor, and if he allows himself to be roped in, it will be from an exaggerated sense of duty. Anyway, if you don't hear from me, we'll meet, as I said, at seven

o'clock sharp at the angle of the Rue Égalité and the Place de la Révolution. After that, all you'll have to do will be to stick to me as closely as you can, and if we get separated we meet again at Choisy. Make yourselves look as demmed a set of ruffians as you can. That shouldn't be difficult."

Again he paused before concluding:

"If, on the other hand, the King is not to accompanied to the scaffold by the Abbé Edgeworth, I will bring or send word to you here, not later than five o'clock in the morning. Remember that my orders to you all for the night are: don't get yourselves caught. If you do, there will be trouble for us all."

The others smiled. He then nodded to them, said briefly: "That is all. Good night! Bless you!" and the next moment was gone. The others listened intently for a while, trying to catch the sound of his footsteps down the stone staircase, but none came, and they went over to the window and looked out into the street. Through the fog and driving sleet they could just perceive the tall figure of their chief as he went across the road and then disappeared in the night.

With one accord three gallant English gentlemen murmured a fervent: "God guard him!" But Devinne still remained silent, and after a little while went out of the room.

Lord Tony said, speaking to both the others:

"Do you trust that fellow Devinne?" and then added emphatically: "I do not."

My Lord Hastings shook his head thoughtfully.

"I wonder what is the matter with him."

"I can tell you that," Lord Tony observed. "He is in love with Mademoiselle de la Rodière. He met her in Paris five years ago, before all this revolutionary trouble had begun. Her mother and, of course, her brother won't hear of her marrying a foreigner, any more than a village doctor, and Devinne, you know, is a queer-tempered fellow. He cannot really look on that fellow Pradel as a serious rival, and yet, as you could see just now, he absolutely hates him and vents his spleen upon him. His attitude to the chief I call unpardonable. That is why I do not trust him."

Whereupon Sir Andrew murmured under his breath: "If we have a traitor in the camp, then God help the lot of us."

4 JANUARY 21ST

The streets of Paris on that morning were silent as the grave: only at the gate of the Temple prison, when the King stepped out into the street, accompanied by the Abbé Edgeworth, and entered the carriage that was waiting for him, were there a few feeble cries of "Mercy! Mercy!" uttered mostly by women. No other sound came from the crowd that had assembled round the Temple gate. All along the route, too, there was silence. No one dared speak or utter a cry of compassion, for every man was in terror of his neighbour, who might denounce him as a traitor to the Republic. The windows of all the houses were closed, and no face was to be seen at them, peering out into the street. Eighty thousand men at arms stood aligned between the prison and the Place de la Révolution, where the guillotine awaited the royal victim of this glorious revolution. Through that cordon no man or body of men could break, and at every street corner cannons bristled and the cannoneers stood waiting with match burning, silent and motionless like stone statues rather than men. Nor was there sound of wheel traffic along the streets, only the rumble of one carriage, in which sat the descendant of sixteen kings, about to die a shameful death by the sentence of his people. Louis sat in the carriage listening to Abbé Edgeworth who read out to him the Prayers for the Dying.

At the angle of the Boulevard Bonne Nouvelle and the Rue de la Lune on a hillock made up of debris from recent excavations, a short, stout, florid man was standing, wrapped in a dark cape. It was the Baron de Batz. He had been standing here for the past three hours, trying vainly to keep himself warm by stamping his feet on the frozen ground. Two hours ago a couple of young men came down the narrow Rue de la Lune and joined the lonely watcher. There was some whispered conversation between the three of them, after which they all remained silent at their post, and from the height on which

they stood they scanned the crowd to right and left of them with ever-increasing anxiety. But there was no sign of any of the five hundred accomplices who were to aid de Batz in his crazy scheme of saving the King. As a matter of fact, de Batz didn't know that in the early hours of the morning most of those five hundred had been roused from sleep by peremptory knocks at their door. A couple of gendarmes had then entered their apartment with orders to keep them under observation, and not to allow them outside their houses until past midday. De Batz and the two friends who were with him now had spent the night talking and scheming in a tavern on the Boulevard and thus escaped this domiciliary visit. They could not understand what had happened, and as time went on they fell to cursing their fellow-conspirators for their treachery or cowardice. Time went on, leaden-footed but inexorable. From the direction of the Temple prison there had already come the ominous sound of the roll of drums, soon followed by the rumble of carriage wheels.

Fog and sleet blurred the distant outline of the Boulevard, but soon through the vaporous mist de Batz and his friends could perceive the vanguard of the military cortège. First the mounted gendarmerie, barring the whole width of the street, then the grenadiers of the National Guard, then the artillery, followed by the drummers, and finally the carriage itself, hermetically closed with shutters against the windows, and round it and behind it more and more troops, more cannon and drummers and grenadiers. De Batz and his friends saw the march past. Luckily for them their five hundred adherents were not there to shout and wave their arms and attempt to break through a cordon of soldiery stronger than any that had ever marched through the streets of a city before. The three men were soon submerged in the crowd that moved and surged in the direction of the Place de la Révolution.

Here in front of the guillotine the carriage came to a halt. The Place

de la Révolution behind the troops was crowded with idlers who were trying to get a view of the awe-inspiring spectacle. It was a great thing to see a king on trial for his life. It was a still greater thing to see him die.

The carriage door was opened. General Santerre commanded a general beating of drums as the King of France mounted the steps of the guillotine. The Abbé Edgeworth was close beside his King, still murmuring the Prayers for the Dying.

It was all over in a moment. Louis tried to say a few words to his people protesting his innocence, but Santerre cried "Tambours!" once more and the roll of drums drowned those last words of the dying monarch. The axe fell. There were shouts of "Vive la République!" there were caps raised on bayonets, hats were waved, and an excited crowd made a rush for the scaffold as the executioner held up the dead monarch's head. Handkerchiefs were dipped in the blood. Locks of hair were cut off the head and sold by the executioner for pieces of silver. There followed half an hour of frantic excitement, during which men shrieked and women screamed, men tumbled over one another trying to rush up the steps of the guillotine, and were hurled down again by the executioner and his aides, while missiles of every kind flew over the heads of this singing, waving, tumultuous mob. The din was incessant and drowned the intermittent roll of drums and the shouts of command from the officers to the soldiery.

And throughout all this uproar the Abbé Edgeworth remained on his knees, on the spot where last he had a sight of his King, and had urged this son of St. Louis to mount serenely up to heaven. He paid no attention to all the wild screaming and roaring, or to the occasional cries: "A la lanterne le calotin!" which were hurled threateningly at his calm kneeling figure.

"A moi le calotin!" came at one time with a roar like that of an

unchained bull, quite close to his ear.

"Non, à moi!"

"À moi! à moi!"

It just went through the abbé's mind that some in the crowd were thirsting for his blood, that they would presently drag him to the guillotine, and that he would be sent to his death in just the same way as his King had been. But the thought did not frighten him. He went on mumbling his prayers, until suddenly he felt himself seized round the shoulders and lifted off his knees, while a frantic crowd still cried: "A la lanterne le calotin!" in the intervals of roaring with laughter. The last thing he heard was a shout from the executioner: "I sell Capet's breeches for twenty livres, his coat for thirty his shoes..."

In the excitement of security these relics the tumultuous crowd forgot the calotin, so wild a rush was there for the platform of the guillotine, where the gruesome auction was about to take place. The abbé by now was only half conscious. He felt the pushing and the jostling all round him, and then a heavy cloak or shawl was wrapped all round him, through which all the hideous sounds became more and more muffled and subdued, till they ceased altogether, and he finally completely lost consciousness.

On the Place de la Révolution, this half-hour of frantic excitement gradually passed away. Presently the troops departed and the crowd gradually dispersed. Men returned to their usual avocations, went to restaurants and cafés, bought, sold and bartered, as if this 21st day of January, 1793, had not been one of the most stupendous ones in the whole course of history.

In the Hall of the Convention members of the Government rubbed their hands together, and deputies called to one another across the

room "C'est fait, c'est fait!" "It is done!" The great thing is done. A king has died on the scaffold like a common criminal for having conspired against the liberty of his people.

It was not until evening that the Convention in Committee decided that the priest who had received the last confessions of Louis Capet had better be put out of the way. He was not the man whom the Government had chosen for the purpose. Who knows what strange and uncomfortable things Louis Capet may have confided to him at the last? Anyway, he was better dead than alive, the committee decided, and the police was instructed to proceed at once with his arrest.

But somehow or other in the turmoil which immediately followed the execution of Louis Capet, the Abbé Edgeworth had disappeared.

5 THE LEVETS OF CHOISY

The Levet family at this time was composed of four members. The old man Charles he was actually not more than fifty but had always been known as "old Levet" as against his eldest son "young Levet," of whom more anon. The old man, then, was by profession a herbalist; his work took him out into the meadows and the mountains and along the river-banks to collect the medicinal herbs required by the druggists. This kind of life lonely of necessity for the most part had made him silent and introspective. He had lived with Nature and knew her every mood: nothing in her frightened him: frosts, snows, thunderstorms were his friends. He did not fear them: he communed with them. Outside nature, two loves had filled his life: his wife and his eldest son. "Young Levet," who was a lieutenant in the Royal Guard, was killed while defending the Tuileries attacked by the mob in August '92. "Old Levet" was never the same man after that. Sparing of words before, he became taciturn and morose. His wife never recovered from the shock. She had a paralytic stroke and had hovered between life and death ever since, unable to speak, unable to move, her great, dark eyes alone reflecting the mental anguish which news from Paris of the horrors of the Revolution caused to her enfeebled mind. Both she and her husband, like their beloved eldest son, were ardent royalists, and poor Henriette Levet had very nearly died when she heard other members of her family or friends speak of the trial of the King and the possibility of his death.

The second and now only son of the Levets, Augustin, was a priest, attached to Saint-Sulpice. Like his father, he was sparing of words save in the exercise of his calling. Whatever time he was able to spare from his duties in the parish, he spent with his mother, reading to her from books of devotion or the Lives of Saints, in a dull, dispassionate voice from which the poor sick woman did not seem to derive much comfort. On the other hand, Blanche, the daughter of the

Levet, did her best to bring an atmosphere not exactly of cheerfulness, as that seemed impossible, but of distraction and of brightness into the Levet household. She was pretty, not yet twenty, and young men gathered round her like flies round a honey-pot. Her brother's constant admonitions that she should take life seriously had little effect on her mercurial temperament. In order not to come in conflict with her family and most of the friends who frequented her father's house, she professed, enthusiasm for the royalist cause, and as she had a quick, inventive brain she knew how to exhibit loyalty for the King and horror at his misfortunes. But it was all very much on the surface; her political views, such as they were, did not interfere with her ready acceptance of the homage of young men of avowedly revolutionary opinions such, for instance, as Louis Maurin, the young lawyer who was very much in love with Blanche and very much in awe of her papa, two reasons which caused him to keep his way of thinking to himself. "Old Levet" did not actually forbid Louis Maurin the house, but he did not encourage the young man's visits; however, when he did come, which was as often as he dared, Louis was very discreet, and Blanche's provocative smile caused him to endure patiently the old man's wrathful glances, whenever politics cropped up as subject of conversation.

As a matter of fact, Blanche did no more than flirt with young Maurin, as she did with anything that wore breeches and avowed admiration for her. The youth of Choisy mostly did. All except the local doctor, Simon Pradel of Provençal parentage, erudite, good-looking, athletic, and immensely popular in the commune where, with a small fortune left to him by an uncle whom he had never seen, he had founded and endowed a hospital for sick children. He came frequently to the house in his capacity as doctor to Madame Levet: the poor woman's large eyes spoke the welcome that her lips could not utter, and he was the only man with whom "old Levet" cared to have what he called a talk, which meant that he listened with

sympathy and even an occasional smile to what the young doctor had to say.

Blanche did more than listen on those occasions, and both with smiles and glances she showed Pradel that his visits were welcome, although, as with all her admirers, she did no more than flirt with this one also. But strangely enough, the young man remained impervious to the spoilt beauty's blandishments, and his manner towards her was no different from that which he displayed towards Marie Bachelier, the maid of all work. In Choisy itself Pradel was called by some a misanthrope and even a woman-hater, but there were others who declared that they had seen Dr. Pradel roaming o' nights in the purlieus of the Château de la Rodière, in the hope, so they said, of catching a glimpse of Mademoiselle Cécile. Some of this tittle-tattle did not fail to reach pretty Blanche Levet's ears, and it is an uncontrovertible axiom that pique will always enkindle love. Jealousy too played its part in this sudden wakening of Blanche's unsophisticated heart. Certain it is that what had been at first little else than warm-hearted sympathy for the young doctor became something very like infatuation, almost in the turn of a hand.

6 NEWS

This 21st day of January had been one of unmitigated terror and despair for the inmates of the Levets' house at Choisy. Old Levet had gone out quite early in the morning. With snow on the ground and a fog lying thick over the river and the meadows he could not gather herbs and simples and follow his usual avocation. What he wanted above all, however, was to be alone, and then to wander into the town in search of news. News!! What this day and its destined terrible event meant to a man of Levet's convictions can scarcely be conceived. To him the execution of the King of France by the sentence of the people was nothing short of sacrilege, a crime only one degree less impious than that committed on Calvary. Old Levet wanted to be the first to hear the news. Unless a miracle happened at the eleventh hour he knew that it would surpass in horror anything that had ever occurred before in history. And he knew that he would have to break that news to his wife. If he didn't tell her, she would guess, and when she knew she would surely die.

And so the old man really old now though he was no more than fifty wandered out into the streets of Choisy alone, communing with himself, trying all in vain to steel himself against the awful blow that was sure to fall. All the morning he wandered aimlessly. But at ten o'clock he came to a halt. There was something in the air that told him that the awesome deed was accomplished: it was a distant rumbling that sounded like a roll of thunder; but Levet knew in his heart that it was the roll of drums, announcing to the world that the head of a King of France had fallen under the guillotine. And in his heart he felt acute physical pain, and a sudden intense hatred for the people all around him. They knew just as well as he did what had happened. Some of them had paused with finger uplifted, listening to that something in the air which was quite undefinable. There was a café close by. The proprietor had taken down the shutters a quarter

of an hour ago. Customers had quickly flocked in. There was quite a crowd in there. And suddenly when that distant roll had died away, those inside set up a loud cheer. It was taken up by a few passers-by while others stood still, mute, as if awe had turned them to stone. Old Levet fled down the street. It led to the river and the bridge. At the bridge-head he stopped. There was a corner-stone there; he sat down on it and waited. He had risen very early in the morning, and when he opened the front door of his house, he saw a note weighted down with a stone lying on the doorstep. He stooped and picked it up and read it, well knowing where the note came from. He had had several like it before, usually giving him instructions how to help in a deed of mercy. He had always been ready to help and to obey those instructions, for they came from a man whom he only knew vaguely as a professor at some university, but whom he respected above all men he had ever come across. Charles Levet had always given what help he could, often at considerable risk to himself.

The note to-day also gave him instructions, very simple ones this time. All it said was: "Wait at the bridge-head from noon till dusk." It was only ten o'clock as yet, but old Levet didn't care. What were hours to him, now that such an awful calamity had sullied the fair name of France for ever? He was numb with cold and fatigue, but he didn't care. He just sat there, waiting and watching, with lack-lustre eyes, the stream of traffic go by over the bridge. Crowds were returning from Paris on foot, on horse-back or in cabriolets. They had been up in the capital "to see the show." They were talking and laughing quite naturally, as if they had been to a theatre or a race-meeting. Old Levet drew his cape closer round his shoulders, and closed his aching eyes. The cold had made him drowsy.

A distant church clock had struck four when out of the crowd of passers-by two figures detached themselves and made straight for the corner-stone where old Levet was sitting, waiting patiently. A tall

figure and a short one: two men, both dressed in black and wrapped in heavy capes against the cold. Levet shook himself out of his torpor. The taller of the two men helped him struggle to his feet, and then said:

"This is the Abbé Edgeworth, Charles. He was with His Majesty until the last."

"We'll go straight home," Levet responded simply. "It is cold here, and Monsieur l'Abbé is welcome."

Without another words the three men started to walk back through the town. It was characteristic of Levet that he made no further comment, nor did he ask a question. He walked briskly, ahead of the other two, looking neither to right nor left. The priest appeared to be in a state of exhaustion; his tall friend held him tightly by the arm, to enable him to walk at all. At a distance of some hundred metres or so from his house old Levet came to a halt. He waited till the other came close to him, then he said simply:

"My wife is very ill. She knows nothing yet. Perhaps she guesses. But I must prepare her. Will you wait here?"

It was quite dark now, and the fog very dense. Levet's shrunken figure was quickly lost to view.

7 MONSIEUR LE PROFESSEUR

The Levet's house stood about four metres back from the road, behind a low wall which was surmounted by an iron railing. An iron grille gave access to a tiny front garden, intersected by a narrow brick path which led to the front door. Charles Levet went into the house, closing the door noiselessly. He took off his cloak, and went straight into the sitting-room. It adjoined his wife's bedroom. The double communicating doors were wide open, and he could see the invalid stretched out on her bed, with her thin arms spread outside the coverlet. Her great dark eyes looked agonizingly expectant. Her son Augustin was on his knees beside the bed, murmuring half-audible prayers. As soon as she caught sight of her husband, she guessed that all was over, and the unforgivable crime had been committed. Old Levet knew that she guessed. He came quickly to the bedside. An ashen-grey hue spread over the dying woman's face, and a film gathered over her eyes.

"The doctor," old Levet commanded, speaking to his son.

"Too late," Augustin responded without rising from his knees; "her soul has fled to God!" He turned over a page in his book of devotion and began reciting the Prayers for the Dead.

Levet stooped and kissed his dead wife's forehead. Then he reverently closed her eyes. The shock, even though she had expected it, had killed her. The death of her eldest son had stretched her on a bed of sickness, the death of her King had brought about the end. The horror of the deed, the knowledge of the appalling sacrilege had snapped the attenuated thread that held her to life.

Levet broke in, with some impatience, on his son's orisons:

"Where is your sister?" he asked.

"She went out a few moments ago to fetch Pradel. I could see that my mother was passing away, so I sent her."

"She shouldn't have gone out alone at night, in this fog, too...."

"She wasn't alone," the young priest rejoined, "Louis Maurin was with her."

At mention of the name the old man flared up: "You don't mean to tell me that, to-day of all days, that renegade was in my house?"

Augustin gave an indifferent shrug. His father went on with unabated vehemence: "With your mother lying on the point of death, Augustin, you should not have allowed this outrage."

"Communion with the dying," the priest retorted, "was of greater import than political quarrels. Maurin didn't stay long," he went on; "I had to send for Pradel, I wanted him to go. But Blanche insisted on going herself. But what does it all matter, Father? In face of what happened to-day, what does anything matter in this sinful world?"

This was the only indication Augustin Levet gave that he, too, felt acutely the horror of the crime that had been committed that morning, and had been the direct cause of his mother's death. Having said that much, he resumed his orisons, and in the room where the dead woman lay there fell a solemn silence, only broken by the dull sound of the young priest's muttered prayers.

Charles Levet remained standing, silent and almost motionless by the bedside of his dead wife. Then he turned abruptly and went through the sitting-room out into the street. Some two hundred metres up the road he came on Blakeney and the priest who were waiting for

him. The latter by now was scarcely able to stand; he was leaning heavily against the Englishman's shoulder.

Levet said simply: "My wife is dead," and then added: "Come, Monsieur l'Abbé, you are welcome! And you too, Monsieur le Professeur."

Between them the two men supported the tottering footsteps of the abbé, almost carried him, in fact, as far as the grille. Here the three men came to a halt, and Blakeney said:

"I think Monsieur l'Abbé will be all right now. When he has had some food and a short rest, he will be able to come with me as far as the château. Monsieur le Marquis will look after him the rest of the night and," he added speaking to the priest, "we hope within the next twenty-four hours, Monsieur l'Abbé, to have you well on the way to permanent safety."

"I don't know," the abbé murmured feebly, "how to show my gratitude to you, sir. You and your friends were heroic in dragging me away from that cruel mob. I don't even know who you are yet you saved my life at risk of your own why you did it I cannot guess—"

"Don't try, Monsieur l'Abbé," Blakeney broke in quietly, "and reserve your gratitude for my friend Charles Levet, without whose loyalty my friends and I would have been helpless."

He gave Levet's hand a friendly squeeze and opened the grille for the two men to pass through. He waited a moment or two till they reached the front door, and was on the point of turning to go when he was confronted by two figures which had just emerged out of the fog. One of them was Blanche Levet. Blakeney raised his hat and she exclaimed:

"If it isn't Monsieur le Professeur? Why! What are you doing in Choisy, Monsieur, at this time of night?"

She turned to her companion and went on still lightly and inconsequently:

"Louis, don't you know Monsieur le Professeur-"

"D'Arblay," Blakeney put in, as Blanche had paused, not knowing the name of her father's friend, who had always been referred to in the house as Monsieur le Professeur. "No," he continued, turning to the young lawyer, "I have not yet had the honour of meeting Monsieur I mean Citizen-"

"Maurin," Blanche broke in, "Louis Maurin, and now you know each other's names, will you both come in and-"

"Not now, Mademoiselle," Blakeney said, "Madame Levet is too ill to-"

"My mother is dead," Blanche rejoined quietly. "I went to fetch Docteur Pradel, because Augustin wished me to, but I knew then already that she was dead."

She spoke without any emotion. Evidently no great tie of filial love bound her to her sick mother.

She murmured a quick "Good night," however. Blakeney held the grille open for her, and she ran swiftly into the house.

The two men waited a moment or two until they heard the door of the house close behind the young girl. Then Maurin said:

"Are you going back to Choisy, Citizen?" When Blakeney replied with a curt "Yes!" the lawyer continued: "May I walk with you part of

the way? I am going into the town myself."

On the way down the street Louis Maurin did most of the talking. He spoke of the great event of the day, but did so in a sober, quiet manner. Evidently he did not belong to the Extremist Party, or an any rate did not wish to appear as anything but a moderate and patriotic Republican. Blakeney answered in mono-syllables. He knew little, he said, about politics; science, he said, was a hard taskmaster who monopolized all his time. Arrived opposite the Café Tison on the Grand' Place, he was about to take his leave when Maurin insisted that they should drink a fine together. Blakeney hesitated for a few seconds; then he suddenly made up his mind and he and the young lawyer went into the café together.

Louis Maurin had begun to interest him.

8 MAURIN THE LAWYER

There was quite a crowd in the café. A number of idlers and quidnuncs had drifted out by now from Paris, bringing with them news of the great event and of the minor happenings that clustered round it. Lepelletier, the rich and noted deputy who had voted for "Death with no delay," had been assassinated by an unknown and fanatical royalist while he sat at dinner in a fashionable restaurant. His funeral would be on the morrow. Philippe d'Orléans, now known as Philippe Égalité, Louis Capet's own cousin, had driven in a smart cabriolet to the Place de la Révolution, and watched his kinsman's head fall under the guillotine. "A good patriot, what?" was the universal comment on his attitude. The priest who had been with Capet to the last had mysteriously disappeared at the very moment when, in the Hall of Justice, a decree had been promulgated ordering his arrest. He was, it seems, a dangerous conspirator whom traitors in the pay of Austria had sent to the Temple prison as a substitute for the priest chosen by the Convention to attend on Louis Capet. This news was received with execration. But the priest could not have gone far. The police would soon get him, and he would then pay his second visit to Madame la Guillotine with no chance of paying her a third.

That was the general trend of conversation in the Café Tison: the telling of news and the comments thereon. Louis Maurin and Blakeney had secured a table in a quiet corner of the room; they ordered coffee and fine, and the lawyer told the waiter to bring him pen, ink and paper. These were set before him. He said a polite "Will you excuse me?" to his vis-à-vis before settling down to write. When he had finished what appeared to be a longish letter, he slipped it into an envelope, closed and addressed it, and then summoned the waiter back. He handed him the letter, together with some small money, and said peremptorily:

"There is a commissionaire outside. Give him this and tell him to take it at once to the Town Hall."

The waiter said: "Yes, Citizen!" and went out with the letter, after which short incident the two men sat on silently opposite one another for a time, sipping their coffee and fine, watching the bustling crowd around them, and listening to the chatter, the comments and expressions of approval and disapproval more or less ear-splitting, as the news the quidnuncs brought were welcome or the reverse.

And suddenly Maurin came out with an abrupt question:

"Who was that with old Levet just now, Monsieur le Professeur?" he asked. "Do you happen to know? He was dressed like a priest. I am sure I saw a cassock."

He blurted this out in a loud, rasping voice, almost as if he felt irritated by Monsieur le Professeur's composure and desired to upset it. He did not know, astute lawyer through he was, that he was sitting opposite a man whom no power on earth could ever ruffle or disturb. The man to him was just a black-coated worker like himself, professor at some university or other, a Frenchman, of course, judging from his precise and highly cultured speech.

"I saw no one," Blakeney replied simply. "Perhaps it was a priest called in to attend Madame Levet. You heard Mademoiselle Blanche say that her mother was dying."

"Dead, I understood," Maurin commented dryly. "But Levet, anyhow, had no need to send for a priest. His own son is a calotin."

"Indeed? Then it must have been the doctor."

"The doctor? No, Blanche and I went to fetch Docteur Pradel, but he

was not in."

Maurin remained silent for a minute or two and then said decisively:

"I am sure or nearly sure that it was not Pradel. Of course the fog was very dense and I may have been mistaken. But I don't think I was. At any rate..."

He paused, and thoughtfully sipped his coffee over the rim of his cup; he seemed to be watching his vis-à-vis very intently.

Suddenly he said:

"I shall be going to the Town Hall presently. Will you accompany me, Monsieur le Professeur?"

"To the Town Hall?" I regret, but I..."

"It won't take up much of your time," the young lawyer insisted, "and your presence would be very helpful to me."

"How so?"

"As a witness."

"Would you mind explaining? I don't quite understand."

Maurin called for another fine, drank it down at a gulp and went on:

"Should I be boring you, Monsieur le Professeur, if I were to tell you something of my own sentimental history. You are, I know, an intimate friend of the Levets, and my story is closely connected with theirs. Shall I be boring you?" he reiterated.

"Not in the least," Blakeney answered courteously.

The younger man leaned across the table and lowering his voice to a whisper he began:

"I love Blanche Levet. My great desire is to make her my wife. Unfortunately her father hates me like poison. Though I am a moderate, if convinced Republican, he classes me with all those he calls assassins and regicides." He paused a moment, then once more insisted: "You are quite sure that this does not bore you, Monsieur le Professeur?"

"Quite sure," Blakeney replied.

"You are very kind. I was hoping to enlist your sympathy, perhaps your co-operation, because Blanche has often told me that old Levet has a great regard for you."

"And I for him."

"Quite so. Now, my dear Professeur," the lawyer went on confidentially, "when I saw just now old Levet introducing a man surreptitiously into his house, a scheme suggested itself to me which fervently hope will bring about my union with the woman of my choice. I cannot tell you what put it into my head that Levet was acting surreptitiously, all I know is that the thought did occur to me, and that it gave rise in my mind to the scheme which, with your permission, I will now put before you, with a view to soliciting your kind co-operation. Will you allow me to proceed?"

"Please do," Blakeney responded. "You interest me enormously."

"You are very kind."

Once more the lawyer paused. The noise in the room made conversation difficult. He leaned farther over the table, and went on

still in a subdued tone of voice:

"Whether the man who was with Charles Levet just now, and whom he took into his house, was a genuine priest or not, I neither know nor care. He may be the fugitive Abbé Edgeworth for aught it matters to me. I am practically certain that it wasn't the doctor, but anyway he is just a pawn in the close game which I propose to play, a game, the ultimate stakes of which are my future welfare and success of my career. Old Levet has more money than you would think," he added unblushingly, "and Blanche, besides being very attractive I am really in love with her will have a considerable dot, whilst I..."

He gave a significant shrug and added: "Well! We understand one another, do we not, Monsieur le Professeur? With us black-coated workers money is the only ladder to success."

"Quite so," Blakeney assented imperturbably.

"Anyway, what I am going to do is this. I have just sent a letter to the Chief of Section at the Town Hall, denouncing the Levet family as harbouring a traitor in their house. I enjoy a great deal of prestige with our local authorities and they will take my word for it that the Levets' guest is a dangerous conspirator against the Republic. Now do you guess my purpose?"

"Not exactly."

"It is really quite simple. Just think for a moment how we shall all stand within the next few hours. Levet, his daughter, his son and his guest arrested. I, Louis Maurin, using my influence with the authorities to get the family liberated. Levet's gratitude expressed by granting me his daughter's hand in marriage. Surely you can see how splendidly it will all work."

"Not quite," Blakeney remarked after a slight pause.

"Where's the hitch?"

"I was thinking of the guest. Will your influence be extended towards his liberation also?"

"Oh!" the lawyer replied airily, "I am not going to trouble myself about him. If nothing is proved against him, if he is really just a constitutional priest called in to administer the sacraments to a dying woman, he will get his release without interference on my part."

"He may not."

The lawyer shrugged. "Anyway, he will have to take his chance. My dear friend," he went on with an affected sigh, "a great many heads will fall within the next few days, weeks, months perhaps; are we not on the eve of far bigger things than have occurred as yet? One head more or less...what does it matter?"

To this Blakeney made no immediate reply; and presently the young lawyer resumed, putting all the persuasiveness he could command into his tone:

"You will not refuse me your co-operation, will you, Monsieur le Professeur."

"You will pardon me," Blakeney responded, "but you have not yet told me what you desire me to do."

"Just for the moment, only to come with me as far as the Town Hall, and bear witness to the fact that old Levet introduced a man surreptitiously into his house this afternoon."

"But I don't know that he did."

Maurin shrugged. "Does that matter," he queried blandly, "between friends?"

Then, as Monsieur le Professeur made no comment on this amazing suggestion, he continued glibly:

"It is all perfectly simple, my dear Professeur, as you will see, and nothing that will happen need upset your over-sensitive conscience. I will merely call upon you to confirm with a word or two, my statement that Charles Levet introduced some one furtively into his house, at the very time when his wife was breathing her last. There will be no question of an oath or anything of the sort, just a few words. But we will both insist that Levet's actions were furtive. Won't we? I can reckon on you for this, can I not, my dear friend? I may call you my friend, may I not?"

"If you like."

"You really are most kind. And you will plead my cause with old Levet when my marriage with Blanche comes on the tapis presently, won't you, my friend? Funnily enough I felt you were going to be my friend the moment I sat down at this table opposite to you. But then Blanche had often spoken to me about you, and in what high regard her father held you... Well!" he concluded, after he had paused for breath for a few seconds, "what do you say?" and his eyes glowing and eager, fastened themselves on the other's face.

By way of an answer Blakeney rose.

"That the doors of the Town Hall will be closed against us, unless we hurry," he replied with a smile.

Maurin drew a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"Then you really are coming with me?" he exclaimed, and jumped to his feet. He beckoned to the waiter, and there ensued a friendly little dispute as to who should pay the bill, a dispute from which the lawyer gracefully retired, leaving his newly-found friend to settle both the bill and the gratuity. While he reached for his hat and cloak he just went on talking, talking as if something in his brain had let loose a veritable flood-gate of eloquence. He talked and he talked, and never noticed that Monsieur le Professeur, in the interval of settling with the waiter, had scribbled a few lines on the back of the bill, and kept the crumpled bit of paper in the hollow of his hand. He piloted the voluble talker through the shrieking and gesticulating crowd as far as the door.

The next moment the two men were out in the Place. The fog seemed more dense than ever. As the Town Hall was at some distance from the Café Tison they started to walk briskly across the wide-open space. It was almost deserted, every one having taken refuge against the cold and the damp in the brilliantly-lighted restaurants and cafés: all except a group of three or four slouchy-looking fellows clad in the promiscuous garments affected by the irregular Republican Guard. They were standing outside the Café Tison, very much in the way of the customers who went in or out, and had to be jostled and pushed aside by Monsieur le Professeur before he and Louis Maurin could get past.

9 ORDERS FROM THE CHIEF

Maurin was walking on ahead while he and Monsieur le Professeur crossed the Grand' Place. In the centre of the open space there was at that time a monumental fountain to which a short flight of circular steps gave access. In addition to the fog, a sharp frost now made progress difficult. The ground, covered with a thin layer of half- melted snow, was very slippery, especially around the fountain which, though not playing at this hour, had been going all day, and had scattered spray all around, so that the steps and the pavement around it were covered with a sheet of ice.

Maurin was treading warily. He nearly slipped at one point, and was just in time to save himself from falling. He called out a quick "Take care!" to his companion. But the warning came, apparently, just a few seconds too late, for in answer to his call there came a sudden cry, accompanied by a few vigorous swear words, quite unlike the usual pedantic speech of Monsieur le Professeur. The lawyer turned round at once and saw that learned gentleman sprawling on the ground.

"Whatever has happened?" he queried with ill-disguised impatience.

It was pretty obvious. Monsieur le Professeur lay, groaning, across the steps.

"Can't you get up?" the lawyer asked tartly.

"I'll try," the other replied. Apparently he made a genuine effort to rise, but fell back again groaning piteously.

"But," Maurin insisted with distinct acerbity, "I have to be at the Town Hall before six. It is ten minutes to now, and it is a good step down to

the Rue Haute. Can't you make an effort?"

"I'm afraid not. I think I have broken my ankle. I couldn't walk, unless you supported me."

"Then we should get to the Town Hall too late," the other retorted. "What's to be done?"

"You go, my friend, and I will follow as soon as I can. I dare say I can enlist the assistance of a passer-by to find me a cabriolet, and you can keep the Chief of Section talking till I come."

"Well, if you don't mind being left..."

"No, no! You go! I'll come along as quickly as possible."

"There's a fellow coming this way now. Shall I call him?"

"Thank you. If you will."

He seemed in great pain, and unable to move. A man in blouse and tattered breeches, apparently one of the irregular Republican Guard who had been hanging round the café, loomed out of the fog, and came slouching along towards the fountain. Maurin hailed him.

"My friend is hurt," he said quickly; "will you look after him and bring him to the Town Hall as soon as you can? He will pay you well."

The man came nearer. He mumbled something about a cabriolet.

"Yes, yes!" Maurin acquiesced eagerly. "Try and get one. Don't wait! Run!"

After which peremptory order he turned once more to Monsieur le Professeur.

"You will not fail me, will you?" he insisted.

"No, no! I'll be with you as soon as I can. I promise."

Whereupon the lawyer finally went his way. He fog soon wrapped him up, out of sight, for he crossed the Place now almost at a run. How surprised, not to say gravely disturbed, he would have been, if he had been gifted with second sight, and seen Monsieur le Professeur rise at once and without any effort to his feet, apparently quite unhurt. The fellow in blouse and tattered breeches was quite close to him again, and asked anxiously: "You are not really hurt, are you, Percy?"

"Of course not, you idiot," Blakeney replied with a light laugh. "Tell me! Have the others gone?"

"Tony and Hastings went straight to the Levets, according to your orders. I suppose you scribbled the note while you were in the café."

"As best I could. You deciphered it all right?"

"Yes! Tony and Hastings will take charge of the abbé. The three of us are dressed in these rags as Irregulars of the Republican Guard. Tony has actually got a tricolour scarf round his middle. He and Hastings will formally arrest the abbé and take him at once to La Rodière. Devinne went first to headquarters to change into his own clothes and then will go on straight to the château in a cabriolet to prepare the Marquise and his family for the arrival of the priest. Hastings or Tony will try to get in a word with old man Levet to assure him that everything is by your orders. That is right, isn't it?"

"Quite all right. Now you go on to the château yourself, my good fellow, and wait for me there. Tell the others as soon as they have

seen the abbé safely in the bosom of the La Rodière family, to take up their stand with you just outside the château gates. I will be there too as soon as I possibly can."

"Right!"

"You know your way?"

"I'll find it."

And so they parted: one going to the right, the other to the left. Both were soon swallowed up by the fog. A cabriolet came lumbering along presently. Blakeney hailed him, and ordered the driver to take him to the Town Hall.

10 THE ABBÉ EDGEWORTH

Chance favoured the two members of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, my Lord Hastings and Lord Anthony Dewhurst. They had their orders from the chief and went straight to the Levets' house, and it was Levet himself who opened the door to them in answer to their ring at the outside bell. Briefly they told him who had sent them and what their orders were, and the old man went at once in search of his guest. The Abbé Edgeworth had in the meanwhile enjoyed Charles Levet's hospitality: he had had food, a little drink and a short rest, but he still appeared dazed and aghast, as if moonstruck and awed by everything that had happened to him since dawn the sudden call to attend his King, that terrible drive through Paris with the population silent and the clatter of thousands of armed men all around! Then the supreme moment when he had seen his King strapped to that hideous guillotine. He had made a crowning effort to smother his own horror and indignation and to speak to the martyred King a last word of encouragement: he had raised the crucifix and called out in a loud voice: "Son of St. Louis, ascend to heaven!" Nor had he faltered while that heinous crime was committed, which called to Heaven for vengeance, the crime that could never hope for forgiveness, the sin against the Holy Ghost!

After that everything had been turmoil and confusion: he had tried to concentrate on his devotions, to recite the Prayers for the Dead, but all round him men shouted and women shrieked, and sacrilegious hands were laid on the dead body of his King. He tried to pray, for he was not afraid, although there were shouts of "A la lanterne, le calotin!" He was not afraid. He was ready to follow the son of St. Louis on the path to heaven. Rough hands seized him, and dragged him down the steps of the guillotine. Hideous faces leered at him from above. He must have partly lost consciousness when he felt himself raised on powerful shoulders and thought that he was being

taken straight to the nearest lamp-post with a halter round his neck.

The next thing he remembered was walking through the fog, in company with a man who held him up while he walked: the man, apparently, who had rescued him from the howling mob. And then the warmth and comfort of this hospitable house: kind voices uttering words of welcome, a warm drink, a bed on which to stretch his aching limbs. And now this kind old man telling him that all was well: powerful friends would take him to La Rodière where he would be received with open arms, and where he could remain until such time as a more permanent refuge could be found for him. The abbé was bewildered. Who, he asked, were those wonderful friends who had rescued him at peril of their own lives, and now continued their work of mercy? But Levet couldn't tell him. He spoke vaguely of a man who was professor at a university and seemed to have marvellous courage, and limitless resources. He himself had only known him a little while. Who he was, he couldn't say. He came and went mysteriously and equally mysteriously would invariably be on the spot when innocent men, women or children's lives were threatened. His dead wife had looked upon the man as a messenger from heaven. There was no time to say more just now. Old Levet urged the abbé to hurry.

A moment or two later he was standing once again at the gate of his house, watching three figures move away up the road. They looked like shadows in the fog. One of them was the Abbé Edgeworth. Levet didn't know the others. They had spoken to him in French, bringing a message from that mysterious Professor whom his dead wife had looked on as a messenger from heaven.

"Be sure," the priest had said when he finally took leave of his kind host, "be sure that he has a mandate from God."

These two who were emissaries of the Professor, had spoken French with a foreign accent. Levet thought they must have been

English. But then it seemed incredible that foreigners would take any interest in the sufferings of Frenchmen who were loyal to their King. Englishmen especially. Why should they care? This awful revolution over here had nothing to do with them. Some people went so far as to assert that the English would soon declare war against France that is to say, not against France but against this abominable Republic which had established itself on a foundation of outrage and murder. Anyway, it was all quite inexplicable. Old Levet went indoors, very perplexed and shaking his head. He went straight into the room where his wife lay dead. Earlier in the day he had helped his daughter to set lighted candles at the head and foot of the bed and to dispose sprays of some everlasting shrub round the inert body of her who had been his life's companion for twenty-five years. Her hands were now reverently clasped round a crucifix.

Augustin was still in the room when Levet entered. He was talking in a subdued tone to a tall young man who had a tablet in his hand on which he was apparently making notes with a point of black lead. He was dressed in black from head to foot, with plain white frills at throat and wrists: he wore high boots, and his own hair, innocent of wig, was tied at the nape of the neck with a black bow. Apparently Levet knew that he was there, for he took no notice of him when he entered the room.

The young man, however, at once put tablet and pencil into his pocket and turned as if to go.

"Don't go, Pradel," Levet said curtly; "supper will be ready directly."

"If you will pardon me, Monsieur Levet," the other responded, "I will just say good night to Mademoiselle Blanche. I have been summoned to the château, and am already rather late.

"Some one ill up there?" the old man queried.

"Seemingly."

"Who is it?"

"They didn't tell me. Monsieur le Marquis's pet dog perhaps," the young doctor added with stinging bitterness, "or his favourite horse."

Levet made no remark on this. He moved to his wife's bedside, and Simon Pradel after bidding him and Augustin good night, went out of the room.

Blanche was in the sitting-room, apparently waiting for him.

"You are not going, Simon?" she asked eagerly as soon as he came through the door.

"I am afraid I must, Mademoiselle."

"Can't you stay and have supper with us?" she insisted so earnestly this time, that her voice shook a little and a few tears gathered in her eyes.

"I am sorry," he replied gently, "but I really must go."

"Why?"

He gave a slight shrug. "Professional visit, Mademoiselle," he said.

"You are going to the château," she retorted.

"What makes you say that?" he countered with a smile.

"You have your best clothes on, and your finest linen."

His smile broadened. It was a pleasant smile, which lent to his somewhat stern face a great deal of charm. He looked down ruefully at his well-worn suit of black.

"I have only this one," he said, "and I have great regard for clean linen."

Blanche said nothing for a moment or two. She was very obviously fighting a wave of emotion which caused her lips to quiver, and tears to gather thick and fast in her eyes. And all at once she moved up, close to him, and placed a hand on his arm.

"Don't go to the château, Simon," she entreated.

"My dear, I must. Madame la Marquise might be ill. Besides..."

"Besides what?" And as Simon didn't reply to this challenge, she went on vehemently: "You only go there because you hope to have a word or two with Cécile de la Rodière. You, a distinguished medical man, with medals and degrees from the great universities of Europe, you demean yourself by attending on these people's horses and dogs like any common veterinary lout. Have you no pride, Simon? And all the time you must know that that aristocrat's daughter can never be anything to you."

Pradel remained silent during this vehement tirade. He appeared detached and indifferent, as if the girl's lashing words were not addressed to him. Only the smile had vanished from his face leaving it rather pale and stern. When Blanche had finished speaking, chiefly because the words were choked in her throat, she sank into a chair and dissolved in tears. She cried and sobbed in a veritable paroxysm of grief. Pradel waited in silence till the worst of that paroxysm had passed, then he said gently:

"Mademoiselle Blanche, I am sure you meant kindly by me, when you struck at me with so much contempt and cruelty. I assure you that I bear you no ill-will for what you said just now. With your permission I will call in to-night on my way back from the château to see how your dear father is bearing up. Frankly, I am a little anxious about him. He is no age, but he has a tired heart, and he has had a great deal to endure to-day. Good night, Mademoiselle."

After he had gone Blanche remained for quite a long while, as if prostrate with grief. She was not crying now, but sobs, the aftermath of a flood of tears, shook her shoulders intermittently. Her head ached furiously, and she lay back in the chair, with eyes closed, almost in a state of torpor. From this she was presently aroused by her brother Augustin who came out from his dead mother's room, and seeing the girl there asleep, as he thought he said with some acerbity:

"Have you forgotten that it is supper-time, Blanche?"

Blanche roused herself sufficiently to go into the kitchen and order supper to be brought in at once. They all sat down to table and the old man said grace before he served the soup. They had just begun to eat, when a cabriolet drove up to the grille. A vigorous pull at the outside bell caused old Levet to rise. The family only kept one maid of all work and she was busy dishing up, so he went himself to the door as he most usually did: before he had time to reach the grille, the bell was pulled again.

"I wonder who that can be," Blanche remarked.

"Whoever it is seems in a great hurry," observed her brother.

Old Levet opened the door. Louis Maurin stepped over the threshold. He appeared breathless with excitement. Before Levet

could formulate a question he thrust the old man back into the vestibule, exclaiming:

"Ah! My good friend! Such a calamity! Thank God I am just in time."

"In time for what?" Levet muttered. He had disliked the lawyer at all times, for he looked on him as a traitor and now a regicide, but never had he hated him so bitterly as he did to-day.

"I chanced to be at the Town Hall," Maurin went on, still breathlessly, "and heard that there is an order out for your arrest and I am afraid that the order includes your family and your guest," he concluded significantly.

Levet appeared to take the news with complete indifference. The mock arrest of the Abbé Edgeworth by two emissaries of Monsieur le Professeur had assured him that the priest at any rate had nothing to fear. He gave a slight shrug and said quietly:

"Let them arrest me and my family, if they want to. We are willing to share the fate of our King."

"Don't talk like that, my dear friend," the lawyer admonished earnestly; "such talk has become really dangerous now. And you have your son and daughter to think of."

"They are of one mind with me," Levet retorted gruffly, "and if that is all you have come to say..."

Instinct of hospitality, which with old Levet amounted to a virtue, did prevent his ordering this "traitor" summarily out of his house.

"I came from pure motives of friendship," the young man rejoined, in a tone of gentle reproach, "to warn you of what was impending. The

matter is far more serious than you seem to realize."

"I needed no warning. Loyal people like ourselves must be prepared these days for any calamity."

"But there is your guest..." Maurin put in.

"My guest? What guest?"

"The man you brought to your house this afternoon. The authorities have got to know of this surreptitious visit. It has aroused their suspicion. Hence the order for your arrest and his."

Old Levet gave another shrug.

"There's no one here." He said coolly, "except my son and daughter and the maid."

"Come, come, my dear friend," the lawyer retorted, and his tone became more reproachful, and more gentle like that of a father admonishing his obstinate child, "you must not incriminate yourself by denying indisputable facts. I myself saw you introducing a stranger into your house, and your friend the professor can also bear witness to this."

"I tell you there's no stranger here," old Levet reasserted harshly. "And now I pray you to excuse me. My family waits with supper for me."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the sound of a rumble of wheels accompanied by the tramping of measured footsteps was heard approaching the house. There was a cry of "Halt!" outside the grille and then the usual summons: "In the name of the Republic!" The grille was thrust open, there was more tramping of

heavy feet over the stone path to the house, and loud banging on the massive front door.

"What did I tell you?" Maurin queried. He pushed past old Levet and strode quickly across the vestibule to the dining-room, where at the sound of that ominous call Blanche and Augustin had jumped to their feet. The lawyer put one finger to his lips and murmured rapidly:

"Do not be afraid. I am watching over you all. You have nothing to fear. But tell me quickly, where is the stranger?"

"The stranger?" Augustin responded "What stranger?"

"You know quite well," the other retorted. "Your father's guest, whom he brought here this afternoon."

"There has been no one here all day," Augustin rejoined quietly. "My mother died. Docteur Pradel was here to certify. There has been no one else."

Maurin turned sharply to the girl.

"Blanche," he said earnestly, "tell me the truth. Where is your father's guest?"

"Augustin has told you, Louis," she replied, "there is no one here but ourselves."

"They will search the house, you know," he insisted.

"Let them."

"And question your maid."

"She can only tell them the truth."

The lawyer was decidedly nonplussed. Looking about him, he could not help noticing that only three places were laid round the table, and that there were only three half-empty soup plates, there, while the tureen stood on the sideboard.

Through the door, which was ajar, he could hear old Levet give categorical replies to the questions which the sergeant of the guard put to him.

"There is no one here."

"Only the doctor came this afternoon."

"He came to certify."

"My son and daughter are at supper. My wife is dead. You can question the maid."

Maurin spoke once more to Blanche.

"Mademoiselle," he entreated, "for your own sake, tell me the truth."

"I have told you," she reasserted, "there is no one here except ourselves."

The lawyer smothered the harsh word which came to his lips: he said nothing more, however, turned on his heel and went out of the room.

"What is all this?" he asked curtly of the sergeant.

"You know best, Citizen Lawyer," was the soldier's equally curt reply.

"I?" Maurin retorted unblushingly. "What the devil has it got to do

with me?"

"Well! It was you, I understand, who denounced these people."

"That is a lie. " "Who did then?"

"A friend of the family, Professor d'Arblay."

"Where is he?"

"He had an accident in the road. Sprained his ankle. He had to drive home."

"Where is his home?"

"I don't know. I hardly know him."

"But you were with him in the Town Hall. You were seen coming out of the Chief Commissary's cabinet."

"I was there on professional business," the lawyer retorted tartly, "and you have no right to question me like that. I had nothing to do with this denunciation, as I have the honour of being on friendly terms with this family. And I may as well tell you that I shall use all the influence I possess to clear the whole of this matter up. So you had better behave decently while you are in this house. It won't be good for you if you do not."

He raised his voice and spoke peremptorily like one accustomed to be listened to with deference. But the sergeant seemed unimpressed. All he said was:

"Very well, Citizen. You will act, no doubt, as you thing best in your own interests. I have only my duty to perform."

He gave a quick order to two of his men, who immediately stepped forward and took up their stand one on each side of Charles Levet. The sergeant then crossed the vestibule, and taking no further notice of the lawyer, he went into the dining-room. Blanche and Augustin had resumed their seats at the table. Blanche sat with her chin cupped in her hand. Augustin, his eyes closed, his fingers twined together, seemed absorbed in prayer. In the background Marie, the maid of all work, stood agape like a frightened hen.

The sergeant took a comprehensive survey of the room. He was a stolid-looking fellow, obviously a countryman and not over-endowed with intelligence, and he gave the impression that what he lacked in personality he strove to counterbalance by bluster: the sort of bumpkin, in fact, whom the Revolution had dragged out of obscurity and thrust into some measure of prominence, and who was determined to make the most of his unexpected rise to fortune. He took no further notice of the lawyer, cleared his throat, and announced with due pompousness:

"In the name of the Republic!"

He then unfolded a paper which he had in his hand, and continued:

"I have here a list of all the inmates of this house, as given to the Chief of Section this afternoon, either by Citizen Maurin or his friend the Professor with the sprained ankle, whose address is not known. I will read aloud the names on this list, and each one of you on hearing your name, say the one word. 'Present' and stand at attention. Now then!"

He then proceeded to read and to interpolate comments of his own after every name.

"Charles Levet, herbalist! We have got him safely already. Henriette

his wife! She is dead, I understand. Augustin Levet, priest!... Why don't you answer?" he interposed peremptorily as Augustin had not made the required reply, "and why don't you rise? Have you also got a sprained ankle?"

Augustin then rose obediently and spoke the word:

"Present."

"Blanche Levet, daughter of Charles," the soldier continued.

"Present."

"Marie Bachelier, aide ménage."

"Here I am, Citizen Sergeant," quoth Marie, nearly scared out of her wits.

"And a guest, identity unknown," the soldier concluded. "Where is he?" He rolled up the paper and thrust it into his belt.

"Where is the guest?" he reiterated gruffly, and still receiving no answer, he asked once more: "Where is he?"

He looked round from one to the other, rolling his eyes and clearing his throat in a manner destined to impress these "traitors."

Augustin thereupon said emphatically: "There is no one here." And Blanche shook her pretty head and declared: "No one has been here all day except Citizen Maurin and the Citizen Doctor."

By way of a response to these declarations the sergeant of the Republican Guard turned on his heel and called to the small squad who were standing at attention, some in the vestibule, some outside the front door. To Blanche and Augustin he merely remarked: "We'll

soon see about that." And to old Levet, who was standing patiently between the two soldiers, seemingly quite unmoved by what was going on in his house, he said sternly:

"I am about to order this house to be searched. So let me warn you, Citizen Levet, that if any stranger is found on your premises, it will be a far more serious matter for you and your family than if you had given him up of your own accord."

Old Levet merely shook his head and reiterated simply:

"There is no one here."

The sergeant then ordered his men to proceed with the search. It was thorough. The soldiers did not mince matters. They even invaded the room where Henriette Levet lay dead. They looked under her bed and lifted the sheet which covered her. Old Levet stood by, while this sacrilege was being committed, a silent figure as rigid as the dead. In the dining-room Augustin had once more taken refuge in prayer, while Blanche, half-dazed by all that she had gone through, sank back into a chair, her elbows resting on the table, and her eyes staring into vacancy.

Louis Maurin, as soon as the soldiers were out of the way, came and sat down opposite the young girl. He had remained silent and aloof while this last short episode was going on, but now he leaned over the table and began talking in an impressive whisper:

"Do not be afraid, Mademoiselle Blanche," he said. "I give you my word that nothing serious will happen to your father or to any of you, even if this meddlesome sergeant should discover your anonymous friend in this house. Please, please," he went on earnestly, as Blanche was obviously on the point of renewing her protest that there was no one here, "please say no more. I do firmly believe that you

know nothing of what happened here this afternoon. As for your father Well! You know he is very silent and secretive. He may be sheltering some one who has come under the ban of the authorities. But I insist that you do not worry your pretty head about him, or about yourself and Augustin. I have a great deal of influence at the Commissariat and I give you my word that not later than to-morrow you will all be sitting having supper round this table. There now, let me see you smile. I tell you I can, and will, make the safety of those you care for a personal matter with the authorities. It might prove a little more difficult if your father has been sheltering some one surreptitiously instead of giving him up at once to the guard, but even so I can do it. My word on it, Mademoiselle Blanche."

He was very persuasive and very earnest. The ghost of a smile flitted round Blanche's pretty mouth.

"You are very kind, Louis," she said.

"I would do anything for you, Mademoiselle," the young man responded earnestly.

She sighed and murmured: "I cannot understand the whole thing."

"What can't you understand, Mademoiselle?"

"Monsieur le Professeur. He seemed such a friend. Do you really think that it was he?"

"Who caused all this trouble, you mean?"

"Yes!"

"Well! I am not sure," Maurin replied vaguely. "One never knows. He may be a spy of the revolutionary government and he may have

denounced your father. They are very clever, those fellows. They worm themselves into your confidence, and then betray you for a mere pittance. I wish your father had not made such a friend of him. But as I assured you just now, Mademoiselle, you have no cause for worry. While I live, no possible harm shall come to you or to your family. You do trust me, don't you?"

She murmured a timid "Yes!" and gave him her hand, which he raised to his lips.

The soldiers in the meanwhile had continued their search on the floor above. The noise of heavy footsteps, of furniture being dragged out of place, of banging on walls and cupboards, disturbed the serenity of this house which at the moment, with its mistress lying dead, should have been an abode of peace. Whilst this loud chatter went on overhead, Maurin shot searching glances at the young girl to see if she betrayed any anxiety for the guest whom he firmly believed to be still in the house. But Blanche remained seemingly unmoved and, much to his chagrin, Maurin was forced to come to the conclusion that he had brought a squad of Republican Guards out on a fool's errand and that his well-laid plan would end in a manner not altogether to his credit, and not in accordance with his hopes.

A few moments later the sergeant and his men came clattering downstairs again, all of them obviously ill-tempered at having been dragged out of barracks at this hour and in such abominable weather. The sergeant kicked the dining-room door open with his boot, and addressed the lawyer in a harsh, almost insulting tone:

"I don't know what you were thinking of, Citizen Lawyer," he said, "when you stated before the Chief of Section that a suspicious stranger was lurking in this house. We have searched it from attic to cellar and there's no one in it except the family, one of whom is dead, and the others seemingly daft. At any rate, I can't get anything out of

them. I don't know if you can."

"It's no business of mine, as you well know, Citizen Sergeant," Maurin responded coolly, "to question these people, any more than it is your business to question me. I attend to my duties, you had better attend to yours."

"My duty is to arrest the inmates of this house," the soldier countered, "and if they are wise they will come along quietly. Now then you," he added, addressing them all collectively: "Charles Levet, Augustin and Blanche Levet, and Marie Bachelier, I have a carriage waiting for you. Go and get ready quickly. I don't want to waste any more time."

Obediently and silently Blanche and Augustin made for the door. Blanche called to the maid who seemed by now more dead than alive.

"But this is an outrage," Maurin suddenly interposed vehemently, "you cannot leave the dead un-guarded. Some one must remain in the house to prevent any sacrilege being committed."

The sergeant shrugged. "Sacrilege?" he put in with a sneer. "What is sacrilege? And why shouldn't the dead woman be alone in the house. She can't run away. Anyway, if you feel like that, Citizen Lawyer, why don't you stay and look after her? Come on!" he concluded roughly, addressing the others, "didn't you hear me say I didn't want to waste any more time?"

He marshalled the three out of the room. As Blanche went past the lawyer, she threw him an appealing glance. He murmured under his breath: "I will look after her. I promise you."

Ten minutes later Charles Levet with his son and daughter and the

maid were seated in the chaise, and were driven under arrest to the Town Hall, there to be charged with treason or intended treason against the Republic.

11 THE MORNING AFTER

But the very next day all was well. Charles Levet with his daughter and son, and the maid, had certainly passed a very uncomfortable night in the cells of the municipal prison, and the next morning had been conducted before the Chief of Section, where they had to submit to a searching examination. And here things did not go any too well. Charles Levet was taciturn and obstinate, Blanche voluble and tearful, and Augustin detached, and Marie the maid was so scared that she said first one thing then another, and all things untrue. The Chief of Section was impatient. He was desirous of doing the right thing, but he was a local man and the Levets were people of his own class: nothing "aristocratic" about them and, therefore, not likely to plot against the Republic, or to favour fugitive aristos. Indeed, he was very much annoyed that Maurin the lawyer a personal friend of his and also of his own class should have taken it upon himself to make incriminating statements against the Levets. To have indicted the Levet family for treason would have been a very unpopular move in Choisy where the old herbalist was highly respected and his pretty daughter courted by half the youth of the commune.

After the interrogation of the accused, the worthy Chief of Section had an interview with Maurin. The latter, as supple as an eel, wriggled out of his awkward position with his usual skill, and in a few movements had succeeded in persuading his friend that he, individually, had nothing to do with the false accusation brought against the Levets. He had, he said, been foolish enough to listen to the insinuations brought against these good people by a man whom he had met casually that day. A professor, so he understood, at the University of Grenoble.

"But why," the chief asked with some acerbity, "did you allow yourself to be led by the nose, by a man whom you hardly knew at

all?"

"I said," the lawyer responded, "that I had met him casually that day, but I had often heard old Levet speak about him. He seemed to be a friend of the family and so-"

"A friend?" the other broke in. "But you say that it was he who denounced these people."

"It was."

"How do you make that out?"

"Between you and me, my friend," the lawyer replied confidentially, "I have come to the conclusion that that so-called university professor was just an agent provocateur, in other words, a spy of the government. There are a good many of those about, so I am told: the Convention makes use of them to ferret out obscure conspiracies, and treasonable associations. They get a small pittance for every plot they discover, and so much for every head that they bring to the guillotine."

"And so you think that this Professor-"

"Was just such another. I do. I met him outside the Levet's house. He took me by the arm, and led me to the Café Tison, where he began his long story of how he had seen old Levet bring a man surreptitiously into the house. I, of course, thought it my duty to let you know at once. You would have blamed me if I had not, wouldn't you?"

"Of course."

The Chief of Section remained silent for a moment. Chin in hand, he reflected over the whole affair. He could not altogether dismiss the

fact from his mind that some one, either his friend Maurin, or the mysterious professor had seen a stranger enter the Levets' house; and all afternoon yesterday there were persistent rumours that the priest who had attended Louis Capet to the last had unaccountably disappeared, even whilst the Convention at a special sitting of its Committee had ordered his arrest.

"One thing is very certain," Maurin now put in persuasively; "when your squad came to arrest the Levets there was no one in the house but themselves."

"They may have smuggled some one out."

"Where to, my friend?" the lawyer argued. And he added lightly: "Now you are crediting old Levet with more brains than he has got."

He paused a moment, then finally went on:

"I don't know what you feel about it all, my good man, but I am convinced in my own mind that Charles Levet had no other visitor in his house...except, of course, Docteur Pradel," he added as if in an afterthought.

"Ah, yes! Docteur Pradel...I hadn't thought about him."

"Nor had I...Till just now...."

Maurin rose and stretched out his hand to his friend who shook it warmly.

"Well!" He said glibly, "will you allow me to convey the good news to the Levets?"

"What good news?"

"That you have gone into the matter and have decided that the charge of treason against them has not been proved."

"Yes!" the chief responded after a moment's hesitation, "you may go and tell them that if you wish. I won't follow up the matter just now but, of course, I shall bear it in mind. In the meanwhile," he concluded as he saw his friend to the door, "I will just send for Docteur Pradel and have a talk with him."

Louis Maurin came away from that interview much elated. He had gained his point, and a very little clever wordy manipulation on his part would easily convince the Levets that they owed their freedom to him. The Professeur had fortunately kept out of the way. Maurin devoutly hoped that he really had broken his ankle and would be laid up for some days; by that time his wooing of the lovely Blanche, with the consent of her irascible papa, would be well on the way to a happy issue. But there was another matter that added greatly to his elation, and this was that he had put a spoke in the wheel of Simon Pradel, the one man in Choisy who, in his opinion, might prove a serious rival in the affections of Blanche. He was far too astute not to have scented this rivalry before now, and Blanche herself had unwittingly given his sharp eyes, more than one indication of the state of her feelings toward the young doctor.

Well! a rival out of the way is better than one who is constantly on the spot, and since times were getting troublesome now, it would not be difficult to keep a man out of the way permanently once the breath of suspicion touched him.

Everything then was for the best in the best possible world, and Louis Maurin made his way to the prison cells where the Levet family were still awaiting their fate, there to tell them that he and no one else had persuaded the Chief of Section to order their immediate liberation. Whether he quite succeeded in so persuading them, is

somewhat doubtful, certainly as far as Charles Levet was concerned, for the old man remained as taciturn as ever in spite of the young man's eloquent protestations, whilst Augustin murmured something about good deeds being their own reward. But their lack of enthusiasm was countered by Blanche's outspoken gratitude. With tears in her eyes she thanked Louis again and again for all that he had done for them.

"We all tried to be brave," she said, "but, frankly, I for one was very frightened; as for poor Marie, she spent the night lamenting and calling on all the saints to protect her."

Later, when they reached the portal of the prison-house she said to her father:

"Let us drive home, Father. I am so anxious to know if everything has been all right in the house, with maman lying there alone."

It was a bright, frosty morning, but a thin layer of snow still lay on the ground. In this outlying part of the town, there were few passers-by and no cabriolets in sight, but a poor wretch in thin blouse and tattered breeches stood shivering in the middle of the road. He was an old man with arched back and wrinkled, grimy face; from under his shabby red cap wisps of white hair fluttered in the wind. His teeth were chattering as he murmured a prayer for charity. Maurin called to him:

"See if you can find a cabriolet, Citizen, and bring it along. You might get one in the Place Verte and there will be five sous for you. We'll wait for it at that tavern over the way."

The man raised a finger to his forelock and shuffled off in the direction of the Place Verte, his sabots made no sound on the thin carpet of snow.

"What misery, mon Dieu," Blanche sighed while she watched the old caitiff's retreating figure. "And this is what they call Equality and Fraternity. Can't anything be done for a poor wretch like that? He seems almost a cripple with that humped back."

"He could go to the Assistance Publique," Maurin replied dryly, "but some of these fellows seem to prefer begging in the streets. This one, I should say, has been a soldier in—"

He was about to say "in Louis Capet's army," but with Charles Levet within hearing, he thought better of it. This was obviously not the moment to irritate the old man.

"Come and drink a mug of hot ale with me while we wait," he suggested cheerily to the whole party. They were all very cold, having only had a meagre prison breakfast in the early hours of the morning: a small tavern over the way, at a short distance looked inviting. Old Levet would have demurred: he wore his most obstinate expression: but Blanche was obviously both weary and cold and the maid looked ready to faint with inanition; even Augustin cast longing eyes across the road. Louis Maurin without another word led the way. Levet followed reluctantly, the others with alacrity, and presently they were all seated at a table in a small stuffy room that reeked of lamp-oil and stale food, but sipping with gusto the hot ale which the land-lord, surly and out-at-elbows, had placed before them.

12 A FALSE MOVE

It was after the first ten minutes of desultory conversation among the party, that Louis Maurin made what he called afterwards the greatest mistake of his life. Indeed, he often cursed himself afterwards for that twinge of jealousy, coupled with boastfulness, which prompted him to speak of Simon Pradel at all. It was just one of those false moves which even an experienced chess-player might make with a view to protecting his queen, only to find himself checkmated in the end. Little did the astute lawyer guess that by a few words carelessly spoken he was actually precipitating the ruin of his cherished hopes and helping to bring about that extraordinary series of events which caused so many heartburnings, set all the quidnuncs of Choisy gossiping and remained the chief topic of conversation round local firesides for many weeks to come.

Blanche had drunk the ale, said a few pleasant words to Maurin, chaffed her brother and the maid, and relapsed into silence. Maurin, who was feeling at peace with all the world and very pleased with himself, queried after a time: "Thoughtful, Mademoiselle?"

It seemed almost as if she had dropped to sleep for she gave no sign of response, and Maurin insisted.

"Of what are you thinking, Mademoiselle?"

She roused herself, gave a shrug, a sigh, a feeble smile and replied: "Friends."

"Why friends?" he asked again.

"I was just wondering how many of our friends will have to suffer as we did last night...as innocently I mean...arrest... imprisonment..."

anxiety.... These are terrible times, Louis!"

"And there are worse to come, Mademoiselle," he declared ostentatiously; "happy those who have powerful friends to save them from disaster."

This hint was obvious, but neither old Levet nor Augustin responded to it. It was left for Blanche to say: "You have been very kind, Louis."

Silence once more, until Augustin remarked:

"We were, of course, innocent."

"That helped a little, of course," Maurin was willing to admit, "but you have no idea how obstinate the Committee are, once there has been actual denunciation of treason. And we must always remember those poor wretches who for a miserable pittance will ferret out the secrets of some who have not been clever enough to keep their political opinions to themselves."

"I supposed it was one of those wretches who trumped up a charge against us," Blanche remarked.

"Undoubtedly. And I had all the difficulty in the world in fact I had to pledge my good name before I could persuade the Chief of Section that the charge was trumped up."

He paused a moment, then added self-complacently: "I shall find it still more difficult in the case of Simon Pradel, I'm afraid."

Blanche gave a start.

"Simon?" she queried. "What about Simon?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Know what?"

Already Maurin realized that he had made a false move when he mentioned Pradel. Blanche all at once had become the living representation of eager, feverish anxiety. Her cheeks were aflame, her eyes glittered, her voice positively quavered when she insisted on getting an explanation from the lawyer.

"Why don't you answer, Louis? What is there to know about Simon?"

Why, oh, why had he brought the doctor's name on the tapis? He had done it primarily for his own glorification, and in order to stand better and better with the Levets because of his influence and his zeal. Never had he intended to rouse dormant passion in the girl by speaking of the danger which threatened Pradel. Women are queer, he commented with bitterness to himself. Let a man be sick or in any way in need of their help, and at once he becomes an object of interest, or, as in this case, simple friendship at once flames into love.

Old Levet, who had hardly opened his mouth all this while, and had seemed to be too deeply absorbed in his own thoughts to take notice what was said around him, now put in a word: "Don't worry, my girl," he said; "Simon is no fool, and there is no one in Choisy who would dare touch him."

By this time, Maurin had succeeded in turning his thoughts in another direction. Self-reproach gave place to his usual self-complacency and self-exaltation. He had made a false move, but he thanked his stars that he was in a position to retrieve it.

"I am afraid you are wrong there, Monsieur Levet," he observed

unctuously. "As a matter of fact, I happen to know that the Section has its eye on Docteur Pradel His mysterious comings and goings yesterday, and his constant visits at the Château de la Rodière, which often extend late into the night, have aroused suspicion, and, as you know, from suspicion to denunciation there is only one step and that one sometimes leads as far as the guillotine. However, as I had the pleasure of telling you just now, I will do my best for the doctor, seeing that he is your friend."

"And that he is innocent," Blanche asserted vehemently. "There was nothing mysterious about Simon's comings and goings yesterday. He only goes to the château when he is sent for professionally, nor does he extend his visits late into the night."

Maurin shrugged.

"I can only repeat what I have been told, Mademoiselle," he said, "I can assure you..."

He felt that he had made another false move by saying that which was sure to arouse the girl's jealousy. Indeed, he was beginning to think that luck had not attended him in the manner he had hoped, and was quite relieved when the sound of shuffling sabots over the sanded floor cut this awkward conversation short. Maurin looked round to see the old beggar of a while ago standing in the middle of the room, waiting at a respectful distance till he was spoken to.

Maurin queried sharply:

"What do you want?"

The man raised a hand stiff with cold to his white forelock.

"The cabriolet, Citizen," he murmured.

The poor wretch seemed unable to say more than that. With trembling finger he pointed to the door behind him. A ramshackle vehicle drawn by a miserable nag was waiting outside. Levet paid for the drinks and the whole party made their way to the door. At the last, when the family had crowded into the cabriolet, old Levet pressed a piece of silver into the beggar's shaky hand.

Maurin remained in the road outside the tavern until the vehicle had disappeared at a turning of the street. He was not the man ever to admit, even to himself, that he was in the wrong, but in this case he had, perhaps, been somewhat injudicious, and he felt that he must take an early opportunity to retrieve whatever blunder he may have committed. Blanche was very young, he commented to himself; she scarcely knew her own mind, and Pradel was the man whom she met most constantly. But after this, gratitude would be sure to play an important rôle in the girl's attitude towards the friend who had helped her and her family out of a very difficult situation. Maurin prided himself on the fact that he had persuaded the girl, if not the others, that it was his influence and his alone that had brought about their liberation after a few hours' detention. She was already inclined to be grateful and affectionate for that. It would be his task after this to work unceasingly on her emotions and to his own advantage.

And reflecting thus, lawyer Maurin made final tracks for home.

Book II – THE DOCTOR

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13 THE CHÂTEAU DE LA RODIÈRE

It had always been a stately château ever since the day when Luc de la Rodière, returning from the war with Holland after the peace of Ryswick, received this quasi-regal residence at the hands of Louis XIV in recognition for his gallantry in the field. It was still stately in this year 1793, even though it bore the indelible marks of four years of neglect following the riots of 1789 when the populace of Choisy, carried away by the events up in Paris and the storming of the Bastille, and egged on by paid agitators, marched in a body up to the château, smashed a quantity of furniture and a few windows and mirrors, tore curtains down and carpets up, ransacked the larders and cellars, and then marched down again with lusty shouts of the new popular cry: "A la lanterne les aristos!"

Luckily, Madame la Marquise with her son and daughter were absent on that day: they had gone up to Paris for the funeral of Monsieur le Marquis. Whether it was the emptiness of the house, or its atmosphere of faded flowers, stale incense, and burnt-out candles, which dampened the ebullient spirits of the crowd, it is impossible to say. Certain it is that after they had done what mischief they could on the ground floor, and then marched upstairs to the monumental ballroom, where they found lackeys and valets busy sweeping up dead floral wreaths, they felt awed all of a sudden: something of their old beliefs, of their respect for the dead, of all that these burnt-out candles and stale incense stood for kept them silent and subdued, even though such things had by government decree been denounced as superstition, and unworthy the dignity of man.

They had come up to the château determined to demand all sorts of things-they didn't know exactly what-and as there was no one there to give satisfaction to these demands, and the paid agitator had, as usual, kept carefully out of the way, these poor people felt very like a

lot of dogs who had taken to the water, hoping to find something to play with, and merely succeeding in getting very wet.

But the mischief was done, and when the young Marquise with Madame, his mother, and Mademoiselle Cécile returned to La Rodière three days later, they found the château in the state in which the riotous crowd had left it; the stately hall on the ground floor, the banqueting room, the monumental staircase, the cellars and the larders, were a mass of wreckage. The terrified personnel of lackeys and female servants had run away, leaving the ballroom where their late master had lain dead, still a litter of dead flowers and linen cloths, of torn lace and stumps of wax candles. Only Paul Leroux and his wife Marie had remained. They were old people-very old-who had served feu Monsieur le Marquis and his father and mother before him, first as kitchen wench and scullion then on through the hierarchy of maid and valet, to that of butler and housekeeper. They had never known any other home but La Rodière: if they left it, they would not have known where to go: they had no children, no family, no kindred. And so they stayed on, after the mob had cleared away, and one by one the château staff-young and old, indoors and out of doors, garden and stable-men- had packed up their belongings and betaken themselves to their own homes wherever these might be. Paul and Marie stayed on and did their best to feed the horses and dogs that had been left behind, and to get a few rooms tidy and warm for the occupation of Madame la Marquise. And thus the widow and the young Marquis and Mademoiselle Cécile found them and their devastated home. Marie had prepared a meagre supper, Paul had brushed his clothes and polished his shoes, and placed such pieces of silver on the table as had escaped the attention of the mob. He wore his white gloves and served his young master and the family with the same solemnity as he had done, when half a dozen footmen were in attendance round the dinner-table.

Madame la Marquise, herself a scion of the old French noblesse, was far too proud to display her feelings before her servants, or before her children. She bore herself with marvellous courage during the terrible trial of this first evening in the wrecked château. Nor did she lose any of her dignity during the years that followed. In that attitude she emulated those of her own class with whom the watchword seemed to be not to let those assassins in the government know how bitterly they felt the repeated onslaughts on their property and on their privileges. Not one of them believed, in those early days of the Revolution, that such a state of tyranny and mob-law could persist, and secretly most of them-especially the older generation-nursed thoughts of exemplary retaliation. But the years rolled on and tyranny and mob-law did persist, and hopes of retribution had perforce to give way to a kind of proud indifference in the men and silent resignation in the women: but in the same way as tyranny and hatred grew in intensity in those who for centuries had been little else than bondslaves to the privileged classes, so did contempt for them and their accession to power continue to dwell in the hearts of the aristocrats. Where the latter had felt condescension and often kindly tolerance toward their subordinates, as in the case of Madame la Marquise, they had now, for the most part, nothing but lofty scorn for those whom they looked on as spoliators and assassins. The middle classes, those at any rate who professed liberal ideas, however moderate, they treated with contumely far worse than before: the local lawyer, the local doctor, the artist, the musician, all those in fact who were to a certain extent still dependent on them for their living, they still kept at arm's length: as for their actual dependants, the workers on their estate, or in the towns, they were the rabble in their sight, plagues which God sent down to earth to punish France for her sins.

To this attitude there were, of course, many and often pathetic exceptions. There were men and women, high-born, bred in every

conceivable luxury, and now reduced to comparative poverty, who could always be called upon to assist those who were poorer than themselves. Cécile de la Rodière was one of them, so was the old Marquise to a certain extent, though in a more detached and aloof way. There were some even who had real understanding for the conditions that had brought about the present social upheaval, but these belonged for the most part to the younger generation: the old found it wellnigh impossible to accommodate themselves to the new order of things, which had made them subservient to those whom they had been brought up to regard as inferior products of God's creative scheme.

Madame la Marquise scarcely ever went out of doors and never beyond the park gates. She had a horror of meeting people who in the past would have curtsied or bowed low as she went past, and now merely nodded-nodded!-in a surly kind of way, or, if they spoke at all, would perhaps say: "Good day, Citizeness." Citizeness! At least that is what she thought would occur if she set foot outside the house. So she remained most of the day in her boudoir doing crochet-work, or else turning out drawers full of beautiful laces and garments which she patted with loving hands, and put away again in soft paper with sachets of lavender. She invariably wore black, dresses from past days which she happened to have, some with hooped and quilted skirts, others with sacques, the rich silk of which had survived the wear and tear of years. She no longer wore powder on her hair, because she had used up the last box about a year ago, and when she desired Marie to buy her some more, Marie said that the commodity could no longer be bought. Madame did not ask why; she guessed, and thereafter wore elaborate caps of old lace which she fashioned herself, and which entirely covered her hair.

Thanks to the goodwill of Paul and Marie some semblance of order had been brought into the devastated part of the château: broken

window-panes were replaced and torn carpets and curtains put out of sight. In the stables most of the horses and valuable dogs were sold or destroyed: Monsieur le Marquis only kept a couple of sporting dogs and two or three horses for his own use. Then, as the winter grew severe and fuel and food became scarce and dear, three pairs of willing hands were recruited from Choisy to supplement the exiguous staff of the once luxurious household. These willing hands, two outdoor men to help in the garden and stables and a girl in the house were now called aides-ménage, the appellation servant or groom being thought derogatory to the dignity of free-born citizens of France. Even then, special permission for employing these aides had to be obtained from the government: and this was only granted in consideration of the fact that Paul and Marie Leroux were old and infirm, and that it was they and not the ci-devants who required help.

This, then was the house to which the Abbé Edgeworth was conducted in the evening of that horrible day when he had seen his anointed King perish on the guillotine like a common criminal. Ever since that early hour in the morning when he had been called in to administer the sacraments to the man who had once been Louis XVI, King of France, he had lived in a constant state of nerve-strain, and as the afternoon and evening wore on he felt that strain more and more acutely. Towards seven o'clock two men who looked more like cut-throats than any voluntary revolutionary guards the abbé had ever seen had conducted him to La Rodière. Before he started out with them old Levet had assured him that everything was being done to ensure his safety: the same powerful and generous friend who had rescued him from the hands of a howling mob had further engineered the final means for his escape out of France.

The old priest accepted this explanation in perfect faith and trust. He assured his kind host that he was not the least bit afraid. He had gone through such a terrible experience that nothing could occur now

to frighten him. Nor did anything untoward happen on the way. He got very tired stumping up the rugged track which was a short cut to the château. The monumental gates, no longer closed against intruders, were wide open. The abbé and his escort passed through unchallenged and walked up the stately avenue. The front door of the mansion was opened to them by Paul, who stood by deferentially in his threadbare but immaculately brushed suit of black, whilst the old priest stepped over the threshold.

Tired though he was the abbé did not fail to turn immediately in order to express his gratitude to the two enigmatic ruffians who had guided his footsteps so carefully, but they had gone. Their footsteps in the clumsy sabots echoed down the long avenue for a time but they themselves had already disappeared in the gloom. Later on an attempt was made to overtake them, but perhaps the attempt was too desultory to lead to any result: anyway, no trace was found of these pseudo- revolutionaries about whom the abbé knew as little as anybody.

But this is by the way. The priest who by now was on the verge of exhaustion both mentally and physically, sank into an armchair which Paul offered him, and here he waited patiently with eyes closed and lips murmuring a feeble prayer while his arrival was being announced to Monsieur le Marquis.

A few moments later a young man came running down the stairs with arms outstretched, shouting a welcome even before he had caught sight of the priest.

François de la Rodière was the only son of the late Marquis. He had inherited the title and estates four years ago on the death of his father; he was a well-set-up, athletic-looking youth, who might have been called handsome but for an arrogant, not to say cruel, expression round his thin-lipped mouth, and a distinctly receding

chin. He was dressed with utmost elegance, in the mode that had prevailed before the present regime of equality had made tattered breeches, threadbare coats and soiled linen, the fashion.

The abbé rose at once to greet him.

"We were expecting you, Monsieur l'Abbé," the young man said cheerily. "My mother and sister are upstairs. I hope you are not too tired."

The abbé was certainly tired, but he contrived to smile and to ask with some surprise:

"You were expecting me? But how could you know...?"

"It is all a long story, Father," François de la Rodière replied thoughtfully; "we are all of us under its spell for the moment. But never mind about that now. We'll tell you all about it when you have had supper and a rest."

The welcome which Madame la Marquise extended to the priest was no less cordial than that of her son. The Abbé Edgeworth, by virtue of his holy office, and because he had been privileged to attend the royal martyr during the last hours of his life, stood on an altogether different plane in the eyes of Madame than the rest of the despicable bourgeoisie. Thus Mademoiselle Cécile, her daughter, was ceremoniously presented to Monsieur l'Abbé, and so was the young English gentleman, my lord Devinne, a friend of the family, who had ridden over from Paris that afternoon, bringing news of the terrible doings there. He had, it seems, also brought tidings of the Abbé Edgeworth's early arrival at La Rodière.

It was while the family and their guest were seated round the supper-table that Mademoiselle Cécile related to the priest the

mysterious occurrence which had puzzled them all since morning.

"It was all so wonderful!" she explained, "and I cannot tell you, Father, how excited I am, because the first intimation we had that you were coming was addressed to me."

"To you, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes! to me," she replied, "and you shall judge for yourself whether the whole thing is not enough to excite the most placid person, and I am anything but placid. Early this morning," she continued, "when I took my usual walk in the park, I saw down the avenue a scrubby-looking man coming slowly towards me from the direction of the gate. He was at some distance from where I was so I didn't really see him well, but somehow I knew that he had nothing to do with our own small staff. We are accustomed nowadays," she added with a pathetic little sigh, "to all sorts of people invading our privacy. This man, however, was obviously doing no harm; he just walked along, quite slowly, with his hands in his pockets, looking neither to right nor left. I didn't take any more notice of him until he came to one of the stone seats in the avenue. Then I saw him take a paper out of his pocket and lay it down on the seat, after which he gave me a distinct sign, drawing my attention to the paper; he then turned and went back the way he came and I lost sight of him behind the shrubbery."

She paused a moment, almost out of breath with excitement, then she went on: "You may imagine, Father, how I hurried to the seat and picked up the mysterious message. Here it is," she said and drew from the folds of her fichu a crumpled piece of paper. "I have not parted from it since I picked it up and read its contents. Listen what it says: 'The Abbé Edgeworth, vicar of St. André, who accompanied the King of France to the scaffold will claim your hospitality to-day for the night.' Look at it, Monsieur l'Abbé. Isn't it extraordinary? I have shown it to maman, of course, and to François. They couldn't

understand at all where it came from, until milord Devinne threw a still more puzzling light on the whole thing."

She held the paper out to the priest who took it from her, put his spectacles on his nose and glanced down on the mysterious note.

"It certainly is very curious," he said, "and it is not signed."

"Only with a rough drawing of a small scarlet flower," the girl observed. The priest handed the paper back to her. She took it, folded it together almost reverently and replaced it in the folds of her fichu. The abbé turned to the young Englishman:

"And you, milord," he asked, "can actually throw some light on the sender of this anonymous message?"

"Not exactly that," Devinne protested, "but I can tell you this: that small scarlet flower is a device adopted by the chief of a band of English gentlemen who have pledged themselves to save innocent men and women and children from the tragic fate that befell the King of France to-day."

The old priest hastily crossed himself.

"May God forgive the sacrilege," he murmured. Then he went on: "But what a high ideal, milord! Saving the innocent! And Englishmen, you say? Are you a member of that heroic band yourself?"

"I have that honour."

"And your chief? Who is he?"

"Ah!" Devinne replied, "that is our secret and his."

"Your pardon, milord! I had not thought to be indiscreet. The whole

thing simply amazes me. It is so wonderful to do such noble deeds, to risk one's life for the sake of others who may be nothing to you, and do it all unknown, probably unthanked! And to think that I owe my life to such men as you, milord, to your friends and to your chief! And that little red flower? It is a Scarlet Pimpernel, is it not?"

"Yes!"

"I seem to have heard something about it. But only vaguely. The police here speak of an anonymous English spying organization."

"We do no spying, Monsieur l'Abbé. The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel has nothing to do with politics."

"I am sure it has not. But I understand that even the government is greatly disturbed by its activities, and has offered a large reward for the apprehension, milord, of your chief. But God will protect him, never fear."

It was after this that the old priest seemed to collapse. He gave a gasp and sank back in his chair in a faint. François de la Rodière hastily called to Paul, and together the two men carried the old man upstairs to the room which had been prepared for him, and put him to bed. When they came back and explained that Monsieur l'Abbé appeared to be very ill, Madame la Marquise gave orders to Paul that Dr. Pradel be fetched at once.

"The doctor is in the house now, Madame la Marquise," Paul observed.

"Doing what?" Madame asked.

"I sent for him, Maman," François put in; "Stella needed a purge and César got a splinter in his paw. But I thought he would be gone by

now."

"And why hasn't he gone?"

"Marie had one of her bad attacks of rheumatism, Madame la Marquise, and Berthe the kitchen girl had a poisoned finger. The doctor has been seeing to them."

"Tell him to go up to Monsieur l'Abbé at once," François commanded.

When Paul had gone, he turned to Lord Devinne.

"This is very unfortunate," he said. "I do hope it won't be a long affair. I don't mind the abbé being here, say, a day or two, but you didn't say anything about his being a sick man."

"I didn't know that he was," the Englishman observed.

"Your wonder chief should have told you," the other retorted with obvious ill-humour. "It won't be over-safe either for maman or for the rest of us to be harbouring a man who is under the ban of this murdering government. Believe me, milord, I—"

He was interrupted by the opening of the door and the entrance of Simon Pradel. Madame la Marquise gave him a gracious nod, and Cécile a kindly glance. François, on the other hand, did not take the trouble to greet him.

"It is upstairs you have got to go," he said curtly; "a friend of ours who was here at supper was suddenly taken ill."

Simon took no notice of the insolence of the young man's tone. He only frowned slightly, took his professional tablet and pencil from his pocket and asked:

"What is the name of your friend, Monsieur le Marquis?"

"His name has nothing to do with you," the other retorted tartly.

"I am afraid it has, Monsieur le Marquis. I am bound by law to report to the local Section every case I attend within this area."

Madame la Marquise sighed and turned her head away; the word "Section" or "law" invariably upset her. But François suffered contradiction badly, especially on the part of this fellow Pradel whom he knew to hold democratic if not revolutionary views.

"You can go and report to the devil," he said with growing exasperation. He was still in a fume over the affair of the abbé's inconvenient sickness, and now, what he considered presumption on the part of this purveyor of pills and purges, turned his annoyance into fury.

"Either," he went on, not attempting to control his temper, "either you go and attend to my guest upstairs or you clear out of my house in double quick time."

There was not much meekness in Simon Pradel either. The arrogance of these aristocrats exasperated him just as much as his own attitude exasperated them. His face went very white, and he was on the point of making a retort which probably would have had unpleasant consequences for everyone concerned when he caught a glance, an appealing glance, levelled at him out of Cécile's beautiful eyes.

"Our friend is old, Monsieur le Docteur," she said gently, "and very ill. I am sure he will tell you his name himself, for he has no reason to hide it."

The glance and the words froze the sharp retort on Pradel's lips. He succeeded in keeping his rising temper under control and without another word, and just a slight inclination of the head he went out of the room. François on the other hand made no attempt to swallow his wrath: he turned on his sister and said acidly:

"You were a fool, Cécile. What that fellow wanted was a sound thrashing: your amiability will only encourage him in his insolence. All his like ought to have tasted the whip-last long ago. If they had, we shouldn't be in the plight we are in to-day. Don't you agree with me, Maman?" he concluded, appealing to his stately mother.

But Madame la Marquise who was very much upset by the incident had already sailed out of the room.

14 AN OUTRAGE

It was at daybreak the following morning that Simon Pradel left the château. He had spent the whole night at the bedside of the Abbé Edgeworth, fighting a stubborn fight against a tired heart, which threatened any moment to cease beating. The old priest was hardly conscious during all those hours, only swallowing mechanically at intervals the cordials and restoratives which the doctor forced between his lips. Just before six he rallied a little. His first request was for a priest to hear his confession.

"You are no longer in danger now," Pradel said to him gently.

But the abbé insisted.

"I must see a priest," he said; "it is three days since I made confession."

"You have nothing on your conscience, I am sure, Monsieur l'Abbé, and I am afraid of too much mental effort for you."

"Concern at being deprived of a brother's ministrations will be worse for me than any effort," the old man declared with serene obstinacy.

There was nothing for it but to humour the sick man. Pradel immediately thought of Augustin Levet and decided to go and fetch him. He collected his impedimenta, left instructions with the woman who was in charge of the invalid, and made his way, with much relief, out of this inhospitable château. The morning was clear and cold, the sun just rising above the woods of Charenton, flooded the valley with its pale, wintry light. In the park one or two labourers were at work and in the stableyard away to the left Pradel saw three men, one of whom,

a groom, was holding a horse by the bridle which another, presumably Lord Devinne was about to mount; the third had his back turned towards the avenue and Pradel couldn't see who it was. He was walking quickly now in the direction of the gate, and suddenly became aware of a woman's figure walking in the same direction as himself, some distance ahead of him. For the moment he came to a halt, and stood stockstill, hardly crediting his own eyes. It was not often that such a piece of good fortune came his way. The joy of meeting Mademoiselle Cécile, alone, of speaking with her unobserved, had only occurred twice during these last twelve months when first he had learned to love her.

Pradel was no fool. He knew well enough that his love was absolutely hopeless: that is to say he had known it until recently when the greatest social upheaval the world had ever seen, turned the whole fabric of society topsy-turvy. He would hardly have been human if he had not since then begun, not exactly to hope, but to wonder. Opposition on the part of these arrogant patricians who constituted Mademoiselle Cécile's family would probably continue, but there was no knowing what the next few months, even weeks, might bring in the way of drawing these aristocrats out of their fortresses of pride, and leaving them more completely at the mercy of the much despised middle class.

Pradel, of course, didn't think of all this at the moment when he saw Cécile de la Rodière walking alone in the park. He only marvelled at his own good fortune and hastened to overtake her. She was wrapped in an ample cloak from neck to ankles, but its hood had fallen away from her head and that same wintry sun that glistened on the river, touched the loose curls above her ears and made them shine like tiny streaks of gold.

All down the length of the avenue there were stone seats at intervals;

the last of these was not very far from the entrance gate. Cécile came to a halt beside it, looked all round her almost, Pradel thought, as if she was expecting some one, and then sat down. At sound of the young man's footsteps she turned, and seeing him she rose, obviously a little confused. He came near, took off his hat, bowed low and said smiling:

"Up betimes, Mademoiselle?"

"The sunrise looked so beautiful from my window," she murmured, "I was tempted."

"I don't wonder. This morning air puts life into one."

Cécile sat down again. Without waiting for permission Simon sat down beside her.

"I might echo your question, Monsieur le Docteur," the girl resumed with a smile: "Up betimes?"

"Not exactly, Mademoiselle. As a matter of fact I am ready for bed now."

"You have been up all night?"

"With my patient."

"The dear old man! How is he?"

"Better now. But he has had a bad night."

"And you were with him all the time?"

"Of course."

"That was kind. And," the girl added with a smile, "did he confess to you?"

"No. But I guessed."

"Was he raving then, in delirium?"

"No. He was very weak, but quite conscious."

"Then how could you guess?"

"He is a priest, for he has a tonsure. He is a fugitive since his name was withheld. It was not very difficult."

"You won't..." she implored impulsively.

"Mademoiselle!" he retorted with gentle reproach. "I know. I know," she rejoined quickly. "I ought not to have asked. You would not be capable of such a mean action. Everyone knows how noble and generous you always are, and you must try and forgive me."

She gave a quaint little sigh, and added with a curious strain of bitterness:

"We all seem a little unhinged these days. Nothing seems the same as it was just a few years ago. Our poor country has gone mad and so have we, in a way. But," she resumed more evenly, "I must not keep you from your rest. You lead such a busy life, you must not overtire yourself."

"Rest?" he exclaimed involuntarily. "Overtire myself? As if there was anything in the world...."

He contrived to check himself in time. The torrent of words which were about to rise from his heart to his lips would have had

consequences, the seriousness of which it had been difficult to overestimate. Cécile de la Rodière was woman enough to realize this also, but womanlike too, she didn't want the interview to end abruptly like this. So she rose and turned to walk towards the gate. He followed, thinking the while how gladly he would have lingered on, how gladly he would have prolonged this tête-à-tête which to her probably was banal enough but which for him had been one of the happiest moments of his lonely life. Cécile, however, said nothing till they reached the postern gate. Here she came to a standstill, and while he was in the act of opening the gate, she stretched her hand out to him.

"Am I forgiven?" she asked, and gave him a glance that would have addled a stoic's brain. What could a man in love do, but bend the knee and kiss the little hand. It was a moment of serenity and of peace, with the wintry sun touching the bare branches of sycamore and chestnut with its silvery light. Out of the depths of the shrubbery close by there came the sound of pattering tiny feet, the scarce perceptible movements of small rodents on the prowl. Then the beating of a horse's hoof in the near distance on the frozen ground, and a man's voice saying:

"A pleasant journey, my friend, and come and see us soon again," followed almost immediately by a loud curse and a shout:

"What is that lout doing there?"

Cécile snatched her head away, and turned frightened eyes in the direction whence the shout had come. But before Simon Pradel could jump to his feet, before Cécile could intervene, the young doctor was felled to the ground by a stunning blow from a riding-crop on the top of his head. All he heard as his senses reeled was Cécile's cry of horror and distress and her brother's infuriated shouts of "How dare you? How dare you?"

The crop was raised again and another blow came down, this time on the unfortunate young doctor's shoulders. But Pradel was not quite conscious now: he felt dizzy and sick and utterly helpless. All he could do was to put up one arm to shield his head from being hit again. He could just see Cécile's little feet beneath her skirt, and the edge of her cloak: he heard her agonized cry for help and Lord Devinne's voice called out:

"François! For God's sake stop! You might kill him."

He tried to struggle to his feet, cursing himself for his helplessness, when suddenly a curious sound came from somewhere close by. Was it from the shrubbery, or from the road opposite? Or from the cypress trees that stood sentinel outside the park gates? Impossible to say: but it had a curious paralysing effect on every one there, on that madman blind with fury as well as on his helpless victim. And yet the sound had nothing terrifying in it; it was just a prolonged, drawly, rather inane laugh; but the fact that it appeared to come from nowhere in particular and that there was no one in sight who could possibly have laughed at this moment, lent to the sound something peculiarly eerie. The age of superstition had not yet died away. François's curses froze on his lips, his cheeks became ashen grey, his arm brandishing the crop remained poised above his head as if suddenly turned to stone.

"What was that?" he continued to murmur.

"Some yokel in the road," Lord Devinne suggested, and then added lightly. "Anyway, my friend, it saved you from committing a murder."

The spell only lasted a few moments. Already François had recovered his senses, and with them, his rage.

"Committed a murder?" he retorted roughly. "I wish I had killed the brute."

He turned to his sister. "Come, Cécile!" he commanded.

She wouldn't come; she desired nothing else but to minister to the stricken man. He was lying huddled up on the ground and a gash across his forehead caused the blood to stream down his face; he had quite lost consciousness. François gave the prone, helpless form a vicious kick.

"François," the girl cried, herself roused to fury by his cowardice, "I forbid you...."

"And I swear to you that I will kill him, unless you come away with me at once."

He seized the girl by the wrist and tried to drag her away. The light of mania was in his eyes. His own fury had inflamed his blood, superstitious terror had also done its work, and the whole atmosphere of revolutionary France, materialized as it were in this low-born bourgeois who had dared to make love to the daughter of an aristocrat, completed the addling of his brain, so that by now he really was not quite sane.

Cécile, horrified and indignant and afraid that the boy might do some greater mischief still, turned to Lord Devinne and said coolly:

"Milord, my brother is not responsible for his actions, so I must look to you to act as a Christian and a gentleman. If you need help, please call to Antoine in the stables. He will attend to Docteur Pradel, until he is able to get home."

She gave him a curt not. Indeed, she did not attempt to conceal the

contempt which she felt for his attitude during the whole of this infamous episode, for with the exception of the one call to François:

"For God's sake, that's enough! you might kill him!" he had stood there beside his horse, with the reins over his arm, seemingly quite detached and indifferent to the abominable outrage perpetrated on a defenceless man. Even now as François by sheer force succeeded in dragging his sister away, he made a movement as if to get to horse again, until he met a last look from Cécile and apparently thought it better to make some show of human feeling.

"I'll get Antoine to give me a hand," he said, and leading his horse, he turned in the direction of the stables.

Chance, however, intervened. Antoine did not happen to be in the stables at the moment. Devinne tethered his horse in the yard, and then, after a few seconds' hesitation, he seemed to make up his mind to a certain course, and made his way round the shrubbery back to the château. His train of thought during those few seconds had been: "If I don't see Cécile now, she will brood over the whole thing, and imagine all sorts of things that didn't really happen."

Paul opened the door to him. He asked to see Mademoiselle. Paul took the message upstairs, but returned with a word from Mademoiselle that she was not feeling well and couldn't see anybody. Devinne sent up again, and again was refused. He asked when he might have the privilege of calling and was told that Mademoiselle could not say definitely. It would depend on the state of her health.

Useless to insist further. Devinne, very much chagrined, went back the way he came, feeling anything but at peace with the world in general and in particular with Simon Pradel, who was the primary cause of all this trouble. Back in the stable yard he found Antoine at work there; but all he did was to mount his horse and ride away

without saying a word about a man lying unconscious by the roadside. However, when he rode past the gate he noted, rather to his surprise, that there was no sign of Simon Pradel.

"That sort of riff-raff is very tough," was my Lord Devinne's mental comment, as he put his horse to a trot down the road.

15 ALARMING NEWS

When Simon Pradel came back to complete consciousness, he found himself sitting propped up against a willow tree by the side of the little stream that runs winding its turbulent way for three or four hundred metres parallel with the road. His cloak was wrapped round him and his hat was at the back of his head. His head ached furiously and it took him some time to collect his senses and to remember what had happened. He put his hand to his forehead: it encountered a handkerchief tied round it underneath his hat.

Then he remembered everything, and insane fury took possession of him body and soul. Nothing would do but he must at once wreak vengeance on the coward who had reduced him to such a humiliating pass. He was strong, he was athletic, far more so than that effete young Marquis who had caught him unawares and struck him from behind before he had a chance of defending himself. All sorts of fantastic schemes, the result of fever in his blood, presented themselves to his mind while he struggled to his feet and, still rather giddy and stiff, made for the road, and thence toward the gate of the château. How he could best get a private interview with François de la Rodière at a spot where the young miscreant could not call anyone to his aid, was the puzzle that, for the moment, defied solution. The order had probably been given already that if he, Pradel, called at the château, the door should be slammed in his face. And he laughed aloud with rage and bitterness at thought that the man whose worthless life he could squeeze out with his own powerful hands was so hemmed in, even in these days, that nothing but mere chance would deliver him up to his victim's just revenge.

It was his own outburst of laughter that brought back to the young doctor's mind the curious incident which, as a matter of fact, had probably saved his life. There was not knowing to what lengths that

madman would have gone in his senseless rage, had not that eerie laughter roused the echoes of the dawn and paralysed his murderous arm. But Pradel had no more idea than the others whence that laugh had come; all he knew was that it had saved his life, and that it remained as mysterious, as unaccountable as the fact that here he was, propped against a willow tree by the side of the stream, with his forehead bandaged, his hands and face wiped clean of blood and his clothes carefully freed from dirt. He did remember, but only vaguely, that he had been lifted off the ground by arms that seemed to be very powerful, and that he was being carried along in those same arms, he supposed across the road. There was also a moment when though semi-conscious, he seemed to hear that quaint laugh again, but this he put down to the figment of a dream. This new train of thought, however, did in a measure abate the worst of his fury. From thence to remembering more and more of the events of the morning was only a question of time. A few seconds, and he remembered Cécile, the beloved hand extended to him the kindly glance, the delicious tête-à-tête in the avenue. And he also remembered the Abbé Edgeworth and the old man's earnest request for the ministrations of a brother priest and his own determination to fetch Augustin Levet for this task.

Vengeance, then, would have to wait for that mere chance which might never come. God Himself had said "Vengeance is mine. I will repay!" What then?

With a last shrug of bitter contempt at his own impotence, Pradel turned his back finally on that château of evil. He was on the point of wending his way down the rough track, which is a short cut into Choisy, when he saw a shabbily dressed little man who seemed to be lurking desultorily at the angle of the road. He took no notice, however, not even when he became aware that as soon as he himself had started to follow the track, the man immediately turned

and went leisurely down the other way.

Walking downhill on slippery frozen ground was a painful process, with every step a jar, and every movement a strain on aching limbs: but will-power is a sturdy crutch, and so many different thoughts were running riot in Simon Pradel's mind that they left no room in his brain for self-pity. Less than an hour later he was outside the Levets' house, ringing the front door bell. There was no answer. He rang again and again. It seemed strange, he thought, that there should be no one astir in the house to watch over the dead. Old Levet with his habit of wandering about the countryside was a very early riser, so was Marie the maid. Augustin, of course, might have gone to church, but there was Blanche also; surely the two women would not have left the dead unguarded.

Vaguely apprehensive, not knowing what to think, Simon thought he would go to the church close by where he knew the Levets worshipped, hoping to find Augustin there. As he turned out of the gate he met the Widow Dupont, a neighbour of the Levets, who, at sight of him, threw up her arms and exclaimed:

"Ah, Citizen Doctor, what a calamity!"

Pradel frowned inquiringly.

"Calamity? What calamity?"

"Didn't you know?"

"Know what?"

"The poor Levets! And the citizeness lying there dead, all alone! I and my girl would have gone in and kept watch as is only fitting, but we didn't know about it all until afterwards; and then the house was

shut up like you see it now."

She talked on with the volubility peculiar to her kind. It was some time before Simon could get in a word edgeways:

"But, in God's name, what has happened?" he broke in at last.

"They were arrested last night."

"Arrested?"

"And they are all going to be guillotined," the worthy widow concluded, with that curious mixture of awe and complacency so characteristic of a certain type of countrywoman. "All of them! Poor old Levet, his saintly son, pretty little Blanche and Marie, the maid. Not that I would care about Marie as a maid. She is a good girl, but she is not thorough in her work, if you know what I mean--"

At this point she broke off, for she had caught sight of the bandage round the doctor's head:

"But you are hurt, Citizen Doctor!" she exclaimed. "Do come inside and let me--"

"It is nothing, Citizeness," he retorted impatiently; "only a false step on a slippery road. But--"

"One has to be so careful on a day like this, and I say that some of the roads about here are a disgrace to--"

"I know, I know. But tell me, how do you know all this, about the Levets? Did you see it happen?"

"No, Citizen, I did not. But I did see Citizen Maurin, the lawyer, afterwards--after they had all gone, that is, in a carriage and pair and

lots of soldiers. I asked Citizen Maurin if they were really going to be guillotined, one never knows what may happen these days: like that poor King now-I should say Louis Capet-one never knows. Does one?"

But Pradel had heard enough. With a hasty word of thanks to the voluble widow, he turned and walked rapidly up the street. It was no use trying to find Augustin now, but he went into the nearest church, saw the curé, asked him or his coadjutor to go at once to La Rodière to see a sick man, and then, anxious to get first-hand news, he went on to Maurin's office. There he was told by the servant that the citizen lawyer was out for the moment but was expected back for déjeuner. It was now close on ten o'clock and there would be two hours to kill; time enough to go back home, swallow a cup of coffee and get some rest before attending to his correspondence and professional work. As he walked away from Maurin's house, Simon happened to look back and was the shabby little man of a while ago go up to the front door and ring the bell. The same servant opened the door, but the shabby little man was at once admitted.

16 RUMOUR AND COUNTER-RUMOUR

There is nothing like a village or a small provincial town for disseminating news. Within a few hours of its occurrence it was known all over Choisy that a dastardly outrage had been committed on the person of the much-beloved and highly respected citizen, Dr. Pradel, by the ci-devant Marquis de la Rodière up at the château. Some of these rumours went even so far as to assert that it was a case of murder: this, however, was later on automatically contradicted, when Dr. Pradel was seen crossing the Grand' Place, looking pale and severe but certainly not dead.

Whence and how the rumour originated nobody knew but by the evening it was all over the place and the principal subject of conversation at street corners and in the cafés. Even the tragic event of the day before was relegated to the background while various versions of the story, more or less contradictory, went from mouth to mouth. Louis Maurin was one of the first to hear of it, and it made him very angry indeed. His aide-ménage, Henri, related to a crony afterwards that the citizen lawyer had had two visits from a seedy-looking individual, who often came to the office on business but whom he, Henri, didn't know by name. It was during this man's second visit that the citizen lawyer had flown into a rage. Henri had been quite frightened, and though he was not the least inquisitive by nature, he could not help overhearing what went on in the office.

"You consummate fool..." he heard his employer say.

And: "You told me to spread any rumours that were derogatory to him . . ."

Then again: "This is not derogatory, you idiot...it will just make a hero of him..."

All of which was very mysterious, as the crony was bound to admit. What a pity that the worthy aide-ménage could not hear more. It seems that the seedy-looking individual went away soon afterwards, looking very down in the mouth.

No wonder that Louis Maurin was furious. Everything he had planned recently for his wooing of Blanche Levet seemed to be going wrong. To spread rumours that were derogatory to Pradel's moral character was one thing. Blanche would be sure to hear of it, so would old Levet, and there was a good chance that the doctor would, in consequence, be forbidden the house. But to represent the man as the victim of aristocratic brutality and arrogance, to give, in fact, the whole incident a political significance, was to excite any young girl's imagination in favour of what she would call a martyr to his convictions. For that is the turn which the rumour had now taken. Dr. Pradel, so said the gossips, had professed liberal views: the ci-devants up at the château, enraged at the execution of Louis Capet, had lost all sense of restraint, and had vented their fury on the first victim who came to their hand. In the cafés and at street corners there was talk among the hot-headed youths of Choisy to go up to La Rodière in a body and extract vengeance from those insolent aristos for the outrage committed on a respected member of the community. If this project was put into execution Simon Pradel would, of course, at once become the most important personage in Choisy. He would be elected mayor without doubt, even perhaps member of the Convention; a second Danton or Robespierre, there was no knowing. In spite of the cold on this frosty January evening, Maurin perspired profusely at the prospect of seeing Blanche dazzled by the doctor's glory, and old Levet thinking it prudent perhaps to have such a progressive politician for his son-in-law.

The thought was maddening. Maurin didn't feel that he could endure it in solitude with only that fool of an aide-ménage for company. He

saw the rosy future which he had mapped out for himself turning to darkly gathering clouds. It was now seven o'clock. The Levets would be at supper. He, Maurin, had every excuse for calling on them, to inquire after their health after the trying ordeals of the past twenty-four hours, and to offer his services in connexion with the funeral arrangements which could no longer be delayed.

Well wrapped up in a cosy mantle, the lawyer sallied forth. The Levets were at supper when he arrived. He was quite observant enough to note at once that there was an element of disturbance in the family circle. Blanche had evidently been crying: her eyes were heavy, and her cheeks aflame. She had pushed aside her plate of soup untasted. Augustin, serene and detached as usual, with his breviary propped up against a glass in front of him, was quietly finishing his, whilst Charles Levet's expression of face was inscrutable. Maurin had a shrewd suspicion, however, of what went on in the old royalist's mind. Pradel, in a sense, was his friend, and he was probably shocked at the story of the outrage, but deep down in his heart, the herbalist had kept a feeling of loyalty not only to his King, but to the seigneur. He had been born and bred in this loyalty, and in the belief that a seigneur, an aristocrat who was the prop and mainstay of the throne could do no wrong, or if he did, there was certainly a reason and an explanation for his misdoing. Augustin would look upon the outrage as the will of God, or a visitation of the devil, and would pray humbly and earnestly that Monsieur le Marquis de la Rodière be forgiven for his outburst of temper. Only Blanche would be indignant. Maurin's egoism merely attributed this to casual interest in a friend, the thought that the girl was seriously in love with the doctor, he dismissed as disturbing and certainly unlikely.

He had always prided himself on his tact. It was only his tact, so he believed, that enabled him ever to enter this house as a welcome guest, even though his political views were as abhorrent to old Levet

as the plague. He entered the room now with hand out-stretched and an air of debonnaire geniality, coupled with the solemnity due to a house wherein its mistress lay dead. He was asked to sit down and was offered a glass of wine. He talked of funeral arrangements, connected with legal formalities; he asked after every one's health, professed to be the bearer of official apologies for the family's arrest and detention, and apparently was not aware that his volubility was countered by silence on the part of his three listeners. Blanche still looked very distressed, in fact, she seemed to have the greatest difficulty in restraining her tears. Maurin was on the point of broaching the subject of Pradel, when there was a ring at the bell.

"That'll be the Citizen Doctor," Marie remarked, and went waddling off like a duck to open the door.

"I'll see him outside," old Levet said, as he rose from the table. "Come Augustin!" he called to his son.

To Maurin, who had been watching Blanche keenly, it seemed as if it had been at a sign from her that her father had called to Augustin and with him had gone out of the room. A moment or two later he could hear two of the men talking together in the passage after which all three went into the sitting-room. There was no mistaking the expression in the girl's face now. It was all eagerness and excitement, and in her eyes there was just that look which only comes in a woman's eyes when the man she loves is near. Maurin cursed himself for his lack of judgement. He should have guessed which way the land lay and played his cards differently. It was not by involving Pradel in political imbroglios that he would succeed in turning Blanche against him. There were other means by which the budding love of a young and inexperienced girl could be changed first to pique and thence perhaps to hatred. And pique would surely throw Blanche into the arms of the man who knew how to play his cards

well, that man, of course, being himself.

Fortunately Louis Maurin did, in his own estimation, hold the trump card now, and he made up his mind to play it at once. He nodded in the direction whence the sound of men talking came as a faint and confused murmur, and said blandly:

"Our young friend in there has got over his trouble of this morning quite quickly. He--"

"Don't speak of that outrage, Louis," Blanche broke in vehemently; "I can't bear it."

"My dear," he retorted suavely, "I was only going to say, that, like most men who are in love, he seems willing to endure both physical and moral humiliation, for the sake of the short glimpses he has of the lady of his choice. I don't blame him. We are all of us like that, you know, all of us who know what love is. I would endure anything for your sake, Blanche...even blows."

"And now you are talking nonsense," the girl rejoined dryly. "There was no question of love in the unprovoked insult which that abominable aristo put upon Simon."

The lawyer gave a light shrug and echoed with something of a sneer:

"Unprovoked? My dear Blanche!"

"Certainly it was unprovoked. Simon had been sitting up with a sick man all night. He was returning home in the small hours of the morning when that devil of a Marquis, coward as well as a bully, fell on him from behind and knocked him senseless before he could defend himself."

Maurin gave a superior little smile.

"A very pretty story, my dear. May I ask from whom you had it?"

"Every one in Choisy will tell you the same. Every detail is known-

"No, dear, not every detail; nor will every one in Choisy tell the pretty tale, for there is a man who stood by while the whole episode was going on, and who saw everything from the beginning."

"Some liar, I suppose," she retorted.

"No, not a liar. A man of integrity, of position, an official, in fact."

"And what did he tell you?"

Maurin smiled once more. Imperceptibly this time. Blanche plied him with questions. She wanted to know. She did not, as older women would have done, refuse to hear another word that might prove derogatory to the man she loved.

"Simon Pradel, my dear Blanche, was discovered by François de la Rodière making love to his sister, in the early dawn...after a night spent at the château, but not with a sick man. He was, in fact, kneeling at Mademoiselle's feet, kissing her hand in farewell. No wonder the ci-devant lost his temper."

"It's not true!" the girl cried, hot with indignation.

"I pledge you my word that it is," the lawyer responded calmly.

Already Blanche had jumped to her feet. She went to the door, threw it open, and pointed to it with a dramatic gesture.

"Out of the house, Citizen Louis Maurin," she said, speaking as

calmly as he had done, "and never dare set foot into it again. You are a liar and a traducer and I hate you worse than any one I have ever known in all my life."

She remained standing by the door, a forbidding, almost a tragic figure. Maurin remained for a time where he was, his eyes fixed upon her, pondering within himself what he should do. The girl's sudden revulsion had struck him with dismay. It was so unexpected. Once again Fate, or a false move on his part perhaps, had upset all his plans.

For the moment, however, there was nothing for him to do but to obey. He rose slowly, picked up his hat and coat and went to the door. Striding past the girl he made her a low bow. As soon as he had gone through the door she slammed it to behind him.

17 TIMELY WARNING

It was in the early morning of the day following the outrage on Dr. Pradel that a cabriolet, more ramshackle perhaps than any that plied in Choisy, turned into the great gates of La Rodière and came to a halt at the front door of the château. A tall man, dressed in sober black, alighted from the vehicle and rang the outside bell. To Paul who opened the door to him, the tall man gave his name as d'Arblay, Professor at the University of Louvain in Belgium, and added that he desired to speak with Monsieur l'Abbé.

Paul was a little doubtful: one had to be so careful nowadays with so many spies of that murdering government about. The visitor looked respectable enough, but there was never any knowing, and Paul thought it wisest to shut the door in the "Professor's" face whilst he went to consult his better half. Marie too was doubtful. For months past now, no visitor had called at the château, and, of course, one never did know. In the end the two old people decided that the only thing to do as to report the whole matter to Monsieur le Marquis, and he would decide whether the "Professeur" was to be introduced into Monsieur l'Abbé's presence or not.

To their astonishment Monsieur le Marquis was overjoyed when he heard of the visit, and commanded that Monsieur le Professeur be shown at once into his own private room. Never had Monsieur le Marquis shown such condescension towards a member of the despised "bourgeoisie," and Paul ushered in the visitor with as much deference as he would have shown to one who had a handle to his name.

François de la Rodière was indeed more than condescending. He greeted the tall Professor most cordially.

"Your visit is more than welcome, sir," he said. "I have been expecting it ever since yesterday at noon, when I received one of those mysterious messages signed with the device of a small red flower which have already puzzled us. You, I suppose, know all about it."

"All?" the Professor replied. "Not exactly, Monsieur le Marquis. But I have been asked to call here in a cabriolet for Monsieur l'Abbé Edgeworth, and to drive with him as far as Vitry, where friends of his who are of Belgian nationality, and therefore safe from interference by the revolutionary government, will convey him safely to the frontier."

François could not help being impressed by the grave and dignified demeanour of this learned man, as well as by his exquisitely cut clothes and fine linen. Of course one didn't look on these people as one's equals. In spite of their erudition they had neither the culture, nor certainly the traditions, that made of one's own caste a privileged class; but this man seemed certainly superior to most of his kind. To begin with he spoke French with a precision that amounted to pedantry, and this was strange in a Belgian: their French was usually execrable. Then there was something almost noble in the man's bearing. He had not been asked to sit-of course not, in the august presence of Monsieur le Marquis-and stood there in an attitude of singular grace. He was tall and obviously powerful, and he had beautiful hands, one of which rested on the ivory knob of his cane. There was nothing Belgian about all that either, the Belgians being for the most part short and stocky and, with their Flemish ancestry were of a very different fibre to the aristocracy of France. Puzzled, François remarked casually:

"You are Belgian, are you not, Professor?"

"Cosmopolitan would be a better word, Monsieur le Marquis," the other replied coolly. "I trust Monsieur l'Abbé is in a better state of

health. The journey might be trying for an invalid."

"Oh! he is much better. Much, much better," François replied, then went on in a confidential manner: "Entre nous, my good Professor, his being ill here was somewhat inconvenient, not to say dangerous for the safety of Madame la Marquise and all of us. I shall really be thankful to have him out of the way."

"I am sure. Especially in view of the fact that the people down in Choisy are none too friendly towards your family."

"Oh! the riff-raff down in Choisy do not frighten me. Riff-raff! that is all they are. They shout and yell and break a window or two. They did it once before, you know, four years ago. I was away at the time, or I would have put a few charges of shot into their vile bodies. I shall, too, and without compunction, if they dare show their ugly faces inside my gates. No! no, I am not afraid of that rabble. Let them come. They will get their deserts."

"It is sometimes best to be prepared."

"I am prepared. With powder and shot. The first man who sets foot on the perron is a dead man, so are all who follow him."

"Retreat before a powerful enemy is sometimes more prudent and often more brave than assured resistance."

"You mean run away before the canaille. Not I. I'll see them all in hell first."

"I was thinking of Madame la Marquise and Mademoiselle Cécile."

"Then, pray," François retorted, with supreme arrogance, "cease thinking of aught but your own business, which is to look after the

welfare of Monsieur l'Abbé Edgeworth."

With that, he turned his back on his visitor and stalked out of the room, leaving the Professor standing there motionless, a thoughtful look in his deep blue eyes and a sarcastic curl round his firm lips. A moment or two later Paul came in.

"Monsieur l'Abbé is waiting to see Monsieur le Professeur," he said.

The latter gave a short, impatient sigh and followed Paul out of the room. His interview with the old priest was short. The abbé with that patient acceptance of fate which he had shown since the one catastrophic event two days ago, was ready to follow this unknown friend as he had followed the two ruffianly guards the other day from the Levets' home to the château. He made his adieux to the family who had so generously sheltered him, expressed his thanks to them, as well as to Paul and Marie, who had looked after him, and finally stepped into the cabriolet which he understood would take him on to Vitry first, there to meet Belgian friends who would drive him by coach to the frontier. Monsieur le Professeur sat by his side and drove with him for about a kilometre or so; he then called to the driver to stop, alighted from the vehicle and bade the old priest farewell.

"The friends, Monsieur l'Abbé," he said finally, "who will take care of you at Vitry and convey you to the frontier, are kind and generous. The head of the family has held an official position in Paris for the Belgian Government. He has a safe-conduct for you. Try and think of no one but yourself until you are over the border. God guard you."

He then spoke a word or two to the driver which the abbé failed to hear. There were two men on the box. One of them now got down and took his seat under the hood of the carriage. He looked something of a ruffian, but the abbé did not mind his looks. He was used to friendly ruffians by now. He took a last look at the mysterious Professor, saw

him standing bareheaded at the side of the road, his black cloak wrapped round his tall figure, one slender hand resting on the knob of his cane, his face a reflection of lofty thoughts within a noble soul.

It was a face and form the Abbé Edgeworth knew that he would never forget, even though he was destined never to see them again. As the driver whipped his nag, the priest murmured a prayer to God to bless and guard this mysterious friend to whom he owed his safety and his life.

18 IMPENDING TROUBLE

Three days had gone by since the incidents at la Rodière, and excitement in Choisy over the outrage on Dr. Pradel was working itself up to fever-pitch. In the evenings, men and women who had been at work in the government factories all day, would pour out in their hundreds and invade the cafés and restaurants, eager to hear further details of the abominable assault which by now had inflamed the passions of every adult in the commune. A devilish aristocrat had shown his hatred and contempt for the people by making a cowardly attack on one of the most respected citizens of Choisy, on a man who spent his life and fortune in ministering to the poor and doing good to every man, woman or child who called to him for help. Such an affront called aloud for vengeance. It was directed against the people, against the rights and privileges of every free-born citizen of France.

And paid agitators came down from Paris, and stood at street corners or on the tables in cafés and restaurants and harangued the excited crowds that readily enough gathered round them to hear them speak.

"Why, I ask you, Citizens," they would demand in ringing tones, "why did Louis Capet's head fall like that of a common criminal under the guillotine, a few days ago? Because he had conspired against the people. Conspired against our liberties: against yours, Citizens, and against mine. Judges and jury found him guilty, and pronounced death sentence upon him. King or ex-King, I didn't matter. He was found guilty by his fellow-men of having conspired against the people and he was punishment by death. Then why, I ask you," the impassioned orator would then go on, "why should those ci-devants up at La Rodière not be punished also? The outrage which they have committed against the whole of our commune, and our commune

must pronounce judgement upon them, by virtue of the sovereignty of the people of France."

Rapturous applause and shouts of "Vive la République" and "Vive" all sorts of other things greeted the peroration. "The sovereignty of the people" were magic words which always stirred the blood of every self-respecting citizen. They were spoken by men who knew how to work on the passions of poor, ignorant folk whose lot through life had been one of continuous struggle against misery and starvation, and whom it was easy enough to persuade that by the overthrow of all existing dynastic rights, the millenium for the humble and the lowly would surely come. They were men employed by the revolutionary government for the sole purpose of stirring up trouble in places where the bulk of the inhabitants appeared placid and contented with their lot. Such a place was this small commune of Choisy, where people like the Levets lived the simple life, following their own avocations without the usual show of discontent, and where men like Simon Pradel set the example of quiet, unassuming generosity.

And this was a grand opportunity for sowing seeds of anarchy and turbulence beloved by the government, seeds that had already brought forth wholesale massacres in Paris, and the tragedy of January 21st. So the men who were sent down by the government to make trouble, got their opportunity now. They enticed the crowds into cafés and restaurants, and standing on tables, throwing their arms about, they talked and they harangued and shouted: "Down with the aristos!" till these humble folk, intoxicated by promises of a millenium and a life of ease and plenty, took up the cry and shouted: "Down with the aristos! To hell with La Rodière and the whole brood up at the château!"

The chief centre of this growing agitation was the restaurant Tison

adjoining the café of the same name on the Grand' Place; a great number of people, women as well as men, usually crowded in there in the evenings because it was known that the hero of the hour, Dr. Pradel, usually took his supper in the restaurant. People wanted to see him, to shake him by the hand and to explain to him how ready everyone was in Choisy to avenge his wrongs on those arrogant ci-devants up at La Rodière.

Unfortunately Simon Pradel did not see eye to eye with that agitated crowd. He resented his own impotence bitterly enough, but he didn't want other people—certainly not a lot of rioters—to make trouble up at the château and, God help them, strike perhaps at Mademoiselle Cécile whilst trying to punish her brother. Up to now he had succeeded in keeping the more aggressive hotheads within bounds. He had a great deal of influence with his fellow-citizens, was very highly respected and they did listen to him when he first begged, then commanded them to mind their own business and let him manage his own. In this, strangely enough, he had an ally in a man he detested, Louis Maurin, the lawyer, who appeared just as anxious as he was himself to put a stop to the insane project advocated by the agents of the government; this was to march in a body to La Rodière, there to loot or destroy the contents of the château as had already been done once, four years ago, and if not actually to murder the family of aristos, at any rate to give them a wholesome freight followed by exemplary punishment.

After Louis Maurin had ignominiously turned out of the Levets' house by Blanche, he did not attempt to set foot in it again. He took to frequenting the restaurant Tison more assiduously than ever before, there to use what influence he possessed to moderate the inflammatory harangues of the agitators, since he was hand in glove with most of these gentlemen. As a matter of fact the last thing in the world Maurin desired was an armed raid on La Rodière with Simon

Pradel the centre of an admiring crowd, and the glorification of the one man who stood in the way of his cherished matrimonial schemes.

"You don't want to set the whole commune by the ears, Citizen Conty," he argued with the orator who had just ended an impassioned harangue amidst thunderous applause. "It is too soon for that sort of thing. The government wants you to incite the people to patriotism, to inflame their love for their country, not to work on this silly sentiment for one man, who, before you can put a stop to it, would become a sort of hero of the commune, be elected mayor and presently be sent to the Convention, there to become a dictator and rival to Robespierre or Danton, and what will you gain by that? Whereas if you will only bide your time..."

"Well, what should I gain by bidding my time according to you, Citizen Lawyer?"

"Give those aristos up at the château enough rope, and presently you will be able to denounce them and get a big reward if they are condemned. I have known as much as twenty livres being paid for the apprehension of a ci-devant Marquis and thirty for his women-folk. As for a prominent citizen like that fellow Pradel, I know that I can get you fifty livres the day he is brought to trial for treason."

The other man shrugged, spat and gave a coarse laugh.

"Do you hate him so much as all that, Citizen Lawyer?" he queried.

"I do not hate Docteur Pradel," Maurin replied loftily, "more than I do all traitors to the Republic, and I know that Pradel is a traitor."

"How do you know that?"

"He is constantly up at the château. He puts his professional pride in his pocket and gives purges to the ci-devants' horses and dogs. And do you know why he was thrashed the other morning? Because he had spent the night with the wench Cécile, and was bidding her a fond farewell in the early dawn, when they were both caught in a compromising position by her brother, who took the law in his own hands and broke his riding-crop over the shoulders of the amorous young doctor."

Conversation was difficult in this atmosphere of noisy excitement. Maurin sat down at a table and asked Citizen Conty to join him in a plate of soup to be followed by onion pie. He had had no supper yet, and was hungry, but Choisy had done badly lately in the matter of provisions. It was too close to Paris to get the pick of the market and the commune had to be content with what was left over from the capital. In the farther corner of the crowded restaurant a small troupe of musicians were scraping the catgut, blowing down brass instruments and banging on drums to their own obvious satisfaction, for they made a great noise, wagged their heads and perspired profusely while they supplemented their ear-splitting attempts at a tune by singing lustily in accompaniment. They had struck up the opening bars of the old French ditty: "Il était une bergère.

Et ron et petit pataplon."

The young people took it up:

"Il était une bergère.

Qui gardait ses moutons ton, ton.

Qui gardait ses moutons."

The older folk also joined in till the low-raftered room was filled with

a deafening uproar that would effectually have drowned any further attempt at oratory on the part of Citizen Conty and his like.

"These cursed catgut scrapers," the latter cried in exasperation. "I'll have them turned out. One can't do anything with these fools while this row is going on."

He stood up on his chair and tried to shout, but while he shouted the crowd bellowed: "El-le fit du fromage.

Et ron et ron petit pataplon.

El-le fit du fromage.

Du lait de ses moutons, to-ton.

Du lait de ses moutons."

The leader of the band was particularly active. Where he had got his fiddle from it was difficult to imagine: it gave forth sounds now creaking, now wheezing, anon screeching or howling and always discordant, provoking either laughter or the throwing of miscellaneous missiles at his head. They were all of them a scrubby lot, these musicians, unwashed, unshaved, in ragged breeches above their bare legs, shoes down-at-heel or else sabots, and grubby Phrygian caps adorned with tricolour cocades on their unkempt heads. They called themselves an itinerant orchestra whom the proprietor of the restaurant had enticed into the place under promise of a hot supper, and they were obviously doing their best to earn it: "Le chat qui la regarde.

Et ron et ron petit pataplon."

"That rascal over there should be made to do honest work," Conty

grunted, after he had made several vain attempts to shout the musicians down. "I call it an outrage on the country for a big hulking fellow like that to scrape a fiddle and ogle the girls when he should be training to fight the English."

"To fight the English?" Maurin interposed. "What do you mean, Citizen?"

He and Conty had a tureen of hot soup on the table between them. Each dipped into it with a big ladle and filled up his plate to the rim. The soup was very hot and they blew on their spoons before conveying them to their mouths.

The musicians lifted up their cracked voices with a hoot and a cheer, whilst the chorus took up the lively tune: "Le chat qui la regarde

D'un petit air fripon, pon, pon.

D'un petit air fripon. " and the leader of the band, suiting the action to the word, cast side glances on the girls with an air as roguish as that of the cheese-maker's cat.

"What do you mean, Citizen Conty," the young lawyer reiterated, "by talking about fighting the English?"

"Just what I say," Conty replied. "We shall be at war with those barbarians before the month is out."

"Who told you that?"

"You'll hear of it, Citizen Lawyer. Ill news travels apace."

"But how did you know?" Maurin insisted.

"We government agents," Conty observed loftily, "know these things

long before you ordinary people do."

"But..."

"As a matter of fact," the other now condescended to explain, "I was in Paris this morning. I met a number of deputies. There will be a debate about the whole affair in the Convention to-night. Citizen Chauvelin," he went on confidentially, "is back from London since the twenty-first. His work over there is finished, and he is travelling round the country on propaganda work for the government. Secret service, you know. I spoke with him. He told me he would be in Choisy to-night to have a look round. Now, you see," Conty concluded, as he attacked the savoury onion pie, "why I want to get all these fools into the right frame of mind. We want to show Paris what Choisy can do. What?"

"Chauvelin?" Maurin mused. "I've heard about him."

"And you'll see him presently. A clever fellow, but hard as steel. He was sent to England to represent our government, but he didn't stay long, and, name of a dog, how he does hate the English!"

The musicians had just led off with the last verse of the popular ditty: "La bergère en colère.

Et ron, et ron, petit pataplon. " when Conty jumped to his feet, and with a hasty: "There he is!" pushed his way through the crowd towards the door.

Armand Chauvelin, ex-envoy of the revolutionary government at the Court of St. James, had just returned from England, a sadder and wiser man: somewhat discredited perhaps, owing to his repeated failures in bringing the noted English spy, known as the Scarlet Pimpernel, to book but nevertheless still standing high in the Councils

only of the various Committees, not only because of his great abilities, but because of his well-known hatred for the spy who had baffled him. He was still an important member of the Central Committee of Public Safety, and as such both respected and feared wherever he went.

Conty, the political agitator, was all obsequiousness when greeting this important personage. He conducted Citizen Chauvelin to the table where Louis Maurin had also finished eating, presented him to the lawyer, after which the two men pressed the newcomer to partake of supper as their guest. Chauvelin refused. He was not staying in Choisy this night, having other business to attend to, he said, in the Loiret district. He wouldn't even sit down. Despite his small, spare figure, he looked strangely impressive in his quietude, and, dressed as he was in sober black, amidst this noisy, excited crowd, many inquisitive glances were turned on him as he stood there. His thin white hands were clasped behind his back and he was listening to the answers which Conty and Maurin gave him in reply to his inquiries about the temper of the people in Choisy, and to their story of the outrage perpetrated on Docteur Pradel by the ci-devant Marquis up at La Rodière. This story interested him; he encouraged Conty in his efforts to keep the excitement of the populace at boiling point, and to inflame as far as possible the hatred of the people against the aristos. An armed raid on the château, he thought, would be a good move, if properly engineered, and as he intended to be back in Choisy in a couple of days, he desired the project to be put off until his return.

"Those aristos at La Rodière interest me," he said. "There is an old woman, you say?"

"Yes," Conty informed him; "the ci-devant Marquise, the mother of the present young cub who thrashed Docteur Pradel."

"And there is a girl? A young girl?"

"Yes, Citizen, and two old aides-ménage. But they are harmless enough."

"It would be so much better-" Maurin ventured to say.

"I was not asking your opinion, Citizen Lawyer," Chauvelin broke in haughtily. "What I've said, I've said. Prepare the way, Citizen Conty," he went on, "and as soon as I am back in Choisy I will let you know. If I mistake not," he added under his breath, almost as if he didn't wish the others to hear what he was saying, "we shall have some fun over that raid at La Rodière. An old woman, a young girl, two old servants! The very people to arouse the sympathy of our gallant English spies."

He nodded to the two men and turned to go. The crowd in the small restaurant was more dense than ever. People were sitting on the tables, the side-boards, and on top of one another. The musicians had just played the last bar of the favoured tune, the chorus of which was bawled out by the enthusiastic crowd, to the accompaniment of thunderous handclaps and banging of miscellaneous tools on any surface that happened to be handy: "La bergère en colère.

Tua son petit chanton, ton, ton.

Tua son petit chanton."

Chauvelin had real difficulty in pushing his way through the dense throng. The vociferous shouts that filled the low room with a clamour that was deafening made him quite giddy. He would have liked to put his hands to his ears, but he had need of his elbows to get along at all. He felt dazed, what with the noise and the smell of stale food and of unwashed humanity; at any rate, he put his curious experience down to an addled state of his brain, for while he was being pushed and jostled, and only saw individual faces through a kind of haze

made of dust and fumes, he suddenly felt as if a pair of eyes, one pair only, was looking at him out of the hundreds that were there. Of course, it was only a hallucination: he was sure it was, and yet for some reason or other he felt a cold shiver running down his spine. He tried to recapture the glance of those eyes, but no one now in the crowd seemed to be looking at him. The musicians had finished playing, or rather they tried to finish playing, but their audience wouldn't allow them to. Every one was shouting at the top of his voice: "Il était une bergère."

They wanted the whole of the six verses all over again.

Chauvelin got as far as the door, was on the point of opening it when a sound-the sound he hated more than any on earth-reached his ear above the din: it was a loud, prolonged, rather inane burst of laughter. Chauvelin did not swear, nor did he shiver again: his nerves were suddenly quite steady, and if he could have translated his thoughts into words, he would have said with a chuckle: "I was right, then! and you are here, my gallant friend, at your old tricks again. Well, since you wish it, à nous deux once more, and I think I may promise you some fun, as you call it, at La Rodière."

19 THE LEAGUE

Although Choisy is only twelve or fifteen kilometres from Paris, it was in those days just a small provincial town, with its Hôtel de Ville and its Committee of Public Safety sitting there, its Grand' Place, its ancient castle then used as a prison, and its famous bridge across the Seine. To the south and west of the Grand' Place there were two or three residential streets with a few substantial, stone-built houses, the homes of professional men, or of tradespeople who had retired on a competence, and farther along a few isolated, poorer-looking houses, such a one as old Levet's lying back from the road behind a small grille and a tiny front garden. But all these features only covered a small area, round which stretched fields and spinneys, with here and there a cottage for the most part roofless and derelict.

It was in one of these dilapidated cottages which stood in a meadow about half-way between Choisy and the height on which was perched the Château de la Rodière, that what looked like a troupe of itinerant musicians had sought shelter against the cold. They had made up a fire in the wide open hearth; the smoke curled up the chimney, and they sat round with their knees drawn up to their chins and their arms encircling their knees. It was the middle of the morning. The wintry dawn had been fine, but already its beauty had gone: ugly grey clouds gathered overhead, and a few thin flakes of snow were beginning to fall. The men sitting there appeared to be waiting for something or someone. They didn't say much: one or two of them were smoking clay-pipes, others were munching bits of stale bread or scraps of cheese which they drew out of their pockets. There were four of them altogether inside the cottage, and one sat outside on a broken-down stool propped against the wall, apparently on the watch. They all looked as if they had just donned such garments as they happened to picked up in an old clothes dealer's shop—a blouse, or a knitted vest, sabots or shoes down at heel, and

breeches very much the worse for wear. In a corner of the room a number of musical instruments were piled up, a miscellaneous collection of violin, guitar, trumpet and drum. Precariously perched on top of this pile of rubbish sat Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., the most fastidious dandy fashionable London had ever known, the arbiter of elegance, the friend of the Prince of Wales, the adored of every woman in England. He too was unwashed, unkempt, unshaved, his slender hands, those hands a queen had once termed exquisite, were covered with grime, his nails were in the deepest mourning. He wore a tattered blouse, sabots stuffed with straw on his bare feet, threadbare breeches and on his head a Phrygian cap which had once been red. At the moment he was scraping a fiddle, drawing from it wailing sounds that provoked loud groans from his friends and an occasional missile hurled at his head.

"Percy, if you don't leave off..." one of them threatened, and shied a mouldy piece of cheese at his chief.

"What will you do if I don't?" Sir Percy countered, and successfully dodged the missile, "for I am not going to leave off. I must get this demmed tune right, as we surely will be made to play it presently."

He went on scraping the opening bars of the new "Marseillaise."

"We are in for some fine sport, I imagine, what?" Lord Anthony Dewhurst remarked, and dug his teeth into a hard apple, which he had just extracted from his breeches' pocket.

"Tony," one of the others demanded-it was my Lord Hastings, "where did you get that apple?"

"My sweetheart gave it me. She stole it from her neighbour's garden ..."

My Lord Tony got no further. He was attacked all at once from three sides. Three pairs of hands were stretched out to wrest the apple from him.

They were just a lot of schoolboys on the spree, these men, enjoying this life of voluntary penury and intense discomfort, sometimes even of starvation and always of short-commons, for it was not always thought advisable for the type of ragamuffin that they appeared to be to buy sufficient food in the markets, in places where the movements of every man, woman and child were known and reported to the police. But they didn't mind. They loved it all. It was such sport, they said, and all in the wake of their chief whom they would follow to the death.

"We are in for some fine sport!" Lord Tony had declared, before the attack on his apple was launched. He held it up at arm's length, trying to rescue it from his assailants who made grabs at it and invariably got in one another's way, until a firm hand finally seized it and Blakeney's pleasant drawly voice was raised to say:

"I'll toss you all for this precious thing...what there is left of it."

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes won the toss, and the apple, which had suffered wreckage during the fight, was finally hurled at the head of the revered chief, who had resumed his attempts at getting a tune out of his cracked fiddle. A distant church clock had struck eleven a few minutes ago. The man on the watch outside put his head in at the door and announced curtly:

"Here he comes."

And presently Devinne came in. He was dressed in his ordinary clothes with dark coat, riding breeches and boots. His face wore a sullen look and he scarcely glanced either at his friends or at his

chief, just flung himself on the ground in front of the fire and muttered between his teeth:

"God! I'm tired!"

After a moment or two while no one else spoke he added as if grudgingly:

"I'm sorry I'm late, Percy. I had to put up my horse and..."

"Listen to this, you fellows," Blakeney said with a chuckle as he scraped his fiddle and extracted from it a wailing version of the "Marseillaise."

Young Devinne jumped to his feet, strode across the floor and snatched the fiddle out of Blakeney's hand.

"Percy!" he cried hoarsely.

"You don't like it my dear fellow? Well I don't blame you, but-"

"Percy," the young man rejoined, "you've got to be serious...you have got to help me...it is all damnable...damnable...I shall go mad if this goes on much longer...and if you don't help me."

He was obviously beside himself with excitement, strode up and down the place, his hand pressed tightly, against his forehead. The words came tumbling out through his lips, whilst his voice was raucous with agitation.

Blakeney watched him for a moment or two without speaking. His face through all the grime and disfigurement wore that expression of infinite sympathy and understanding of which he, of all men, appeared to hold the secret, the understanding of other people's troubles and difficulties, and that wordless sympathy which had so

endeared him to his friends.

"Help you, my dear fellow," he now said. "Of course, we'll all help you, if you want us. What are we here for but to help each other, as well as those poor wretches who are in trouble through no fault of their own?"

Then, as Devinne said nothing for the moment, just continued to pace up and down, up and down like a trapped feline, he went on:

"Tell us about it, boy. It is this La Rodière business, isn't it?"

"It is. And a damnable business it will be, unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless you do something about it in double quick time. Those ruffians in Choisy are planning mischief. You knew that two days ago, and you have done nothing. I wanted to go up to La Rodière to warn them of what was in the wind. I could have done it yesterday, gone up there this morning. It wouldn't have interfered with any of your plans: and it would have meant all the world to me. But what did you do: You took me along with Stowmarries to drive that old abbé as far as Vitry, a job any fool could have done."

"But you did it so admirably, my dear fellow," Sir Percy put in quietly, when young Devinne paused for want of breath. He had come to a halt in front of his chief, glaring at him with eyes that held anything but deference; his face was flushed, beads of perspiration stood on his forehead and glued his matted hair to his temples.

"Percy...!" he cried, not trying to disguise his exasperation. But Blakeney went on still quite quietly:

"You did the fool's job, as you call it, as admirably as you have always done everything the League set you to do; and you did it because you happen to have been born a gentleman and the son of a very great gentleman who honoured me with his friendship, and because you have always remembered that you swore to me on your word of honour that, while we are all of us engaged on the business of the League, you would obey me in all things."

"An oath of that sort," the young man retorted vehemently, "does not bind a man when—"

"When he is in love, and the woman he loves is in danger..." Sir Percy broke in gently. "That is what you were going to say, was it not, lad?"

He rose and put a kindly hand on Devinne's shoulder.

"Don't think I don't understand, my dear fellow," he said earnestly. "I do. God knows I do. But you know that the word of honour of an English gentleman is a big thing. A very, very big thing and a very hard one sometimes. So hard that nothing on earth can break it: but if by the agency of some devil, that word should get broken, then honour is irretrievably shattered too."

"Now tell me," he resumed more lightly, "did you on your way back from Vitry call on Charles Levet and tell him that the Abbé Edgeworth is by now safely on his way to the Belgian frontier?"

Devinne looked sullen.

"I forgot," he said curtly.

The others—Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, Lord Anthony Dewhurst, my Lord Hastings—had not spoken one word since Devinne had come into the

room. Sir Philip Glynde (he was the son of the head of the great banking firm Glynde Col, of Throgmorton Street), who had been on the watch outside, was leaning against the door-jamb, whilst keeping an eye on the road. He too was silent like the others and, like the others, his face expressed something like horror. It is a little difficult to estimate in these less romantic times, the depth of feeling that all these young men had for Percy Blakeney. It was a feeling akin to reverence, and the love they bore him had no resemblance to any love that any man has ever felt for another...and this because that love had its foundation in admiration for the character of the man: his extraordinary selflessness, his perfect disregard of personal danger and the cheerfulness with which he sacrificed everything, his personal comfort, even his love for his wife, in the cause of suffering humanity. And now to think that this boy...this... this young muckworm daring to...to what?...to defy their chosen chief...? It was unthinkable. Sir Andrew thought it sacrilege, Lord Tony unsportsmanly; Hastings would have struck him in the face, and Glynde would have taken him by the scruff of his neck and thrown him out into the road.

Blakeney gave a quaint little laugh:

"Gad! That is a pity," he said. "Fancy forgetting a little thing like that. But we have no control over our memory, have we? Well, dear lad, you have a long walk before you, so you'd best start right away now. Tell Charles Levet that the abbé is now with some Belgian friends who are looking after him. I promised the old man that I would let him know, he has been very good to us, and we must keep in touch with him. I have an idea that he and his family may have need of us one day."

Devinne still looked sulky.

"You want me to go to the Levets' house? Now?"

"Well, you did forget to call in on your way. Didn't you?"

"Then don't expect me back here-I shall go straight on to La Rodière."

There was a slight pause, during which no human sound disturbed the kind of awed hush that had fallen over this squalid, derelict place. Blakeney had scarcely made a movement when young Devinne thus flung defiance in his face. Only Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, the man who perhaps among all the others knew every line around the mouth of his chief, and every expression in the deep-set lazy blue eyes, noted a certain stiffening of the massive figure, and a tightening of the firm lips. But this only lasted for a few seconds. The very next moment Blakeney threw back his head and his prolonged inimitable laugh raised the echo of the dilapidated walls. The humour of the situation had tickled his fancy. This boy!!... Well!!... It was absolutely priceless. Those flaming eyes, the obstinate mouth, the attitude of a schoolboy in the act of defying his schoolmaster, and half afraid of the cane in the dominie's hand seemed to him ludicrous in the extreme.

"My dear fellow," he said, and once again the friendly hand was laid on Devinne's shoulder, and the kindest of lazy blue eyes looked down on this contumacious boy, "you really are a marvel. But don't let me keep you," he went on airily. "I don't suppose the Levets will invite you to dinner, and if they don't it will be hours before you are there and back and able to get something to eat. Anyway, you will meet us again in the restaurant, without fail, at one o'clock."

This, of course, was a command. Blakeney had been standing between Devinne and the direct access to the door. He now stepped a little to one side, leaving the way free for the young man to go out. There was an awkward moment. Devinne, half-ashamed but still half-defiant, would not meet the chief's gently ironical glance. The others said nothing, and after a minute or two, he finally strode out of the

cottage. A thin layer of snow lay on field and road, and deadened the sound of his footsteps. Glynde after a time put his head in at the door.

"He is out of sight," he announced.

Lord Hastings jumped to his feet.

"My turn to watch," he said. "Glynde is frozen stiff."

"Never mind about the watch now," Sir Percy interrupted. "We are fairly safe here, and there are one or two things I want to talk over with you fellows."

With a gesture of the hand he seemed to dismiss Devinne and the boy's incipient rebellion out of his mind and to ask the others to forget also. They were willing enough to do this for the time being; there was nothing in the world they enjoyed more than to talk things over with the chief. Hunger, cold, discomfort, even dirt were all forgotten when they could squat round on the floor and hear him tell them of those wonderful adventures which he planned and which had for their aim the rescue of innocent men, women and children, from the hands of an administration that knew neither mercy, justice nor restraint; adventures, full of danger and excitement, which had become as the breath of life to them all.

"We are agreed, are we not?" Blakeney resumed, as soon as he held their full attention, "that for the next day or two we must concentrate on those wretched people up at La Rodière. Monsieur le Marquis François we care nothing about, it is true, but there is the old lady, there is the young girl and there are the two old people who have been faithful servants and are, therefore, just as much in danger as their masters. We cannot leave François out of our calculations because neither his mother nor his sister would go away without him. So it will be five people-not to say six-whom we shall have to get over

to England as soon as danger becomes really imminent. That might be even no later than this evening. We shall be up there with the riotous crowd during the afternoon, and we shall have our fiddle, our trumpets and our drums, not to mention our melodious voices with which we can always divert their thoughts from unprofitable mischief, to some equally boisterous but less dangerous channels. You all know the ropes now: we have played that game successfully before and can do it again, what?"

There was unanimous assent to the project.

"Yes, by gad!" came from one of them.

"It is a game I particularly affection," from another.

"Always makes me think of tally-ho!"-this from the keen sportsman, Lord Anthony Dewhurst.

And: "Go on, Percy! This is violently exciting,"-from them all.

The fire had burned itself out; no one thought of feeding it; for one thing there was no more fuel. The wind drove in by the rickety door and unglazed window; they were shivering with cold, these young exquisites, but they were hard as nails, and certainly they didn't care. Excitement kept them warm. They were just like schoolboys looking forward to a raid on a neighbour's orchard, and they hung breathless on the lips of the man, their leader, who had planned the adventure for them.

"We'll bide our time, of course," Blakeney now continued. "Our friends, the worst of the hotheads, once they have accomplished their purpose and asserted their rights and privileges to make themselves unpleasant to the aristos, will turn their backs on La Rodière, their spirits slightly dampened perhaps. They will then crowd into the

nearest cabaret, there is one close to the château, they will talk things over, eat and drink and allow those hellish agitators to talk their heads off, while we shall continue to addle their brains with strains of sentimental music. And all the time we'll be watching the opportunity for action. Of course, during the course of a long afternoon a number of incidents are certain to occur which we cannot foresee and which will either aid or hinder us. You know my favourite motto, to take Chance by the one hair on his head and force him to do my bidding. In a small place like this by far our best plan will be to proceed once more to La Rodière as soon as the crowd has made its way back to Choisy and we find the coast fairly clear. We'll go in the guise of a squad of Gendarmerie Nationale and there arrest Monsieur le Marquis, his mother, his sister and the two faithful old servants. With a little luck, those tactics are sure to succeed."

He paused a moment, striding up and down the narrow room, a set look on his face. His followers who watched him waited in silence, knowing that through that active brain the plan for the daring rescue of those innocents was gradually being elaborated and matured. After a time Blakeney resumed.

"I am not taking Devinne with us at any time this afternoon. The crowd up at the château is certain to deal harshly with the family, and if Mademoiselle Cécile is rough-handed he might do or say something rash which would compromise us all. So I shall send him to our headquarters outside Corbeil, to instruct Galveston and Holte to have horses ready and generally to be prepared for our arrival with a certain number of refugees, among whom there will be two ladies. Galveston is very expert in making all arrangements, I know I can trust him and Holte to do the necessary as far as lies in their power."

"At what time do you think you will carry the whole thing through, Percy?" one of the others asked. "The arrest, I mean, and the flight

from La Rodière?"

"I cannot tell you that just yet. Sometime during the night, of course. I would prefer the early dawn for many reasons, if only for the sake of the light. The night might be very dark, bad for fast driving. But I will give you instructions about that later. It will only be by hearing the talk around us that I shall be able to decide finally. I shall also have to ascertain exactly how much help mine host of the cabaret will be willing to give us."

"You mean the cabaret on the Corbeil road, not far from La Rodière?"

"A matter of two or three hundred yards, yes. It boasts of the poetic sign: 'The Dog Without a Tail' I have been in touch with mine host and his Junoesque wife already."

"Percy, you are wonderful!"

"Glynde, you are an ass."

Laughter all round and then Blakeney resumed once more:

"There will also be Pradel to consider."

"Pradel?" one of them asked. "Why?"

"If we leave him here, we'd only have to come back and get him later. They'll have him, you may be sure of that. He has one or two bitter enemies, as men of his outstanding worth always have, and there are always petty jealousies both male and female that make for mischief. Anyhow, he is too fine a fellow to be left for these wolves to devour. But I shall be better able to judge of all this after I have gauged the temper of the crowd both at la Rodière and afterwards."

"That young Marquis was a fool not have got away before now."

"He wouldn't hear of it. You know their ways. They are all alike. Some of them quite fine fellows, but they have not yet learned to accept the inevitable, and the women, poor dears, have no influence over their menfolk."

"Then we are going up to La Rodière with the crowd, I take it," Lord Hastings observed.

"Certainly we are."

"You haven't forgotten, Percy, by any chance..." Sir Andrew suggested.

"I think not. You mean, my dear friend Monsieur Chambertin, beg pardon, Chauvelin?" Blakeney rejoined gaily. "No, by gad, I had not forgotten him. I am pining for his agreeable society. I wonder now whether during his last stay in London he has learned how to tie his cravat as a gentleman should."

"Percy! will you be..." Lord Tony hazarded.

"Careful, was the word you were going to say, eh, Tony? Of course, I won't be careful, but I give you my word that my friend Chambertin is not going to get me—not this time."

A soft look stole into his deep-set eyes. It seemed as if he had seen a vision of his exquisite wife Marguerite wandering lonely and anxious, in her garden at Richmond waiting for him, her husband and lover, who was her one absorbing thought, whilst he... She too was his absorbing thought, the great thought, that filled his mind and warmed his heart: but it was not all-absorbing. Foremost in his mind were all those innocents, little children, men and women, young and

old who, unknown to themselves seemed to call to him, to stretch out imploring arms towards him for comfort and for help: those were the moments when Marguerite's lovely face appeared blurred by the rain of tears shed in devastated homes and inside prison walls, and when he, the adoring husband and devoted lover, dismissed with a sigh of longing, all thoughts of holding her in his arms.

Such a moment was the present one, when the name of his deadly enemy recalled as on a transient picture, his life of happiness and of ease in England: the garden at Richmond, his beautiful wife, the many friends, and a sigh of longing for it all came involuntarily to his lips. But the moment was very brief. A few seconds only went by, and Sir Percy Blakeney was once more the Scarlet Pimpernel, the man of action and of heroic self-sacrifice, the leader with so forceful a personality that he was able to hold nineteen men to his will, obedient to his commands, ready to face every kind of danger, even to meet death at a word from him.

"And now," he said, his voice perfectly firm and incisive, "it is time that we collected our goods and saw whether our friends down at Choisy are ready for the fight."

They set to, to collect their musical instruments, their fiddles and drums and trumpets. Just for a moment the glamour of the coming adventure faded before one hideous fear of which not one of them had ever spoken yet, but which troubled them all.

Blakeney was humming the tune of the "Marseillaise."

"I wish I could remember the words of the demmed thing," he said. "What comes after: 'Aux armes, citoyens!?' Ffoulkes, you ought to know."

Sir Andrew replied almost gruffly: "I don't," and Lord Tony called

suddenly to his chief:

"Percy."

"Yes! What is it?"

"That fellow, Devinne..."

"What about him?"

"You don't trust him, do you?"

"The son of old Gery Rudford, the straightest rider to hounds I ever knew? Of course I trust him."

"I wish you wouldn't," Hastings put in.

"The father may have been a sportsman," Glynde added; "the son certainly is not."

"Don't say that, my dear fellow," Blakeney rejoined; "it sounds like treason to the rest of us. The boy is all right. Just mad with jealousy, that's all. He has offended his lady love and she will have nothing more to do with him. I dare say he is sorry that he behaved quite so badly the other morning. I'll admit that he did behave like a cad. He is only a boy, and jealousy...well! we know what a bad counsellor jealousy can be. But between that and doing what you all have in your minds...Egad! I'll not believe it!"

Hastings murmured savagely: "He'd better not."

Sir Philip Glynde nearly punched a hole in the drum, trying to express his feelings, and Lord Tony muttered a murderous oath. Sir Andrew alone said nothing. He knew-they all did, in fact-that Blakeney was one of those men who are so absolutely loyal and

straight, that they simply cannot conceive treachery in a friend. Not one of them trusted Devinne. It was all very well making allowances for a boy thwarted in love, but there had been an expression in this one's face which suggested something more sinister than petty jealousy, and though nothing more was said at the moment, they all registered a vow to keep a close eye on his movements until this adventure in Choisy, which promised to be so exciting, had come to a successful issue, and they were all back in England once more, when they hoped to enlist Lady Blakeney's support in persuading Percy not to rely on young Devinne again.

20 A LIKELY ALLY

Heavy hearted and still sullen and rebellious, St. John Devinne, familiarly known as Johnny, made his way through the town to the Levets' house. All sorts of wild schemes chased one another through his brain, schemes which had the one main objective in view to see Cécile de la Rodière, and, by giving her and her family warning of the mischief contemplated against them by the rabble of Choisy, to worm himself once more into her good graces and regain the love which he had forfeited so foolishly. Indeed, he had every hope of achieving this happy state of things through the fact that it was obviously Simon Pradel who had inflamed the temper of his fellow-citizens, by posing as the heroic victim of his own political opinions. Devinne himself was so convinced of Pradel's rôle in the affair, that he did not think he would have the slightest difficulty in persuading even Cécile that that abominable doctor was the instigator of all the coming trouble, in order to be revenged on her bother for the well- deserved thrashing which he had received.

Chance has a very funny way of shuffling the cards in the game of life. Here were two men, Louis Maurin, the French lawyer, and Lord St. John Devinne, son of an English Duke, both deadly enemies of Simon Pradel, the local doctor, who hardly knew either of them but who was looked upon by both as a serious rival to their love, a rival who must incontinently be swept out of the way. Maurin desired his moral and physical downfall in order to find his way clear for the wooing of Blanche Levet, whilst Devinne had reluctantly come to the conclusion that Cécile de la Rodière had so far demeaned herself as to fall in love with the fellow. She certainly had turned her back on him.

Devinne, ever since that fatal morning, and unless he now took strong measures on his own behalf, he might lose all chance of ever winning her.

These thoughts, as well as certain contumacious ones against the discipline imposed on him by "the chief," kept the young man's mind busy while he made his way through the town. Snow was falling in thin flakes: it was very cold, and there were few people about. It was then just past twelve o'clock: at half-past the workers in the government factory would be coming out and cafés and restaurants would soon be filled to overcrowding.

The new calendar with its Sans-Culottides, its Republican years and its Décadis, had not yet been evolved, and this was still Sunday-not a Christian Sunday, surely, but just a Day of Rest, with factories closed in the afternoon and hours during which paid agitators and government spies could find work for idle hands to do and thoughts of mischief for empty heads to plan. Devinne hurried along, hoping to deliver his message at the Levets and be well on the way to La Rodière before the crowd had been stirred into an organised march on the château. He pulled the collar of his greatcoat up to his ears and his head down to meet it, for the wind blowing right across the Grand' Place was cutting. At the angle of the Rue Verte he suddenly became aware of the man who at the moment was foremost in his thoughts. Simon Pradel was standing at the corner of the street, talking to a girl whose head was swathed in a shawl. Devinne thought that in her he recognized Levet's daughter, whom he had once seen at the château. She was talking heatedly and appeared distressed, for her voice shook as she spoke, and she had one hand on Pradel's arm as if she were either entreating or restraining him. As he went past them, Devinne heard the girl say:

"Don't go up there, Simon! Those aristos hate you. They will only think that you are fawning on them.... Don't go, Simon.... You will regret it, and they will despise you for it...they will . . ."

She seemed to be working herself up into a state of excitement and

kept on raising her voice until it sounded quite shrill.

Pradel tried to pacify her. "Hush, my dear," he said; "don't talk so loud: anyone might hear you."

But she was not to be pacified:

"I don't care who hears me," she retorted; "those aristos are devils who deserve all they will get. Why should you care what happens to them?... You only care because you are in love with Cécile...."

She burst into tears. Pradel put an arm round her shoulders.

"And now you talk like a foolish child...."

Devinne had instinctively halted within earshot, but now he was in danger of being seen and this he did not wish, so, rather reluctantly, he turned and went his way. It was too soon yet to gauge the importance of what he had heard, but already he felt that in this girl, who was obviously half crazy with jealousy, he might find a useful ally, should he fail to obtain an interview with Cécile on his own initiative. In any case, she must have the same desire that he had, namely, to keep Cécile and Pradel apart. This thought elated him, and it was with a more springy step that he strode briskly down the Rue Verte and after a few minutes rang the outside bell of the Levets' house.

Charles Levet opened the door to him, received the message sent to him by his friend Professor d'Arblay, expressed his satisfaction at hearing that Monsieur l'Abbé Edgeworth was safely on his way to Belgium, asked his visitor to join the family at dinner, and on the latter's courteous refusal, bade him a friendly farewell. Back the other side of the gate. Devinne paused a moment to reconsider the whole situation. Should he continue his protest against an irksome discipline, which he felt was incompatible with his dignity as a man of

action and of thought, or should he make a virtue of necessity, meet Blakeney and the others in the Restaurant Tison, hear their plans and then act in accordance with his own schemes and in his own interest?

On the whole he felt inclined to adopt the latter course. He didn't want to quarrel with Blakeney, not just yet, nor yet with the others who were all influential and popular men about town, who might, if the split came, make his position extremely uncomfortable in London. There was nothing he desired more at the moment than to extricate himself from the entanglement of the League, but he was wise enough to realise that if this was done at this juncture, he would, on his return to England, find the doors of more than one smart hostess closed against him. So for the moment there was nothing for it but to keep his appointment with Percy and the others in the Restaurant Tison, and in any case learn what plans were being evolved for this afternoon. If nothing was going to be done right away for the safety of Cécile, then he would act on his own. To this he had fully made up his mind. All this would mean going back now to that horrible cottage and getting once more into those filthy rags which he had come to hate, but he didn't really care now that he knew he could count on the co-operation of a jealous woman, whom he had heard cry out in a voice shrill with emotion: "You only care because you are in love with Cécile!"

Book III – MADEMOISELLE

21 CITIZEN CHAUVELIN

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24 A STRANGE PROPOSAL

21 CITIZEN CHAUVELIN

It must not be thought for a moment that authority as represented by the Gendarmerie Nationale, regular or volunteer, in any way approved, let alone aided and abetted, the insurrectionary movements that were such a feature of the first two years of the Revolution. Authority did not even wink at them, did its best, in fact, to put a stop to these marches and raids on neighbouring châteaux which only ended in a number of broken heads, in loot and unnecessary violence, and a severe remonstrance from the government who had its eye on all property owned by ci-devants and strongly disapproved of its wanton destruction at the hands of an irresponsible mob.

Thus it was that as soon as Simon Pradel became aware of the imminence of the mischief contemplated against the aristos up at La Rodière, and thinking only of Cécile and her safety, he went straight to the Hotel de Ville and drew the attention of the Chief Commissary of the Gendarmerie to what was in the wind.

"Citizen Conty," he explained, "has inflamed everyone's temper to such an extent that there is hardly a man or woman in Choisy to-day who will not march up to La Rodière, and, even if they do not commit murder, will certainly destroy a great deal of property which rightly belongs to the nation."

He was clever enough to know that it was this argument that would prevail. The Chief Commissary looked grave. He was mindful of his own position, not to say his own head, and therefore took the one drastic course which was most likely to minimise the mischief. He gave it out through a proclamation blazoned by the town crier, that by order of the government there would be no Day of Rest this Sunday, and that the work in the factories would be carried on as usual. This

meant that four-fifths of the male population of Choisy and one-third of its womenfolk would be kept at work until seven o'clock in the evening and that the plans for the afternoon's holiday would have to be considerably modified or abandoned altogether.

There was a great deal of dissatisfaction and much murmuring over this, but no man was bold enough to suggest revolt against a government decree. Anything approaching disobedience was very dangerous these days. The armaments factory of Choisy was one of the most important of its kind in Northern France. Every one knew, of course, that war with England was imminent, and to hamper the government at this juncture by shortage of arms was to court disaster, if not death.

In the Restaurant Tison, which was to be the starting point for the march on La Rodière, turbulence had given place to gloom. Even the troupe of musicians who were working with a will to try and revive drooping spirits failed to bring about that state of excitement so essential to the success of the proposed plan. Citizen Conty, too, had received his orders. "Let the people simmer down," the Chief Commissary had commanded, "the government does not want a riot in Choisy just now." Conty didn't care one way or the other. He was paid to carry out government orders, and knew how to steer clear of trouble if these happened to be contradictory. Louis Maurin the lawyer had assured him that in the end it would pay him better to give the aristos at La Rodière a little more rope, and, when the time was ripe, to denounce them as traitors, and if the accusation held and they were actually condemned he, Conty, would then be paid for his services at the usual rate: twenty, thirty livres, even fifty. Of course, there was Citizen Chauvelin to reckon with, an influential man and member of the new Committee of Public Safety who had unlimited powers, and Citizen Chauvelin had distinctly said that he desired a row at La Rodière not later than this day; he had even murmured

under his breath: "We shall have some fun over that raid at La Rodière," and had added something about "English spies," which at the time-it was two days ago-had greatly intrigued Citizen Conty.

The latter fully expected Chauvelin to put in an appearance in the restaurant, and there to give him final orders as to who should be obeyed in this case, a member of the Committee of Public Safety, or a mere Chief Commissary of Gendarmerie. It was close on two o'clock already. The factory bell calling the workers back would ring in half an hour, and Conty was getting anxious.

As time went on the general depression of spirits became more and more accentuated. Even the popular tunes, "Il était une bergère," or "Sur le pont d'Avignon," failed to bring forth the usual lusty response. The people sat at table, finishing their meagre fare, whispering, planning and grumbling. It would have been such fun to march in a body to La Rodière as one had done four years ago, and there was always something to pick up in a place of that sort, something for the larder or the cellar, not to mention things that one could sell presently to the Jew pedlars from Paris. And this afternoon would have been a perfect opportunity for the expedition. It was cold, and snow had ceased to fall. If one only could have made a start at two o'clock, one would have had a couple of hours daylight for the affair. Now, as things were, with work at the factory kept up till seven o'clock, what could anyone do? It would be pitch dark at five, with no moon and possibly a heavy fall of snow; and what was more: if the whole thing was put off those aristos up at La Rodière would certainly be warned by then of what awaited them and would get themselves safely out of the way. That was the general drift of conversation round the trestle tables of the Restaurant Tison. Conty could hear them all talking. He glanced repeatedly up at the clock hoping to see the trim figure of Citizen Chauvelin appear in the doorway. Once the workers had gone back to the factory it would be too late to carry out the original

plan, which had been approved of by Chauvelin, and Conty didn't relish the idea of having to shoulder the responsibility of what might or might not occur in that case. He would have preferred to receive final orders from a member of an influential committee, one who alone could issue orders over the head of the Chief Commissary.

It was then with a feeling of intense relief that precisely at twenty minutes past two he saw the sable-clad figure of Chauvelin working his way towards him through the crowd.

"Well? And what have you done?" Chauvelin queried curtly, and refused the chair which Conty had obsequiously offered him.

"You have heard the proclamation, Citizen?" Conty responded; "about work at the factory this afternoon?"

"I have. But I am asking you what you have done."

"Nothing, Citizen. I was waiting for you."

"You didn't carry out my orders?"

"I hadn't any, Citizen."

"Two days ago I gave you my commands to prepare the way for an armed raid on the château as soon as I was back in Choisy. Yesterday I sent you word that I would be back to-day. But I see no sign of a raid being organized either by you or anyone else."

"The decree was only promulgated a couple of hours ago. All the able-bodied men and women will have to go back to work in a few minutes; there was nothing to be done."

"How do you mean? There was nothing to be done? What about all these people here? I can see at least a hundred that do not work in

the factory, more than enough for what I want."

Conty gave a contemptuous shrug.

"The halt and the maimed," he retorted acidly; "the weaklings and the women. I thought every moment you would come, Citizen Chauvelin, and issue a counter decree giving the workers their usual Day of Rest. As you didn't come, I didn't know what to do."

"So you let them all get into the doldrums."

"What could I do, Citizen?" Conty reiterated sullenly. "I had no orders."

"You had no initiative, you mean? If you had you would have realized that if half the population of Choisy will in a moment or two go to work, the other half will still be here and ready for any mischief."

"Those bumpkins...!"

"Yes, louts and muckworms and cinderwenches. And let me tell you, Citizen Conty, that it is not for you to sneer at such excellent material, rather see that you utilize it as I directed you to do in the name of the government who know how to punish slackness as well as to reward energy."

Having said this, Chauvelin turned his back abruptly on the discomfited Conty and made for the door. Even as he did so an outside bell clanged out the summons for the workers to return to the factory. There was a general hubbub, chairs pushed aside and scraping against the stone floor, the tramp of feet all making for the door, voices shouting from one end of the room to the other. And right through the din, there came to Chauvelin's ears, at the very moment that he passed through the swing-doors, a sound that dominated ever

other, just a prolonged merry, irritatingly inane laugh.

Muttering and grumbling, the workers filed out of the restaurant, and in straggling groups made their way across the Grand' Place. A few remained behind—a couple hundred or so: there was Hector the cobbler, who had lost a leg last year at Valmy, and Marius the wig-maker, who had only one hand where-with to ply his trade; and there was Jean, who suffered from epilepsy, and Anatole, who was half-witted, and Jacques, who was just a dwarf. There were men who were over fifty, and youths who were not yet fourteen, and, of course, there were the women. Conty looked about him, and in his mind agreed with what Citizen Chauvelin had said. Here was excellent material for a well-organized insurrection, and now that the responsibility was no longer his, he would know how to utilize it.

Hardly had the last able-bodied man gone out of the place than Citizen Conty had climbed on the top of the table, and begun his harangue by apostrophizing the musicians.

"What mean you, rascals," he cried lustily, "by scraping your fiddles to give us nothing but sentimental ballads fit only for weaklings to hear? Our fine men have gone to work for their country, and here you are trying to make us sing about shepherdesses and their cats. Mordieu! have you never heard of the air that every patriotic Frenchman should know, an air that puts fire into our blood, not water: 'Allons enfants de la patrie! Le jour de gloire est arrivé!'"

At first the people did not take much notice of Conty; the men had gone and there was nothing much to do but go back to one's own hovels and mope there till they returned. But when presently the musicians, in response to the speaker's challenge, took up the strains of the revolutionary song, they straightened out their backs, turned about the better to hear the impassioned oratory which now poured from Citizen Conty's lips.

"Citizens," he bellowed, while the musicians stopped playing so as not to drown his voice, "while our able-bodied men toil and moil to forge the arms wherewith the soldiers of France will smite the enemies of our beloved country, shall we who cannot join them in this noble work sit still and do nothing to rid France of those other enemies of hers who are far more insidious and far more dangerous to her safety than the English or the Dutch? You know to what enemies I refer! It is to those ci-devants, noble seigneurs, to those aristos who for years, nay, for centuries, batted on the misery and the toil of the people, who grew richer and fatter year by year, while you and your fathers and your grandfathers before you starved so that they might eat, bore misery and disease so that they might wallow in good food and sprawl in down beds."

Murmurs of approval greeted this somewhat confused metaphor, while the musicians at a sign from Conty once more struck up the martial strain:

"Contre nous de la tyrannie.

L'étendard sanglant est levé!"

Conty put up his hand. Once again the musicians paused and once again the orator raised his voice, certain now that he held the attention of his audience. But this time he did not bellow. He began quietly with hardly any emphasis, to explain to them just how in the past the rich had lived and the poor had suffered, how they had all worked hard in order to provide the aristos up in their château with all those luxuries of which they themselves had not even a conception. They, the women, had worked their fingers to the bone sewing and washing and scrubbing; the men had endured kicks from horses, bites from dogs, thrashings from their masters, had contracted sickness, lost a limb or an eye, all in the service of aristos who had

never done anything to alleviate their woes.

At the first mention of a château, the crowd began to prick up its ears. They knew all about a château. There was La Rodière up on the hill whither they would all have marched this afternoon had not the aristos cajoled the Chief Commissary into ordering the men to go to work even on the Day of Rest.

"Aux armes, citoyens!

Chargez vos bataillons!"

The musicians seemed a little uncertain of the tune at this point, but what did it matter? The crowd was getting into the right mood, and a hundred lusty throats soon put them in the right way.

"Chargez vos bataillons!" they sang, and banged on the tables with their hands or any tools that were handy.

Conty was in his element. He held all these poor, half-starved people in a fever by the magic of his oratory, and he would not allow their fever to cool down again. From an abstract reference to any château to the actual mention of La Rodière did not take him long. Now he was speaking of Dr. Pradel, the respected citizen of Choisy, the friend of the poor, who dared to express his political opinions in the presence of those arrogant ci-devants, and what had happened? He had been insulted, outraged, thrashed like a dog!

"And you, Citizens," he once more bellowed, "though the government has not called upon you to fashion bayonets and sabres, are you going to sit still and allow your sworn enemies, the enemies of France, to ride rough-shod over you now that our glorious revolution has levelled all ranks and brought the most exalted heads down under the guillotine? You have no sabres or bayonets, it is true,

but you have your scythes and your axes and you have your fists. Are you going to sit still, I say, and not show those traitors up there on the hill that there is only one sovereignty in the world that counts and which they must obey, the sovereignty of the people?"

The magic words had their usual effect. A perfect storm of applause greeted them, and all at once they began to sing: "Allons enfants de la patrie!" and the musicians blew their trumpets and banged their drums and soon there reigned in the restaurant the sort of mighty row beloved by agitators.

22 AT THE CHÂTEAU

It did not take Conty long after that to persuade a couple of hundred people who were down in the dumps and saw no prospect of getting out of them that it was their duty to go at once to the Château de la Rodière and show these arrogant ci-devants that when the sovereignty of the people was questioned, it would know how to turn the tables on those who dared to flout it. The fact that he quite omitted to explain how the sovereignty of the people had in this particular instance been assailed did not weigh with his unsophisticated audience in the least. They had nothing on earth to do this afternoon, and they were told that it was their patriotic duty to march to La Rodière and there to make themselves as unpleasant as possible, so why in the world should they hesitate?

Headed at first by Citizen Conty himself they all trooped out of the Restaurant Tison, after the manner of those determined Amazons who had marched from Paris to Versailles and there insisted on seeing the ci-devant royal family-Louis Capet, his wife and his two children-and on making their presence felt there, in spite of Bodyguards. So most of what was left of the population of Choisy assembled on the Grand' Place, there formed itself into a compact body and started to march through the town, and thence up the hill, headed by a band of musicians who had sprung up from nowhere a few days ago and had since then greatly contributed to the gaiety inside the cafés and restaurants by their spirited performance of popular airs. On this great occasion they headed the march with their fiddles and trumpets and drum. There were five of them altogether and their leader, a great hulking fellow who should have been fighting for his country instead of scraping the catgut, was soon very popular with the crowd. His rendering of the "Marseillaise" might be somewhat faulty, but he was such a lively kind of vagabond that he put every one into good humour long before they reached the

château.

And they remained in rare good humour. For them this march, this proposed baiting of the aristos was just an afternoon's holiday, something to take them out of themselves, to help them to forget their misery, their squalor, the ever-present fear that conditions of life would get worse rather than better. Above all, it lured them into the belief that this glorious revolution had done something stupendous for them-they didn't quite know what, poor things, but there it was: the millennium, so the men from Paris kept on assuring them. Admittedly, this stupendous thing, this millennium, was already overdue, but these exciting expeditions and telling those arrogant ci-devants a few home truths, made it easier to wait for the really happy days to come, and so the insurrectionary march on La Rodière progressed merrily. It is a fact that insurrection, as an art, carried on by an unruly mob, was the direct product of the Revolution in France. It was revolutionary France that first invented and then perfected the art of insurrection. There was no such thing before 1789, when the crowd stormed the Bastille and reduced it, as a besieging army would reduce an enemy fort. And the movement has to a great extent retained its perfection only in France, probably because it suits the impulsive French temperament better than the temperament of other nations.

Actually a mob-an angry mob-say in England, in Russia or Germany, is usually just a mass of dull, tenacious and probably vindictive humanity; but in France, even during the fiercest days of revolution, there was always an element of inventiveness, almost of genius, in the crowd of men and women that went hammering at the gates of châteaux, insisted on seeing its owners, even when, as in Versailles, these were still their King and Queen, and devised a score of ways of humiliating and baiting them without necessarily resorting to violence. Thus, a French mob is unlike any other in the world.

And so it was in this instance with the hundred or two of women and derelicts who marched up the hill to La Rodière. In the wake of an unwashed, out-at-elbows, raffish troupe of musicians. They stumped along, those, at any rate, who were able-bodied, shouting and singing snatches of the "Marseillaise," not feeling the cold, which was bitter, nor the fatigue of breasting the incline up to the château, on a road slippery with ice and snow. They were as lively as they could be, not knowing exactly what they were going to do once they got up there and came face to face with the ci-devant Marquis and Marquise, for whom they had worked in the past and from whom they had received alternately many kindnesses and many blows. Those who were lame or otherwise feeble, such as Hector the cobbler or Jean the epileptic, stumped along, too, but more slowly, and soon there was a straggling group that fell away from the main body, a group made up of all the derelicts in Choisy who had lost a limb or an eye, were half-witted, or otherwise incapable, but nevertheless were as lively, as expectant of fun, as were their more favoured fellow-citizens.

And right in the rear of them all there walked two men. One of them was Citizen Conty, the paid agent of the government; the other was small and spare, was dressed from head to foot in sober black, his voluminous black cloak effectually concealing the tri-colour scarf which he wore round his waist. He never spoke to his companion while they both trudged up the road in the wake of the crowd, but now and then he would throw quick, searching glances on the surrounding landscape and up at the cloud-covered sky, almost as if he were seeking to wrest from the heavens or the earth some secret which Nature alone could reveal. This was Citizen Chauvelin, at one time representative of the revolutionary government at the English Court, now a member of the newly constituted Committee of Public Safety the most powerful organization in the country, created for the suppression of treason and the unmasking of traitors and of spies.

At the top of the hill there, where the narrow footpath abuts on the main road, the two men came to a halt. Chauvelin said curtly to his companion:

"You may go back now, Citizen Conty."

Conty was only too thankful to obey; he turned down the path and was soon out of sight and out of earshot.

Chauvelin walked on in the direction of the château. The crowd was a long way ahead now, even the stragglers had caught up with them, and there was lusty cheering when the gates of La Rodière first came into view.

Chauvelin came to a halt once more. There was no one in sight, and the perfect quietude of the place was only disturbed by the sound of revellings gradually dying away in the distance. Chauvelin now gave a soft, prolonged whistle, and a minute or two later a man in the uniform of the Gendarmerie Nationale, but wrapped in a huge cloak from head to foot so that his accoutrements could not be seen, came out cautiously from the thicket close by. Chauvelin beckoned to him to approach.

"Well, Citizen Sergeant," he demanded, "did you notice any man who might be that damnable English spy?"

"No, Citizen, I can't say that I did. I was well placed, too, and could see the whole crowd file past me, but I couldn't spot any man who appeared abnormally tall or who looked like an Englishman."

"I expect you were too dense to notice," Chauvelin retorted dryly. "But, anyway, it makes no matter. I will spot him soon enough. As soon as I do I will give you the signal we agreed on. You remember

it?"

"Yes, Citizen. A long whistle twice and then one short one."

"How many men have you got?"

"Thirty, Citizen, and three corporals."

"Where are they?"

"Twenty, with two corporals, in the stables. Ten with one corporal in the coach-house."

"Any outdoor workers about? Grooms or gardeners?"

"Two gardeners, Citizen, and one in the stables."

"They understand?"

"Yes, Citizen. I have promised them fifty livres each if they keep their eyes and mouth shut, and certain arrest and death if they do not. They are terrified and quite safe to hold their tongue."

"My orders, Citizen Sergeant, are that the men remain where they are till they hear the signal, two prolonged whistles, followed by one short one. Like this"-and he took a toy whistle out of his waistcoat pocket and blew softly into it, twice and once again, in the manner which he had described.

"As soon as they hear the whistle, but not before, they are to come out of their hiding-place and make their way in double quick time to the house. Ten men with one corporal will then take up their stand outside each of the three entrances of the château. You know where these are?"

"Quite well, Citizen."

"No one must be allowed to go out of the château until I give the order."

"I quite understand, Citizen."

"It will be the worse for you if you do not. I suppose the men know that we are after that damnable English spy who calls himself the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"They know it, Citizen."

"And that there is a government reward of fifty livres for every soldier of the Republic who aids in his capture?"

"The men are not likely to shirk their duty, Citizen."

"Very well, then. And now about the aristos up there. There is the ci-devant Marquis with his mother and sister, also two aides-ménage who are not ashamed to serve those traitors to their country. Those five, then will be under arrest, but remain in the château till we are ready for them. I will give you further orders as to them. We shall convey them under escort to Choisy some time between the later afternoon, after we have packed the rabble off, and early dawn tomorrow; I have not decided which but will let you know later. You have a coach handy?"

"Yes, Citizen. There is a cabaret close by here, farther up the road. We put up the coach there in the yard, and left two of our men in charge. The place is quiet and quite handy."

"That is all, Citizen Sergeant. You may go and transmit my orders to your corporals. As soon as you have done that, go as unobtrusively

as you can into the house. No one will notice you. They will all be busy baiting the aristos by then. Keep as near as you can to the room where the crowd is at its thickest-the noise will guide you-and wait for me there. Well? What is it now?" Chauvelin went on as the man seemed in no hurry to go.

"Could I order something for the men to keep themselves warm? It is bitterly cold in those stables. The roof is out of repair and-"

"Something?" the other broke in tartly. "What do you mean by 'something'?"

"A drop of eau-de-vie...the cabaret is quite close-"

"Certainly not," Chauvelin rasped out; "half the men would be drunk by the time I wanted them. They can stamp their feet to keep themselves warm. Nobody would hear them with all that row going on."

There was nothing for it but to obey. Citizen Chauvelin, of the committee of Public Safety, was not the man one could ever argue or plead with. The sergeant, resigned and submissive, saluted and turned on his heel. He walked away in the direction of the stables. Chauvelin remained for quite a long while standing there alone, his thoughts running riot in his brain. Twice the Scarlet Pimpernel had slipped through his fingers since that memorable night four months ago at Lord Grenville's ball in London when he, Chauvelin, had first realized that that daring adventurous spy was none other than Sir Percy Blakeney, the arbiter of fashion, the seemingly inane fop who kept London society in a perpetual ripple of laughter at his foolish antics, the most fastidious exquisite in sybaritic England.

"You were part of that unwashed crowd in the Restaurant Tison, my fine friend," he murmured to himself, "for I heard you laugh and felt

your eyes daring to mock me again. Mock me? Aye! but not for long, my gallant fellow. The trap is laid and you won't escape me this time, let me assure you of that, and it will be your 'dear Monsieur Chambertin' who will mock you when you are brought down and gagged and trussed like a fowl ready for roasting."

23 THE RIGAUDON

Now then "allons enfants de la patri-i-i-e." The crowd in a high state of excitement had pushed open the great gates of excitement had pushed open the great gates of La Rodière-these were never bolted these days- and marched up the stately avenue bordered by a double row of gigantic elms which seemed to be waving and nodding their majestic crowns at sight of the motley throng. Ahead of them all marched the musicians, blowing with renewed gusto into their brass trumpets or sending forth into the frosty atmosphere prolonged rolls of drums. Only the fiddler was not in his usual place. He had dropped back on the other side of the gate in order to fit a fresh length of catgut on his violin to replace a broken one. But he was not missed at this juncture, for the other musicians appeared bent on proving the fact that a fiddle was not of much value as a noise-maker when there were trumpets and drums in the orchestra.

Up the crowd marched and mounted the perron steps to the front door of the mansion. They pulled the chain and the bell responded with a loud clang-once, twice and three times. They were themselves making such a noise, shouting and singing, that probably poor old Paul, rather scared but trying to be brave, did not actually hear the bell. However, he did hear it after a time and with shaking knees and trembling voice went to get his orders from Monsieur le Marquis. By this time those in the forefront of the crowd had tugged so hard at the bell-pull that it snapped and came down with a clatter on the marble floor of the perron; whereupon they set to with their fists and nearly brought the solid front door down with their hammerings and their kicks. They didn't hear Paul's shuffling footsteps coming down the great staircase, nor yet his drawing of the bolts, so that when after a minute or two, while they were still hammering and kicking, the door was opened abruptly, the foremost in the ranks tumbled over one another into the hall. This caused great hilarity. Hurrah! Hurrah! This

was going to be a wonderful afternoon's holiday! Onward children of la patrie, the day of glory has certainly arrived. Striving, pushing, laughing, singing, waving arms and stamping feet, the bulk of the crowd made its way up the grand staircase. Poor old Paul! As well attempt to stem the course of an avalanche as to stop this merry, jostling crowd from going where it listed. Some of them indeed wandered into the reception-rooms to right and left of the hall, the larger and smaller dining-rooms, the library, the long gallery and so on, but they found nothing worth destroying. They were not in a mood to smash windows or tear up books, and treasures of art and vertu had long since been put away in comparative safety. There certainly were a few pieces of furniture standing about, looking aloof and solitary under their dust-sheets, and one or two of the women with the French instinct for turning everything into money, turned these over and over, trying to appraise their value. But soon there came from the floor above such prolonged laughter and such hilarious shouts, that curiosity got the better of greed and the quest after loot was soon abandoned.

Upstairs the rest of the merry party, after wandering from room to room, arrived in the grand salon where close on four years ago now the remains of the late Marquis de la Rodière had rested for three days before being removed for internment in Paris. On that occasion they had all come to a halt, awed in spite of themselves, by the somewhat eerie atmosphere of the place, the dead flowers, the torn laces, the smell of guttering candles and of stale incense. The crowd to-day, more jaunty than they were then, had also come to a halt, but only for a few moments. They stared wide-eyed at the objects ranged against the walls, the gilded consols, the mirrors, the crystal sconces and the chairs, and presently they spied the platform whereon in the happy olden days the musicians used to stand playing dance music for Monsieur le Marquis and his guests. The spinet was still there and the desk of the conductor, and a number of stands in gilded wood

which were used for holding the pieces of music.

Amid much excitement and laughter the musicians were called up to mount the platform. This they were quite willing to do, but where was the leader, the fiddler with the grimy face and toothless mouth whose stentorian voice would have raised the dead? A small group who had wandered up to the window saw him stumping up the avenue. They gave a warning shout, the window was thrown open, and cries of "Allons! hurry up!" soon galvanized him into activity. He was lame, and dragged his left leg, but the infirmity did not appear to worry him. As soon as he had reached the perron he started scraping his fiddle. He was met at the foot of the staircase by an enthusiastic throng who carried him up shoulder high, and dropped him down all of a heap on the musician's platform. And a queer sight did this vagabond orchestra look wielding their ramshackle fiddles and trumpets and drumsticks. What a sight to stir the imagination of any thinking man who in the past had seen and heard the private orchestra of Monsieur le Marquis de la Rodière, dressed in their gorgeous uniforms covered with gold lace, under the conductorship perhaps of a Mozart or a Grétry. But the stirrings of imagination were the last things that troubled this hilarious crowd to-day. With much laughter and clapping of hands they ordered the musicians to play a rigaudon. Jacques, the son of the butcher of Choisy, a lad of thirteen with a humped back and the stature of a dwarf, was known to be a great adept at the dance and so was Victoire, the buxom wife of the cabaretier round the corner. They were commanded to perform and together they stepped forward, a comical pair, for Jacques's head only reached as high as Victoire's massive hip and his short arm could not conveniently encircle her waist.

The musicians struck up "Sur le Pont d'Avignon," the only dance tune they knew, and that one none too well.

"Sur le pont d'Avignon.

On y danse, on y danse.

Sur le pont d'Avignon.

On y danse tout en rond."

And Jacques, with his dwarfish hand on Victoire's ample waist, stamped his feet and whirled the lady of large proportions round and round in the mazes of the dance. She was perspiring profusely and her small eyes deeply encased in flesh shone with excitement, whilst Jacques's impish face wore the expression of a young satyr.

It was at this point that the outbursts of laughter rose to such a high pitch that the thrifty housewives down below were tempted to abandon their loot. What had caused the uproar was the sudden appearance of the ci-devant Marquis through what seemed to be a hole in the wall. As a matter of fact this was a door masked by tapestry which gave first on a vestibule and thence on a small boudoir where Madame la Marquise had been sitting with François and Cécile, and with poor Marie huddled up in a corner like a frightened rabbit, all fully expecting that the tumultuous crowd would soon tire, and content itself as it had done four years ago with breaking a few windows, carrying off what portable furniture there was left in the salon, and ending its unpleasant visitation in the cellar and the larder, where there was little enough to tempt its greed.

François de la Rodière was facing the rabble with a riding-whip. For a time his sister was able to restrain him from such a palpable act of folly, but presently the sound of ribald laughter coming from the grand salon where his father had once lain in state, surrounded by flowers and ecclesiastical appurtenances, so outraged him that he lost all control over himself and all sense of prudence. He shook off Cécile's

detaining hand, and strode out of the room. Madame la Marquise had offered no protest or advice; she was one of those women, the product of generations of French high-born ladies who, entrenched as it were in their own dignity, never gave a single thought to such a matter as a social upheaval. "It will all pass away," was their dictum "God will punish them all in His own time!" So she turned a deaf ear to the rioting of the rabble, and went on with her crochet work with perfect serenity.

Cécile, on the other hand, was all for conciliation. She knew her brother's violent temper and genuinely feared for his safety should he provoke the crowd, who at present seemed good-tempered enough, either by word or gesture. She followed him into the vestibule, and saw him take a riding-whip off the wall and throw open the narrow door which gave on the grand salon. The moment he did that the uproar in the salon which had been deafening up to now suddenly died down. Complete silence ensued, but only for a few seconds; the next moment François had closed the door behind him and at once the hubbub in the next room rose louder than ever and there came a terrific outburst of hilarious shouting and laughter and vigorous clapping of hands. Cécile stood there listening, terrified and undecided, longing to go to her brother's assistance, yet feeling the futility of any intervention on her part should the crowd turn ugly. For the moment they appeared distinctly amused, for the laughter went on louder than ever, and it was accompanied by the measured stamping of feet, the clapping of hands and the strains of dance music. What was going on in there? Cécile, terrified at first, felt a little more reassured. She couldn't hear her brother's voice, and apparently the people were enjoying themselves, for they were dancing and laughing and the music never ceased. At last anxiety got the better of prudence. Tentatively she in her turn opened the communicating door, and exactly the same thing happened that had greet François de la Rodière's appearance in the crowded salon. Absolute silence

for a few seconds, and then a terrific, uproarious shout.

What Cécile saw did indeed turn her almost sick with horror, for there was her brother in the middle of the room, dishevelled, with his necktie awry and his cheeks the colour of ashes, in the centre of a ring made up of the worst type of ragamuffins and cinderwenches she had ever seen, all holding hands and twirling round and round him to the tune of a wild rigaudon. His riding-whip was lying broken in half across the threshold at Cécile's feet. The crowd had seized upon him directly they were aware of his presence, torn the whip out of his hand, broken it and thrown it on the floor. They had dragged him and pushed him to the centre of the room, formed a ring round him, shouted injurious epithets and made rude gestures at him; and the more pale he got with rage, the more helpless he found himself, the louder was their laughter and the wilder their dance.

Cécile felt as if she were paralysed. She couldn't move, her knees were shaking under her, and before she could recover herself two women had seized her, one by each hand, and dragged her across the room, where she was thrust into the centre of another ring of uproarious females who danced and capered round her, holding hands and laughing at her obvious terror. It was all like a terrible nightmare. Cécile, trying in vain to control herself, could only put her hands up to her face so as to hide from the mocking crowd the blush of indignation and shame that flooded her cheeks at the sound of the obscene words that men and women, apparently all in right good-humour, flung at her, while they danced what seemed to the poor girl like a saraband of witches. Suddenly she heard a cry:

"Make her dance, Jacques! Make the aristo step it with you! I'll warrant she has never danced the rigaudon with such a handsome partner before."

And Cécile was conscious first of a whiff of garlic, then of a clammy

hand seizing her own, and finally of a shoulder pressed against her side and of an arm around her waist. With a shudder she looked down and saw the grinning, puckish face and misshapen, dwarfish body of Jacques, the son of the local butcher, whom she had often befriended when he was baited by boys bigger and stronger than himself. He was leering up at her and clinging to her waist, trying to make her foot a measure with him. Now unlike her brother, Cécile de la Rodière was possessed of a good deal of sound common sense. She knew well enough that to try and run one's head against a stone wall could only result in bruises, if not worse. Here they were, both of them, she and François, not to mention maman, at the mercy of a couple of hundred people who, though fairly good-tempered at the moment, might soon turn ugly if provoked. She rather felt as if she had been thrust into a cage full of wild beasts and that to humour them was the only chance of safety. She looked about her helplessly, hoping against hope that she might encounter a face that was neither cruel nor mocking, and in her heart prayed, prayed to God to deliver her from this nightmare.

And then suddenly the miracle happened. It was a miracle in very truth, for there in the wide-open doorway was the one man in the world, her world, on whom she could rely, the man who alone next to God could save her from this awful humiliation. Pradel! Simon Pradel! He looked flushed and anxious; he was panting as if he had been running hard for goodness knows how long. His dark, deep-set eyes roamed rapidly round the room till they encountered hers. Thank God! Thank God, that he was here! The scar across his forehead where François had hit him still showed crimson across the pale, damp skin, but his eyes were kind and reassuring. Hers were fastened on him with a look of appeal, and in a moment he was half across the room, pushing his way towards her through the crowd.

All at once the crowd saw him. Dr. Pradel! Simon! their Simon! The

hero of the hour! A lusty cheer roused the echo of the vast hall at sight of him. Now indeed would the fun be fast and furious! Pradel, in the meanwhile, had reached the centre of the room, he broke through the cordon that surrounded Cécile, quite good-naturedly but very firmly he thrust Jacques the butcher's son on one side, took hold of the girl's trembling hand and put his strong arms round her waist.

"Allons," he shouted to the musicians, "put some verve into your playing. 'Tis I will dance the rigaudon with the aristo!"

Nothing loth, the musicians blew their trumpets and beat their drums with renewed vigour:

"Sur le pont d'Avignon.

On y danse, on y danse.

Sur le pont d'Avignon.

On y danse tout en rond!"

A hundred couples were formed and soon they were all of them dancing and singing, not hoarsely or stridently, but just with immense gusto, as if they desired nothing else but enjoy a real jollity.

"Try to smile," Pradel whispered in Cécile's ear. "Be brave! don't show that you are afraid!"

Cécile said: "I am not afraid." And indeed, with her hand in his, she tripped the rigaudon step by step and was no longer afraid. It seemed to her as if with Pradel's nearness the nightmare had become just a dream. Everything now was gay, almost happy. Cruelty and mockery, the desire to humiliate had faded from the faces of the crowd. Every one was smiling at everybody else. One woman called

out loudly across the room to Cécile: "Well chosen, my pretty! Our Simon will make you a fine husband! And you will give France some splendid sons!"

"Smile!" Pradel commanded. "Smile to them and nod! For God's sake, smile!"

And Cécile smiled and nodded while the cry was taken up. "Our Simon and the aristo! And a quiverful of handsome sons! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

In this wild saturnalia even François de la Rodière was forgotten. He was pushed on one side like a useless piece of furniture and collapsed into the nearest chair, half fainting with the exertion of keeping some semblance of control over himself. What he had suffered in the way of humiliation during the past quarter of an hour was unbelievable, and now to see his sister Mademoiselle de la Rodière made to demean herself by dancing with that purveyor of pills and purges, whom François would gladly have strangled, and to be forced to hear name coupled with that of this impudent upstart, seemed more than he could endure.

It was he who suddenly became aware of a curiously incongruous figure of a man who at this point was working his way unobtrusively through the throng. Short, spare, dressed in sober black from head to foot, he had the tricolour scarf round his waist. No one in the crowd took any notice of him. Only François saw him, and in spite of the tell-tale tricolour scarf which proclaimed the man to be in the service of the revolutionary government, he felt that some sort of rescue from this devil's carnival could be effected through one who at any rate looked as if he had washed and brushed his clothes. François tried to attract his attention, but the man walked quietly on, till he was quite close to the spot where Cécile was trying bravely to keep up the rôle of good-humour and even gaiety which Pradel had enjoined her to

assume. She continued to step it, wondering how all this would end. She saw the little man in black wind his way in and out among the dancers, and she saw the leader of the musicians, the unkempt, unshaved, toothless fiddler step down from the platform and always playing his fiddle, follow on the heels of the little man in black. She was so fascinated by the sight of those two figures in such strange contrast one to the other, one so spruce and trim, the other so grimy, one so stern and the other grinning all over his face, that she lost step and had to cling with both hands to her partner's arm.

Then it was that there occurred the strangest of all the strange events of this memorable day. The little man in black was now quite close to her, and the fiddler was immediately behind him and Cécile watched them both, fascinated. All of a sudden the fiddler threw back his head and laughed. Such curious laughter it was, quite merry, but somehow it suggested the merriment of a fool. Cécile stared at the man, for there was something almost eerie about him now, and Pradel too stared at him as amazed, as fascinated as was the girl herself, for the fiddler had thrown down his fiddle.

He straightened his back and stretched out his arms till he appeared preternaturally tall, like a Titan or like a Samson about to shatter the marble pillars of the old château, and to hurl them down with a thunderous crash in the midst of the revellers.

The little man in black also stared at the fiddler, and very slowly the whole expression of his face underwent a change, from surprise to horror and thence to triumph mixed with a kind of awe. His thin lips curled into a mocking smile and through them there came words spoken in English, a language which Cécile understood. What he said was:

"So, my valiant Scarlet Pimpernel, we meet again at last!" and at

the same time he put his hand in his waistcoat pocket and drew out what looked like an ordinary whistle which he was about to put to his mouth when the fiddler, with another outburst of inane laughter, knocked it out of his hand.

For the space of less than two seconds, breathless hush fell on the merry-making throng. The crashing of the fiddle as it was hurled to the floor, the strange outburst of laughter, the rattle of the whistle as it fell, had reduced everyone to silence. But now a wild shout broke in on this chastened mood.

"A spy! a spy!" the fiddler cried in a stentorian voice. "We are betrayed. We shall be massacred! Sauve qui peut!"

And with a sudden stretch of his powerful arms he picked up the little man in black and threw him over his shoulder as if he were a bale of goods and ran with his struggling and kicking burden across the room towards the door. And all the time he continued to shout: "A spy! a spy! We shall be massacred! Remember Paris last September!" And the crowd took up the cry as a crowd will, for are not one hundred humans the counterpart of one hundred sheep? They took up the cry and shouted: "A spy! A spy!" and ran in a body helter-skelter on the heels of the fiddler and his sable-clad load, out of the room across the marble vestibule, down the grand staircase and down below that, through the servants' old quarters, through the kitchen and the pantry, the wash-house and the buttery, and down by the winding staircase which led to the cellar. And behind him there was the crowd, no longer good-tempered now, or intent on holiday-making, but a real rabble this time, and a frightened crowd at that, jostling, pushing, tumbling over one another. An angry crowd is fearsome, but a frightened crowd is worse, for it is ready for anything—bloodshed, carnage, butchery. No one knew that better than the victim of this amazing aggression. He, Chauvelin, had often himself

provoked a crowd into committing murder. Now he was utterly helpless; struggle and kick as he might, he was held as in a steel vice over those powerful shoulders, head down, with the blood hammering away in his temples, a wounded fox with a pack of hounds on his trail. What was going to happen to him? Would this enemy throw him to those hounds, who would surely tear him to pieces. At the top of the stairs, outside the grand salon, he had caught sight, but only dimly, of the sergeant flattened against the wall, as scared as any hunted animal. He had tried to shout to him: "The signal! the signal!" but he felt that his voice never reached the soldier's ears.

And still that awful crowd! the women! Nom d'un chien, the women!! Chauvelin could thank his stars that his merciless captor ran so fast that he left those terrifying Mænads at a good distance behind him. But what in the devil's name was going to happen to him? He learned it soon enough. Arrived at the bottom of the stone stairs, the acrid smell of wine and alcohol and dankness struck his nostrils. He raised his head as much as he could, and saw a yawning door ahead of him. Earlier in the afternoon a few among the ragamuffins had found their way down to the cellar. But the cellar was empty of liquor, and they went away, cursing and leaving the door wide open. Chauvelin felt himself carried in through that door and then thrown none too gently down on a heap of dank straw. The next moment he heard that horrible, hideous, hated laugh, the mocking words: "A bientôt, my dear Monsieur Chambertin!" Then the banging to of a heavy door, the pushing of bolts, the clang of a chain and the grating of a rusty key in the lock, and nothing more. He was crouching on a heap of damp straw, in almost total darkness, sore in body, humiliated to the very depths of his soul, burning with rage and the very bitterness of his disappointment.

He could only hear vaguely what went on the other side of the door. Murmurs and shouts, a few hoarse cries. Was that abominable

rabble demanding its right to commit the murder for which their sadistic spirits clamoured? Chauvelin was not physically a coward, but he was afraid of a mob, because he had more than once seen one at its worst. Furious. Hysterical. Unchecked. Crawling on hands and knees, he drew close to the door, and cowered there, his ear glued to it. The only word he could distinguish was "Key!" The were demanding the key, and apparently were being refused. Was Sir Percy Blakeney defending the life of his most bitter enemy? Or was it that he himself wished to commit the murder which would rid him for ever of his inveterate foe? Huddled up against the door, his teeth chattering, his knees shaking, Chauvelin was not left long in doubt. The voice of Sir Percy rose and fell. He was talking. Talking and laughing, and soon the crowd forgot its ill-humour and its hysteria; he talked to them and presently they listened. He laughed and they laughed with him. And after a time they allowed themselves to be persuaded. The spy was safe under lock and key, so their friend the fiddler assured them; then why not leave him there? There would always be time later on to give him his deserts. And in the meanwhile would it not be wise to see if there were not more spies about the house and then go back and continue the fun? The music. The dancing. Why not? The day was young yet.

Chauvelin couldn't hear any of that, but he guessed it all. He had seen the Scarlet Pimpernel at that kind of work before. Grimy, sans-culotte, outwardly a real muckworm, but eloquent, persuasive, able by some subtle magic to sway a crowd as no one in Chauvelin's experience had ever done. He could see him in his mind's eye, standing with his back to the cellar door, with massive legs apart and arms outstretched, facing the crowd as he always faced any and every danger that threatened him, full of resource and of impudence. The wretched prisoner was conscious that the crowd had once more been swayed by this daring adventurer, as others had been swayed by him in Boulogne and in Paris, at Asnières and Moisson. Chauvelin

saw those scenes pass before his mind's eye as in a dream, and as in a dream he heard the heavy footsteps treading once more the stone steps, but up this time to the floor above. He heard the talking and the laughter growing more and more indistinct and finally dying away altogether. The rabble had gone, but what was to become of him now? Would he be left to die of inanition, shut up in a cellar like a savage dog or cat? No! he felt quite sure that he need not fear that kind of revenge at the hands of the man whom he had pursued with such relentless hate. Instinctively he did pay this tribute to the most gallant foe he had ever pitted his wits against.

What then? He was left wondering. For how long he did not know. Was it for a few minutes or several hours? When presently he heard the rusty key grate once more in the lock, and once more he dragged himself away from the door. A shaft of yellow light from a lantern cut through the gloom of his prison, the door was opened, and that hateful mocking voice said:

"Company for you, my dear Monsieur Chambertin!" And a bundle which turned out to be a man wrapped in a cloak and wearing the uniform of the Gendarmerie Nationale was thrust into the cellar, and landed on the damp straw beside him. The humble sergeant of gendarmerie had fared no better than the powerful and influential member of the Committee of Public Safety.

24 A STRANGE PROPOSAL

After a time Cécile gradually felt as if she had suddenly awakened from an ugly dream, during which every one of her senses had been put to torture. Her eyes, her hears, her nostrils had been outraged by evil smells and ribald words, and the wild antics of King Mob. Then all at once silence, almost peace. The sound of those unruly masses, shouting, singing, stumping, was gradually dying away. A few stragglers, yielding to curiosity, were even now going out of the room. In another remote corner François was struggling to his feet. He appeared dazed and like a man broken in body and spirit. He staggered as far as the tapestried door which led to vestibule and boudoir; as he did so his foot knocked against his broken riding-whip. He stared down at it vacantly, as if he did not know what it was and why it was there, and then passed through the door and closed it behind him.

Pradel and Cécile were alone.

They were both silent. Constrained. She wanted to say something to him, but somehow the words would not come. She knew so little about this man who had, as a matter of fact, saved her reason. At one moment during this wild saraband she had felt as if she were going mad. Then he had come and a sense of security had descended into her soul. But why she should have felt comforted, she couldn't say. She knew that he loved her, at any rate had loved her until that awful hour when he had suffered a terrible outrage at her brother's hands. He couldn't continue to love her after that. Could not. He must hate her and all her family. But if he did, why had he come running all the way from Choisy and stopped this hysterical multitude from doing her bodily harm? There was no ignoring the fact that he had come running along all the way from Choisy, and that he had saved her and maman and François from disaster. Then why did he

look so aloof, so entirely indifferent? His face was quite expressionless; only that horrid scar showed up on his pale forehead. She hated the sight of that scar, but couldn't help looking at it and thinking: "How he must hate us all!" Of course, he belonged to the party that deposed the King and proclaimed the Republic; that, in fact, was François's chief grievance against him. She had never heard him discuss politics, and she and maman lived such a secluded life she didn't know much of what went on. She hated all murderers and regicides-oh! regicides above all!-but somehow she didn't believe that Pradel was one of these. Even before the beginnings of this awful revolution he had always spent most of his time-and people said half his private fortune-in doing good to the needy and keeping up the children's hospital in Choisy. Cécile knew all that. She had even done her best in a small way in the past to help him with some of his charitable work when knowledge of it came her way. No, no, a man of that type was no murderer, no regicide. But it was all very puzzling. Especially as he neither spoke nor moved, apparently leaving the initiative to her.

At last she was able to take it. She mastered her absurd diffidence and steadied her voice as best she could.

"I wish I knew how to thank you, Monsieur le Docteur," she said. "You saved my reason. I think if you had not interfered when you did I should have gone mad."

"Not so bad as that, citizeness, I think," he responded with the ghost of a smile.

Cécile liked his smile. It was kind. But she hated his calling her "citizeness." She stiffened at the word and went on more coolly:

"You have remarkable influence over the people here. They love you."

"They are not a bad crowd really," he said and then added after a second's pause: "Not yet."

"It is strange how they followed that fiddler. Did you see him?"

"Yes!"

"To me he did not seem human. More like a giant out of a fairy-tale. Did you hear what that funny little man in black said to him?"

"I heard, Citizeness. But, unfortunately, I did not understand. He spoke in English, I think."

"Yes! and he called the fiddler 'my valiant Scarlet Pimpernel.'"

"What is that?"

"You have never heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"Only as a mythical personage."

"He really does exist though. It was he, who-"

She paused abruptly, for she had been on the point of naming the Abbé Edgeworth and his escape from La Rodière. No news of the safety of the old priest had as yet been received and until it was definitely known that he was safe in Belgium, the secret of the escape must on no account be revealed. To Cécile's astonishment, however, Pradel himself alluded to it.

"Who engineered the escape of our mutual friend, Abbé Edgeworth, you mean?"

"You knew?"

"I only guessed."

"And I can tell you definitely that it was the English spy whom they call the Scarlet Pimpernel who made every arrangement for the abbé's safety."

"Then why do you call him a spy? An ugly word, meseems, for the noble work which he does."

"You are right there, Monsieur le Docteur. It is always fine to serve your country, or to serve humanity in whichever way seems to you best. I only used the word 'spy' because the Scarlet Pimpernel, so I have heard said, is never seen as himself, but always in disguise. That is why I thought that the fiddler-"

"Yes, Citizeness?"

She shook her head.

"No, no," she said, "it can't be. He made no attempt to save me from those awful women. I suppose he does not think that we up here are in immediate danger. Do you think that we are?" she added abruptly and raised eyes shining with sudden fear up at Pradel.

He made no reply. What could he say? As a matter of fact it was all over Choisy that the arrest of the aristos up at La Rodière was only a question of hours. That was why he had come running up to the château, not so much in terror for her of a boisterous crowd, as of the decree of the Committee of Public Safety, and the inevitable Gendarmerie Nationale.

"I don't mind for myself," Cécile went on after a moment or two, "but maman and...and...François...I know you hate him, and I dare say he deserves your hatred. But he is my brother...and maman ...You

don't think they would dare do anything to maman?...do you?"

She couldn't go on for tears were choking her. She turned away, half ashamed that he should see those tears, and walked across to the window. She stood in the embrasure for a time looking out at first into vacancy, then gradually becoming aware of what was going on down below. The perron and the long avenue were all thronged with that same abominable multitude who had insulted and humiliated her before the advent of Pradel. They were all going away in a body now, quite good-tempered, rather noisy, still singing and shouting. The shades of evening were drawing in fast. It was close on five o'clock, and they were all going home ready to tell of their many adventures to the workers when they came out of the factories, and to the few who had not been fortunate enough to join in the revels of this memorable afternoon. Five o'clock and it was half-past three when first that unruly mass of humanity had invaded the château. One hour and a half of mental torture. To Cécile it seemed an eternity. And now they were going away. Silence would once more reign in the ancestral home of the La Rodières, silence but not peace, for terror of death would from this hour be always present within its walls, the nameless dread which holds its greatest sway o' nights, banishes sleep, and rears its head at every chance word spoken by careless lips: arrest, denunciation, imprisonment, the guillotine.

The guillotine! In a way one had dreaded it for years, but only in a vague way, as something horrible that happened to others, to one's friends, even to one's King, but not to oneself. But now here it was, as it were, at one's very door. And there was maman to think of who was old, and François who was rash....

"Citizeness!"

Citizeness! Another of those chance words that brought the nameless dread striking at one's heart. It roused Cécile de la

Rodière out of her sombre mood. The noise of the crowd below was growing fainter and fainter. Most of the rioters were out of sight already. They had gone quietly enough, and now only a few laggards, men who were lame and women who were feeble, could be seen making their way down the avenue in the fast gathering gloom.

"Citizeness!"

The voice was kindly, rather hoarse, perhaps, and authoritative, but kindly nevertheless. Pradel had come up close to her. He it was who had spoken the chance word. Cécile turned to him.

"Yes, Monsieur le Docteur?"

"You asked me a straight question just now, and I ought to have answered it at once, knowing you to be proud and brave. But I wanted you to collect yourself a little. You are young and have gone through a great deal. Naturally enough, you are slightly unnerved. At the same time I feel that it is best for you and for you all that you should know the truth."

"The truth?"

"The authorities at Choisy have decided on the arrest of your mother, your brother, yourself and your two servants. Directly I learned their decision I ran up here to see what I, as a single individual, could do to save you. I was on my way up already, because I knew that I could do a great deal to prevent a lot of irresponsible women and weaklings from doing more than, perhaps, frightening you, and I would have been here earlier only I could not leave the hospital, where I was attending a really serious case. I thank Heaven that I could not leave sooner, and that I was obliged to call in at the Town Hall, where I learned, by the merest chance, that the Committee of Public Safety had ordered your arrest at the instance of one of its

members, the order to executed within the next twenty-four hours."

Cécile had listened to all this without making any movement or any sign that she understood the meaning of what Pradel had just told her. She had turned to face him and while he talked, her glance never wavered. She looked him straight in the eyes. It was quite dark in the room now, only here in the window embrasure the last lingering evening light sent its dying shaft on the slim figure of Dr. Pradel. Never for one second did Cécile de la Rodière doubt that he spoke the truth.

She could not have explained even to herself how it was she knew, but she was absolutely convinced that when he spoke of this awful danger of death to those she cared for, he was speaking the truth.

For some time after Pradel had finished speaking Cécile said nothing and made no movement. Slowly the purport of what he said penetrated into her brain. Arrest! Within twenty-four hours! It meant death, of course. The guillotine for them all. For maman and François and for Paul and Marie. The guillotine! The horrible thing that happened to others, even to the King. And now to oneself!

Pradel waited, of course, for her to speak. The world for him, as for her, had faded from his ken. Time was standing still. Every thing around them was wrapped in darkness, was merged in a stupendous silence. And suddenly through the silence there came a curious sound, the harsh scraping of catgut on a common fiddle:

"Au clair de la lune

Mon ami Pierrot!"

The old ditty played very much out of tune by an inexperienced hand loosened the strain on Cécile's nerves. She was so young, had been so happy till this awful calamity had descended upon them all. It had begun four years ago with the death of her father whom she had adored, and then the home-coming after his funeral and finding the home a wreck and all the old servants gone except Paul and Marie. Then the murder of the King. And now this. Surely, surely something could be done to save those she loved from disaster and death.

"Docteur Pradel," she murmured appealingly, "can nothing be done?"

"Yes, Citizeness," he replied coldly; "something can be done, and it rests with you. I have told you the worst, but I earnestly believe that it is in my power to get you and your family and your two servants out of this trouble. If I am right in this belief, then I shall thank God on my knees for the privilege of being of service to you. May I proceed?"

"If you please, Monsieur."

"I am afraid that what I am about to say will shock you, wound you, perhaps, in your most cherished prejudices. Believe me, if I could see any other way of averting this terrible calamity, I would take it. I have, as perhaps you know, a certain amount of influence in the commune, not great enough, alas! to obtain a safe-conduct for you and those you care for now that an order for your arrest has been issued by an actual member of the Committee of Public Safety, but I could demand one for my wife."

Cécile could not suppress a gasp nor smother a cry:

"Your wife, Monsieur?"

"I pray you do not misunderstand me," Pradel rejoined calmly, even though at the sound of that cry of protest a shadow had spread over his face, leaving it more wan, more stern, too, than it had been before. "By a recent decree of the existing government marriage between citizens of this country only means going before the Mayor of the Commune and there reciting certain formulas which will bind them in matrimony for as long or as short a time as they desire. Should you decide to go through this ceremony with me, I swear to you that never through any fault of mine will you have cause to regret it. Once you are nominally my wife, I, as an important member of this commune, can protect you, your family and your servants until such time as I find it expedient and safe to convey you all out of this unfortunate country into Switzerland or Belgium, where you could remain until these troublesome times are past. Until then you will all live under my roof as honoured guests. I am a busy man, hardly ever at home. You will hardly ever see me; you need never speak to me unless you wish. And now, with your permission, I will leave you to think it all over quietly and, perhaps, to consult with your family. Tomorrow at ten o'clock I will be back to receive your answer. We will then either go at once to the Mairie or I will offer you and the citizeness, your mother, my respectful adieux."

And he was gone. Cécile never heard him cross the room to go downstairs. All she heard were the strains of that ramshackle fiddle and the soft, wordless humming of the old, old tune:

"Ma chandelle est morte.

Je n'ai plus de feu.

Ouvre moi ta porte.

Pour l'amour de Dieu!"

Well! the door was open for her to pass through from the fear of death to promised security for all those whom she loved. Oh! if it had only been a question of herself, she would not have wasted a moment's reflection on that outrageous proposition.

Outrageous? Was it really outrageous? A proposition couched in terms of dignified respect, and one calculated to safeguard the lives of all those she cared for, could not in all fairness be stigmatized as outrageous. Bold, perhaps, unique certainly: no girl, she supposed, had ever had such a remarkable proposal of marriage. But then the man who made it was nothing if not bold, and the situation was, of course, unique. Nor did she doubt him for an instant. From the first there had been something in his attitude and in the way he spoke that bore the imprint of absolute truth. No, she assuredly did not doubt him. The danger, she knew, was real enough; the way out of it she was convinced, was the only one possible. She was quite sorry now that Pradel had gone so quickly. There were so many things she would have liked to have asked him. The decision which she would have to make was one that should be made on the spur of the moment. The delay would give her a long, sleepless night and a great deal of nerve strain. And then there was the great question. Should she consult maman or confront her with the accomplished fact? And there was François, too. He, with the impulse of youth and prejudice, would say: "Better death than dishonour," and would continue to look on the transaction as a perpetual blot on the escutcheon of the la Rodières.

It was all terribly puzzling. A deep, deep sigh came from Cécile's heart, not a sorrowful sigh really. She did not understand her own feelings. Not entirely. All she knew was that she wished Pradel had not gone away quite so quickly.

She thought, anyhow, that she had best go back to maman now. As a matter of fact, she ought not to have left maman alone quite so long. But maman had François with her, as well as Marie and Paul too, probably. Whereas she, Cécile, was alone. She had no one to advise her, no one to help her analyse that strange mixture inside of her, of doubt and fear and, yes, elation, which was so unaccountable, so strange, so different to anything she had ever felt before. And why had Pradel made such a proposition to her? He loved her. She was woman enough to know that, then why...? why not...? Again she sighed, longed somehow to be older, more experienced in the ways of men... or the ways of lovers.

And what in God's name was she going to say to maman and to François?

Book IV – THE TRAITOR

25 MUTINY

26 OPEN REVOLT

27 TREACHERY

28 CHECK

29 CHECKMATE

30 DISHONOUR

25 MUTINY

In the meanwhile the cabaret up the road was doing a roaring trade. A goodly number of revellers, not satisfied with the excitement of the afternoon, had turned in there for a drink and a gossip. There was such a lot to talk about, and the company quickly formed itself into groups round separate tables, some talking over one thing, some another. Jacques the butcher's boy was there; he was baited for having allowed his partner, the aristo, to be taken from him by the citizen doctor.

"He was handsomer than you, Jacques," he was told; "that's what it was."

And Jacques, full of vanity, as many undersized boys and girls often are, declared most emphatically that he would bring the aristo to her knees, and that within the next three days.

"How wilt thou do that, thou ugly young moke?" he was asked, all in good humour.

"I shall make her marry me," he replied, puffing out his chest like a small turkey-cock.

Laughter all round, then some one queried:

"Thou'll make love to the aristo?"

"I will."

"And ask her in marriage?"

"Yes!"

"And if she says No!"

"If she does, I'll warn her that I will go straight to the Chief Commissary and denounce her and her family as traitors, which will mean the guillotine for the lot of them. So what now?" he concluded with a ludicrous air of triumph.

"A splendid idea, Jacques," a lusty voice cried gaily, and a none-too-gentle hand gave the boy a vigorous slap on the back. "And we'll play a march at thy wedding."

It was the fiddler who had just come in with the other musicians. It seems they had accompanied the bulk of the crowd part of the way down to Choisy, and then felt woefully thirsty, and came to the "Chien sans Queue," which was so much nearer for a drink than the first cabaret down the other way. They certainly looked very weary, very grubby and very dry, which was small wonder, seeing that they had been on the go, marching with the crowd and blowing their trumpets, since before noon. Apparently, poor things, they had no money for though they professed to have mouths as dry as lime-kilns, they did not order drinks, but took their stand in a corner of the room and proceeded to tune up their instruments, which means that they made the kind of noise one usually associates in concert halls with tuning up, but when they had finished the process and started to play what might be called a tune, the sounds which their instruments emitted had no relation whatever to correct harmony. They seemed, however, to please the unsophisticated ears of the audience, or else, perhaps, the mood for song and gaiety had not yet passed away altogether; certain it is that when the ever-popular "Il était une bergère," was struck up, the chorus was taken up with the former gusto and there was much clapping of hands and banging of tin mugs on the tables. But when the woes of the shepherdess and her cat had been proclaimed in song from beginning to end once, twice and three

times and the musicians, more weary and thirsty than ever, deputed their fiddler to go round and hold out his phrygian cap in a mute appeal for sous wherewith to pay for drinks, the whole crowd suddenly discovered that it was getting late and that wives and mothers were waiting for them at home. And there was a chorus something like this:

"Who would have thought it was supper-time?"

"And such a dark night, too."

"If I don't get home, my old woman will be as cross as a she-cat."

"Art thou coming my way, Henri?"

And one by one, or in groups of threes and fours they all filed out of the "Chien sans Queue." Only six sous had been thrown into the Phrygian cap. Polycarpe the landlord stood at his own front door for some time exchanging a few last words with his departing customers. His wife, the Junoesque Victoria, was clearing away the empty mugs in the taproom. The fiddler put his long arm round her capacious waist and drew her, giggling and smirking, on his knee. She smacked his face with elephantine playfulness.

"You couldn't run about with me on your shoulder," she said, "as you did with that poor little man this afternoon."

"He was just a dirty spy," the fiddler retorted, "but if you will challenge me, my Juno, I will have a try with you also."

"Take me upstairs, then, to my room," she said, with a simper. "I am dog-tired after all that dancing and Polycarpe can finish clearing away."

"What will you give me if I do?"

"Free drinks, my beauty," she replied, and pinched his cheeks with her plump fingers, "if you do not drop me on the way."

To her great amazement and no less to her delight the fiddler did heave her up, not as if she were a feather or even a bale of goods certainly, but he did hold her in his arms and carry her not only to the door, but up the narrow staircase, whence she directed him to her bedroom, where she demanded to be deposited on the bed, which gave a loud creak under her goodly weight. She laughed when she saw him give a loud puff of exhaustion.

"I weigh a hundred kilos," she said with some pride.

"I am sure you do," he was willing to admit. But at the provocative glance which the bouncing lady now threw him he took incontinently to his heels. As he was going down the stairs he heard her shouting to her husband.

"Polycarpe! He carried me all the way upstairs in his arms. There's a man for you!"

Polycarpe was standing at the foot of the stairs. His face wore an expression of comical amazement. He was small and spare, had a head as bald as an egg, and tired, purple-rimmed eyes.

"Give the musicians free drinks all round," the lady commanded.

Thus it was that presently five tired musicians were seated round one of the tables in a corner of the taproom of the cabaret "Le Chien sans Queue." With them was Citizen Polycarpe the landlord who, for the moment, was sprawling across the table, his head buried in his arms and snoring like a grampus. The fiddler bent over him, turned

his head over and with delicate, if very grimy finger, lifted the lid of one of his eyes.

"As drunk as a lord," he declared; "that stuff is very potent."

He had a smallish bottle in his hand which he now slipped back into his pocket.

"And the gargantuan lady upstairs," he went on, "is sleeping the sleep of the just. So as soon as Devinne is here we can get on with business."

"He is here," one of the others said, "I am sure I heard his footsteps outside."

He rose and went to the door, called out softly into the night: "Devinne! All serene!"

A minute or two later St. John Devinne came in. He was dressed in ordinary clothes, had clean face and hands, but though normally he would not by his appearance have attracted any attention, here in this squalid tap-room in the midst of his friends all grimy and clad in nothing but rags, he looked strangely conspicuous and, as it were, out of key. A pair of lazy eyes, slightly sarcastic in expression, looked him up and down. Devinne caught the glance and something of a blush mounted to his cheeks, nor did he after that meet the eyes of his chief. He took his seat at the table, edging away as far as he could from the sprawling form of Polycarpe the landlord.

"May I know what has happened this afternoon?" he asked curtly.

"Of course you may, my dear fellow," Blakeney replied. "Here," he added, and pushed a mug and jug of wine nearer to St. John, "have a drink."

"No, thanks."

Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, that young dandy, was busy polishing a tin trumpet. He looked up from his work, glanced up at the chief who gave him a slight nod, whereupon he proceeded to give a short succinct account of the stirring events at the château.

"I thought something of the sort was in the wind," Devinne said with dry sarcasm, "or I should not have been sent up to Paris on that futile errand."

There was complete silence for a moment or two after that. Lord Tony's fist clenched until the knuckles shown smooth and white. Glynde was seen to swallow hard as if to choke words that had risen to his throat. They all looked up at their chief who had not moved a muscle, had not even frowned. Now he gave a light little laugh.

"Do have a drink, Johnny," he said; "it will do you good."

Sir Andrew blew a subdued blast in his tin trumpet and Tony, Glynde and Hastings only swore under their breath. But the tension was eased for the moment, and Blakeney presently resumed:

"The errand, lad," he rejoined simply, "was not futile. One of us had to let Galveston and Holte know that they will have to meet us at headquarters on the St. Gif-Le Perrey Road any time within the next twenty-four hours. You would have been wiser, I think, for their sakes as well as your own, to have assumed some inconspicuous disguise, but you have got through all right, I take it, so we won't say any more about that."

"Yes! I got through all right," Devinne mumbled sulkily. "I am not a fool."

"I am sure you are not, dear lad," Blakeney responded still very quietly, though to any one who knew him as intimately as did Sir Andrew Ffoulkes or Lord Tony, there was just a soupçon of hardness now in the tone of his usually pleasant voice. "You were spared, at any rate, the painful sight of seeing your friends up at La Rodière baited by that unruly crowd."

"Yes! Damn them!"

"And then you know, Johnny, you are nothing of a musician really. Now you should have heard Ffoulkes on his trumpet, or Hastings who played second fiddle; they were demmed marvellous, I tell you. If I were not afraid of waking my Juno upstairs, I would give you a specimen of our performance, right up to the time when our friend Monsieur Chambertin appeared upon the scene."

"By the way," Lord Tony now put in, "what did you do ultimately with that worthy man?"

"I locked him and his sergeant up in the cellar. It won't hurt them to starve for a bit. We'll arrange for them to be let out as soon as we feel that they cannot do us any harm."

"I suppose I shall be told off to do that," Devinne muttered peevishly.

"That's an idea, Johnny," Blakeney responded with imperturbable good humour. "Splendid! But cheer up, lad. We have splendid work before us. When dawn breaks over the hills yonder, we will be out for sport which is fit for the gods. Sport which you all love. Break-neck rides across country, with those poor innocents to save from the wolves who will be howling at us close to our heels. By gad! you will all feel like gods yourselves. You will have lived, all of you. Lived, I tell you! My God! I thank Thee for the chance! That is what you will say."

As the ringing voice of the light-hearted adventurer resounded against the rafters of the old tap-room, landlord Polycarpe raised his head for a moment, looked around him with bleary eyes, then dropped his head down again and emitted a thunderous snore. They all laughed like so many schoolboys, the atmosphere became, as it were, surcharged with the spirits of these young dare-devils, ready to hazard their lives in the pursuit of what Blakeney had called a sport fit for the gods. And so magnetic was the personality of their leader, the greatest and most selfless knight-errant that ever graced the pages of history, that even Devinne the rebellious felt its power and listened spell-bound to the stirring projects of his chief.

Sir Percy now stood in his favourite attitude leaning against the wall, facing the five glowing pairs of eyes, his own fixed on something that he alone saw, something beyond these four squalid walls, the open country perhaps, the break-neck ride that lay ahead of him and his followers, or was it the flower-garden of Richmond, the banks of the Thames, the blue eyes of Marguerite calling to him, asking him to come back to her arms? He threw up his head and laughed. Yes! his adored wife was calling to him even now, but so were those innocents up at the château, three women, an old man, up at La Rodière, and there were others, too, children! God in heaven! One couldn't allow children, women, old men to be butchered without doing what one could do to help them. Marguerite, my beloved, you must wait! I will come back to you, all in good time, when I have done the work which destiny, or was it God Himself? has mapped out for me.

"You remember," he began after a few moments during which he seemed to be collecting his thoughts, "that there came a time when I allowed the crowd to get ahead of me and I remained behind ostensibly to put a new string on my fiddle. I hid in the dense shrubbery just inside the gates, and after a few minutes, five, perhaps

I heard the welcome voice of our dear Monsieur Chauvelin. He gave that egregious agitator Conty the go-by, then he called to a soldier who had evidently been waiting for him, and gave him instructions for his well-conceived damnable plot which embraced the arrest of the whole La Rodière family and their two faithful servants, as well as the capture of mine humble self. I could hear every word he said. I learned that a squad of gendarmerie, thirty in number, was posted in the stables, and that at a certain signal given by my engaging friend, the men were to make their way up to the château and there to await further orders. As soon as this pair of blackguards had parted company, Chauvelin to go straight to the château, and the sergeant to transmit his orders, I slipped out of the gate and came on here.

"Worthy landlord Polycarpe is, of course, an old friend of ours. The place was deserted for the moment. I got him to open a couple of jorums of wine, into which I poured a good measure of this potent stuff, which that splendid fellow Barstow of York gave me recently. Look at old Polycarpe. You can see what a wonderful sleep it induces. With a jorum in each hand, my fiddle and a bunch of mugs, slung over my shoulder, I made my way to the stables, where, as you may well suppose, I was made extremely welcome. I stayed just long enough to see the wine poured out and handed round, then out I slipped, locking the stable and coach-house doors after me. Then back I went to join the merry throng in the château. The rest you know, and so much for the past. Now for the future. Give me some of this abominable vinegar to drink and I'll go on."

One of them poured out the wine, another handed him the mug. He drank it down and did not even make a wry face. Probably he had not the slightest notion what landlord Polycarpe's thin local wine tasted like. Anyway, he did go on.

"Just before dawn we'll go up to La Rodière. I have the key of the

stables in my pocket, and I want to give those nice soldiers another drink. That will keep them quiet till far into the morning. By that time we shall be well away. We'll divest some of them of their accoutrements, which will save us the trouble of going all the way to headquarters to get our own. I have thought the matter well over and, as I said this morning, I am quite positive that in this part of the country, and far from a large city, a mock arrest is by far our best plan. Fortune has favoured us, let me tell you, for there is a coach and a pair here in the yard. I learned this also while I was eavesdropping. It was designed to accommodate the five prisoners. Now it will serve the same purpose for us with two of us on the box and the others freezing on the top, for it will be cold, I tell you. As soon we have effected the arrest, we'll make for the St. Gif-Le Perrey road. At St. Gif, Galveston and Holte will be at our usual quarters, ready with fresh horses to continue the journey to the coast."

"Then we don't start till dawn?" one of them asked.

"Just before dawn. The night will, I am afraid, be very dark, except at rare intervals, for there is a heavy bank of clouds coming over the mountains. We want the light, as we shall have to drive like the devil until well past Le Perrey.

"And we make for the coast?"

"For that little hole Trouville, this side of the Loire. You remember it Foulkes? But we'll talk all that over before I leave you."

"You are not coming all the way?"

"No, only as far as St. Gif. Directly I have seen you all safely on the road I shall have to turn my attention to one other prisoner, and that will be a difficult task. I don't mean that it will be so materially, but Pradel, I feel, will be obstinate. He has his hospital here, and his poor

patients. How am I going to persuade him that anyhow when those murderers have done away with him, his hospital and his poor patients will still have to exist somehow?"

While the chief spoke and the others hung as usual breathless on his lips, Devinne's expression of face became more and more glowering. A dark frown deepened between his eyes. Once or twice he tried to speak, but it was not until Blakeney paused that he suddenly banged his fist on the table.

"Pradel?" he cried. "What the devil do you mean?"

"Just what I said, my dear fellow," Sir Percy replied, with just the slightest possible lifting of his eyebrows. "The others understood. Why not you?"

"The others? The others? I don't care about the others. All I know is that that insolent brute Pradel-"

Up went Blakeney's slender, commanding hand.

"Do not call that man a brute, my lad. He is a fine fellow, and his life is in immediate danger, though he does not know it. He has a bitter and very influential enemy in the lawyer Maurin, who has put up a trumpery charge against him. I learned as lately as last night that his arrest has been finally decided on by the Chief Commissary and is only a matter of a couple of days, till enough false evidence, I suppose, has been collected against him."

"Well! and why not?" Devinne retorted hotly.

"There is no time to go into that now, my dear fellow," Blakeney replied with unruffled patience.

"Why not?"

At sound of this curt challenge to their chief, at the defiant tone of the boy's voice, the others lost all patience, and there was a chorus which should have been a warning to Devinne, that though Blakeney himself was as usual extraordinarily patient and understanding, they in a body, Ffoulkes, Tony, Hastings, Glynde, would not tolerate effrontery, let alone insubordination.

"You young cub!"

"Insolent worm! Wait till you feel my glove on your face."

"By gad! I'll wring his neck!" were some of the threats and epithets they hurled at Devinne. But the latter was now in one of those obstinate moods that opposition soon turns into open revolt, and this, in spite of the fact that Percy now put a firm, but still friendly, hand on his shoulder.

"If I didn't know, lad, what is at the back of your mind," he said gently, "I might remind you once again that you promised me obedience, just like the others, in all matters connected with our League. We should never accomplish the good work which we have all of us undertaken if there was mutiny in our small camp."

Devinne shook the kindly hand off his shoulder.

"Oh! you'll never understand," he muttered glumly.

"What? That you are in love with Cécile de la Rodière and jealous of Simon Pradel?"

"Don't talk of love, Blakeney. You don't know what it means."

A slight pause. Only a second or two, while a curious shadow

seemed to flit over those deep-set eyes that held such a wealth of suppressed emotion in their glance, of sorrow and of doubt and of visions of ecstasy that mayhap the daring adventurer would never taste again. He gave a quick sigh and said simply:

"Perhaps not, dear lad. You may be right. But we are not here to discuss matters of sentiment, and the knife which I am now about to wield will cut into your wounded vanity, and, I fear me, will hurt terribly. Cécile de la Rodière," he went on, and now his tone was very firm and he spoke very slowly, letting every word sink into the boy's consciousness, "is not and never will be in love with you. She is half in love with Pradel already-

Devinne jumped to his feet.

"And that's a lie-" he cried hoarsely, and would have said more only that Glynde struck him full on the mouth.

The others, too, were beside themselves with fury. They laid rough hands on his shoulders. Lord Tony flung an insult in his face, and Hastings called out:

"On your knees, you-"

Blakeney alone remained quite undisturbed. He only spoke when Hastings and Tony between them had nearly forced Devinne down on his knees; then he said with a light laugh:

"Leave the boy alone, Hastings. You too, Tony. Four against one is not a sporting proposition, is it?"

He took Devinne firmly under the arm, helped him to raise himself, and said quietly:

"You are not quite yourself just now, are you Johnny? Come out into the fresh air a bit. It will do you good."

Devinne tried to shake himself free, but held in Percy's iron grip, he was compelled to move with him across the room. The others naturally did not interfere. They were nursing their indignation, while they watched their chief lead the recalcitrant Johnny out of the room.

"I would like to scrag the brute," Glynde muttered savagely.

"I hope to God Percy does not trust him too far," Sir Andrew added.

"You know what he is," was Lord Tony's comment; "he is so straight, such a sportsman himself, that he simply cannot see treachery in others. The old duke, St. John's father, is a splendid old fellow, rides as straight to hounds as any man I know. Percy is his friend, and he cannot conceive that this young cub is anything but a chip of the old block."

"Shall I go out and wring his neck?" was my Lord Hastings's terse suggestion.

As this excellent solution of the present difficulty could not very well be acted upon, these loyal souls could do naught else but await the return of their chief. They fell to talking over the stirring events of the day and the still more stirring events that were to come.

Now and then they cast anxious looks in the direction of the door, wherever St. John Devinne's rasping voice reached their ears.

26 OPEN REVOLT

Outside, in the cold frosty night, a strange clash of wills was taking place with the issue never for a moment in doubt. Devinne, goaded by jealousy, had lost all sense of proportion and all sense of loyalty and honour. It was not only a question of a lover's hatred for a rival whom he still affected to despise, it was also jealousy of the power and influence of his chief, against whose orders he was determined to rebel.

St. John Devinne was an only son. His father, the old Duke of Rudford, a fine old sportsman as every one acknowledged, had been inordinately proud of a boy born to him when he was past middle age. His mother did her best to spoil the child. She gave in to every one of his many caprices. When presently he went to school she loaded him with presents both of money and of "tuck," with the result that he became a little king among his schoolmates. As his housemaster was a bachelor, there was just a housekeeper in charge who was clever enough to earn the good graces of the fond mother, and accepted quite unblushingly every bribe offered to her to pay special attention to young St. John and to favour him in every way she could. The boy came down from Harrow rather more spoilt and certainly more arrogant than he was when he went up.

There followed, however, a rather better time for him morally, when he came under the direct influence of his father. He became quite a good sportsman, rode straight to hounds, was a fine boxer and fencer. During the fashionable seasons in London and in Bath he was a great favourite with the ladies, for he was an amusing talker and an elegant partner in the minuet. When in '90 Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., accompanied by his beautiful young wife, made his dazzling entry in English society after a long sojourn in France, he became St. John Devinne's beau ideal. The boy's one aim in life was to emulate

that perfect gentlemen in all things. And when, after a time, he was actually admitted into the intimate circle of young exquisites of whom Sir Percy was the acknowledged leader, he felt that life could hold no greater happiness for him.

Then the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel was formed and in August '91 St. John Devinne was enrolled as a member and swore the prescribed oath of allegiance, secrecy and obedience to the chief. From certain correspondence that came to light subsequently, it has been established that Blakeney first spoke of his scheme for the establishment of the League with the old Duke, for there is a letter still extant written by the latter to his friend Percy, in which he says:

"Alas, that my two enemies old age and rheumatism prevent my becoming a member of that glorious League which you are contemplating. Gladly would I have sworn allegiance and obedience to you, my dear Percy, whom I love and respect more than any man I have ever known. If you on the other hand do really bear me the affection which you have expressed so beautifully in your letter to me, then allow my boy St. John to be one of your followers and to take what should have been my place by your side, proud to obey you in all things and swearing allegiance to you, second only to that which he owes to his King."

St. John Devinne participated in the rescue of Mariette Joly and Henri Chanel in Paris, in that of the Tourmon-d'Agenays in the forest of Epone, and in two or three other equally daring and successful adventures. He was always looked upon by the others as thoroughly loyal and a good sportsman. Only Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, that truest of all true friends, never really trusted him.

That, then, was the man who in these early days of '93 had gradually allowed his boyish vices to get the better of his finer nature. The devils of arrogance, obstinacy and rebellion against authority had

been the overlords that presided over his development from youth to manhood. They were held in check during the first few months of an adventurous life, fuller and more glorious than he had ever dreamed of, but those three devils in him had got the upper hand over him again.

"You may talk as much as you like, Percy," he said, when he found himself alone with his chief, "you will never induce me to lend a hand in that wild scheme of yours."

"What wild scheme do you mean, Johnny?"

"Risking all our lives to save that upstart from getting his deserts."

"You are still alluding to Simon Pradel?"

"Of course I am. You don't know him as I do. You weren't there when he thrust his attentions on Cécile de la Rodière and was soundly thrashed by François for his pains."

"As it happens, my dear fellow, I was there and I saw and heard everything that went on. You gave me the lie just now when I told you what I know to be a fact, that Cécile de la Rodière is half in love with Simon Pradel. Hers is a simple, thoroughly fine nature which could not help being touched by the man's silent devotion to her. He has a scheme for saving her and her family from disaster, very much, in my opinion, at risk of his own life."

"A scheme?" Devinne retorted with a sneer. "He has a scheme, too, has he?"

"A scheme," Blakeney rejoined earnestly, "which has for its keystone his marriage with Mademoiselle Cécile."

"The devil!"

"No, not the devil, my dear fellow, only the little pagan god who has had a shot at you, too, with his arrow, but has not, methinks, wounded you very deeply."

"Anyhow, Cécile would not marry without her family's consent and they would never allow such a damnable mésalliance."

"The word has not much meaning with us in England these days when foreign princes and dukes earn their living as best they can. And as I have already told you, our League has taken Simon Pradel under its protection along with the la Rodière family."

"You mean that you have taken him under your protection."

"Put it that way if you like."

"And that...in England-"

"In England, too, of course. Don't we always look after our protégés once we have them over there?"

"Then let me tell you this, Blakeney," Devinne retorted, emboldened probably by the patient way in which his chief continued to speak with him. He was being treated like a child, certainly, but like a child of whom the stern schoolmaster was half afraid. "Let me tell you this, now that we are alone and those bullies in there are not here to interfere, that I resent your hectoring me in the manner you have done these last few days. You talk a lot about honour and obedience and all that sort of thing, but I am not a child and you are not a schoolmaster. I will do all I can to help you save Cécile de la Rodière and her mother, even her brother, though I care less for him than for a brass farthing. But help save Pradel I will not, and that is my last

word."

Blakeney had let him talk on without interruption. Perhaps he wished to probe the entire depth of the boy's disloyalty, or perhaps he was just wondering what he could say to his friend's only son to bring him back to the path of honour. Blakeney himself was a man of infinite understanding. During these past two years he had mixed with men and women who belonged to the lowest dregs of society; in the pursuit of his aims he had associated with potential assassins, as well as with misguided fools, and he had such a love of humanity that he had sometimes found it in his heart to sympathize with those whom misery and starvation had turned into criminals. But the case of St. John Devinne was altogether different. Here was a gentleman, a sportsman who almost within the turn of a hand had become blind to the dictates of honour and seemed ready to break his sworn word. To Percy Blakeney, in whose heart the worship of honour was second only to that which he offered to God, the whole circumstance of this boy's attitude was absolutely incomprehensible. He tried with all the patience at his command to understand or sympathize or, at any rate, to find some sort of an explanation for what seemed to him an inconceivable situation. He said very quietly:

"Look here, Johnny, you tell me that you will not lend a hand in saving Pradel, that you intend, in fact, to go against my orders, which means going back on your word of honour. Now that is a very big thing to do, as I told you once before. I won't qualify it any other way, I'll just say that it is a big thing. Will you then tell me why you think of doing it? What is your excuse? Or explanation? You'll want a cast-iron one, my dear fellow, you know, to make me understand it."

Devinne shrugged.

"Excuse? I might refuse to give you one, for I don't admit your right to question me like this. But I will try and remember that we were friends

once, and, as far as I am concerned, we can go on being friends. I have two cast-iron reasons why I refuse to risk my life in order to save Pradel, who is my enemy. He has tried to alienate Cécile's love from me. Thank Heaven, he has not succeeded, but he has tried and will go on trying, once he is out of this country, in safety in England. And you expect me to help him in that? You must think I am a fool. My second reason is that in my opinion we must concentrate on saving Madame la Marquise and Mademoiselle Cécile, François, too, if you insist, but to hamper ourselves with those two old servants, not to mention that damned doctor fellow, is sheer madness to my mind, and I contend that I can make better use of my life than lose it perhaps in the pursuit of such folly."

Blakeney had listened to all this tirade in perfect quietude, never once turning his eyes away from the speaker's face. He couldn't see him very clearly because the shadows of the night were deep and dark, but he had manoeuvred so as to get Devinne within the feeble shaft of light which struck across from the tap-room through the narrow, uncurtained window. Thus he could watch the sneer which curled round the young man's lips and now and then catch the expression of scorn or defiance which distorted his good-looking face. But he made no movement to punish with a blow the insults which this young miscreant dared to fling at his chief. He had himself well in hand; only those who loved him would have been aware of the stiffening of his massive figure and seen the slender hands tightly clenched.

Now that Devinne had paused for lack of breath and still panting with excitement, Blakeney gave him answer, with utmost calm, never once raising his voice.

"I thank you, my good fellow, for this explanation. I am beginning to understand now. As to your last remark, that is as may be. A man

must judge for himself what his own life is worth, and to what use he can put it. It is impossible for any members of the League to arrange for you to return to England for at least another day or two. I am taking it that you would prefer to travel alone rather than in the company of those whom we are going to do our utmost to save from death. If I can possibly arrange it, I will get in touch with Everingham and Aincourt, who know nothing of your treachery-

"Percy!" the other cried in angry protest.

"Who know nothing of your treachery," Blakeney reiterated with deliberate emphasis. "If they did," he added, with a short laugh, "they would possibly wring your neck."

"You needn't worry about me," Devinne retorted sullenly. "I can look after myself."

"Then do, my good fellow. It is the best thing you can do. Good night."

He went up to the door, but paused there, his hand on the latch, his eyes turned once more to the comrade who had turned renegade. It almost seemed as if he still entertained the hope that a sudden revulsion of feeling would bring the son of his old friend back to his side, back to the path of honour and loyalty which he had sworn to follow, back to that life of self-sacrifice and love of humanity which they had all pledged themselves to pursue. Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., that beau ideal of every dandy in London, looked strangely incongruous, almost weird, standing there by the cabaret door, in rags and tatters, with grimy unshaven face, a dirty Phrygian cap over his unkempt hair, his slender hand, which duchesses liked to fondle, covered with soot and dust. Yet also strangely commanding, the living presentation of a brave man brought face to face with some hideous monster, a ghoul in the very existence of which he had never believed

up till now and whose very presence was a pollution.

Did some feeling akin to shame assail St. John Devinne then? It is impossible to say. Certain it is that without another word or backward glance he started to walk away down the hill. And Blakeney with a bitter sigh went to rejoin his comrades in the tap-room. They asked him no questions, for they guessed, if only vaguely, what had happened, and that after this they would have to face that most deadly of all dangers a traitor in the camp.

"If we have a traitor in the camp," Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had once said, "then God help the lot of us."

27 TREACHERY

It is a little difficult to analyse the feelings of a man like St. John Devinne, for he was not really by nature an out and out blackguard. Vanity more than anything else was at the root of his present dishonourable actions. He imagined himself more deeply in love with Cécile de la Rodière than he had ever been before and more deeply than he actually was. Love, in a man of Devinne's type does not really mean much, except the satisfaction of vanity, and, looking back on the pages of history in every civilized land, one cannot help but admit that vanity in men and women has caused more mischief, more misery and greater disasters than any other frailty to which humanity is heir.

And so it was with this man who now was striding rapidly along the snow-covered road which leads down to Choisy. He was not aware of the time, nor of the cold, nor of the roughness of the road. At every dozen steps or so he stumbled over the slippery ground. Once or twice he measured his length in the ditch, but he didn't care. He had set a purpose in his mind, the best part of the night in which to carry it through and nothing else mattered. Nothing. At the cost of dishonour he had made up his mind that he would not lend a hand in any adventure that had for its object the rescue of Simon Pradel from the fate which apparently was waiting for him. Well, if it did, that was his look out, his own fault, too, for daring to court intimacy with his superiors and incurring thereby the enmity of this proletarian government. There was just one thing to be put down to the credit of this young traitor, and that is that mixed with his desire to leave Pradel to his fate, there was also the conviction that the only to ensure Cécile's safety was by concentrating on her and perhaps her mother, and leaving every other issue to take care of itself.

He had formed a plan, of course, and all the way between the

heights of La Rodière and the outskirts of Choisy, running when he could, stumbling often, falling more than once, he elaborated this plan. He covered the ground quickly enough, for the way was downhill all the time and it was no longer very dark, now that a pale moon shed its cold silvery light on the carpet of snow. Somewhere in the far distance a church clock struck the half-hour. Half-past eight it must be, reckoned Devinne, and the Levets would have finished supper. There was their house just in sight. Now for a lucky chance to find the girl alone, the girl who in an access of jealousy as great as his own had cried out: "You only care because you are in love with Cécile!" He paused a moment outside the grill in order to shake the snow and dirt off his clothes, to straighten his hat and adjust his cravat. Then he walked up to the front door and rang the bell. It was old man Levet who opened the door. Devinne raised his hat and said:

"I have come with a message from Professeur D'Arblay. May I enter?"

"Certainly, Monsieur," the old man replied, and as soon as Devinne stood beside him in the vestibule he added: "What can I do for Professeur d'Arblay?"

"The message is actually for your daughter, Monsieur Levet. But if you wish I will deliver it to you."

"I will call my daughter," was Levet's simple response. He called to Blanche, who came out from the kitchen, a dishcloth still in her hand. Seeing a stranger, she quickly put the dishcloth down and wiped her hands on her apron.

"What is it, Father?" she asked.

"A message for you from Professeur d'Arblay. If you want me, you can call. Monsieur," he added, with a slight bow to Devinne, "at your

service."

He went in to the sitting-room. Blanche and Devinne were alone. She turned anxious, inquiring eyes on him. He said:

"It is very important and urgent, Mademoiselle. It means life and death to Madame la Marquise up at the château and to Mademoiselle Cécile."

He noted with satisfaction that at the mention of Cécile's name the young girl's figure appeared to stiffen, and that an expression almost of hostility crept into her eyes. She was silent for a moment or two. Then she turned and said coldly:

"Will you come in here, Monsieur?" and led the way into the small dining-room, closing the door behind him. Chance, then, was bestowing her favours upon the traitor. He could talk to the girl undisturbed. Everything else would be easy. She offered him a chair by the table and sat down opposite him with a small oil-lamp between them, and Devinne, who studied her face closely, did not fail to see that the look of cold hostility still lingered in her eyes, and that her lips were tightly pressed together.

"I had best come at once to the point, Mademoiselle," he began, "for my time is short. The question which I must put to you first of all is this: would you have sufficient courage to go up to La Rodière to-night? I would accompany you, but only as far as the gate, and you would then go on to the château and transmit Professeur d'Arblay's message to Mademoiselle Cécile."

Blanche hesitated a moment, then she said coldly:

"That depends, Monsieur."

"On what?"

"I must know something more about the message."

"You shall, Mademoiselle, you shall. But first will you tell me this? Have you ever heard speak of the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"Only vaguely."

"What have you heard?"

"That he is a dangerous English spy. The sworn enemy of our country. His activities, they say, chiefly consist in helping traitors to escape from justice."

"Would you be very surprised, then, to learn that Professeur d'Arblay is none other than the Scarlet Pimpernel himself?"

Once again Blanche paused before she answered. When she did, she spoke very slowly, almost as if she were searching her memory for facts which had been relegated up to now to the back of her mind.

"No, it would not surprise me. I always looked on Professeur d'Arblay as somewhat mysterious. Father liked him, and they often had long talks together, and maman, pauvre maman! looked upon him, I often thought, as a messenger of God. As a matter of fact, I never knew his name till quite lately, the day when the King was executed and the Abbé Edgeworth-

"Yes? The Abbé Edgeworth? You know about him and his escape from the mob who tried to murder him?"

"Yes. It was Professeur d'Arblay who brought him to this house."

"It was the Scarlet Pimpernel, Mademoiselle."

"The Scarlet Pimpernel?" the girl murmured, "and you know him, Monsieur?"

"I am English, Mademoiselle, and we Englishmen all know him. We work together in the secret service of our country. I told him that I should be going past your house this evening, so he asked me to bring you the message which he desires you to convey to Mademoiselle de la Rodière."

"A verbal message?"

"No. I will write it if you will allow me. It would not have been over safe for a lonely wayfarer as I was to carry a compromising paper about his person. There are many spies and vagabonds about."

"But when we go up to La Rodière?"

"I am going down into Choisy first, and will hire a chaise. We will drive up to the château, with a couple of men on the box."

Blanche looked intently at the young man for a second or two, then she rose, fetched paper, ink and a pen from a side table and placed them before him.

"Will you write your message, Monsieur?" she said simply.

"Will you promise to take it? he retorted.

"I will make no promise. It will depend on the message."

"Then I must take the chance that it meets with your approval," he decided, and with a smile he took up the pen and began to write. Blanche, her elbow resting on the table, her chin cupped in her hand, watched him while he wrote a dozen lines. In the end he made a

rough drawing which looked like a device.

"What is that? she asked.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel, Mademoiselle, a small five-petalled flower. We always use it in our service."

"May I see what you have written?"

"Certainly."

He handed her the paper; she glanced down on it and frowned.

"It is in English," she remarked.

"Yes! my written French is very faulty. But Mademoiselle Cécile will understand."

"But I do not."

"Shall I translate?"

"If you please."

She handed him back the missive and he translated it as he read:

"Mademoiselle. "

"Will you and your august family honour the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel by accepting its protection. Your arrest is only a question of hours. A coach waits for you outside your gate. It will convey you and Madame la Marquise with all possible speed to a place of safety and then return to fetch Monsieur le Marquis, your two servants and Docteur Simon Pradel."

The girl gave a violent start.

"Simon Pradel?"

"You know him, Mademoiselle?"

"Yes!...yes!...I know him.... But why?"

"He and Mademoiselle Cécile have arranged to get married as soon as they are in England."

"It's not true!" Blanche exclaimed vehemently. She then appeared to make an effort to control herself and went on more quietly: "I mean . . . Docteur Pradel has so many interests here...I cannot imagine that he would leave them and become an exile in England...even if his life were in danger, which I pray to God is not the case."

"I can reassure you as to that, Mademoiselle," Devinne said with deep earnestness. "Only to-day did I hear that the charge of treason preferred against the doctor before the Chief Commissary has been dismissed as non-proven. He is held in high esteem in the commune, and like yourself, I cannot believe that he would leave his philanthropic work over here except under constraint."

"What do you mean by constraint?" the girl asked, frowning.

He gave a smile and a shrug.

"Well!" he rejoined, "we all know that when a woman is in love, and sees that her lover is not as ardent as she would wish, she will exercise pressure, which a mere man cannot always resist."

"Then you do not think-" the girl cried impulsively, and quickly checked herself, realizing that she was giving herself away before a stranger. A blush, that was almost one of shame, flooded her cheeks.

and tears of mortification came to her eyes.

"I don't know what you will think of me, Monsieur..." she murmured.

"Only that you are a wonderfully loyal friend, Mademoiselle, and that you are grieved to see a man of Docteur Pradel's worth throw up his career for a futile reason. After all, these troublous days will soon be over. Mademoiselle de la Rodière will then return from England, and if she and the doctor are still of the same mind, they could be affianced then."

Blanche's eager, inquiring eyes searched the young man's face, almost as if she tried to gather in its expression comfort and hope in this awful calamity which threatened to ruin her life. Simon Pradel gone from her for ever, married to Cécile de la Rodière, permanently settled in England probably! What would life be worth to her after that? She saw before her as in a vision, a long vista of years without Simon's companionship, without the hope of ever winning his love, of feeling his arms round her, or his kiss upon her mouth.

She felt a clutch cold as ice upon her heart, tearing at its strings till she could have cried out with the physical pain of it. She shuddered and murmured involuntarily under her breath: "If I could only see him once more."

There followed a few moments silence, while Devinne scrutinized the girl's face, aware though he was too young to be a serious psychologist, of the terrible battle which her better nature was waging against pride and jealousy. He had no cause now to doubt the issue of the conflict. Blanche Levet would be his ally in the act of treachery which he was about to commit. Ignorant and unsuspecting, she did not realize that she was on the point of sacrificing the man she loved, and depriving him of the protection of the one man who had resolved to save him. Jealousy won the day by letting her fall headlong into the

trap which a traitor had so cunningly set for her. She was about to become the instrument which would deliver Simon Pradel into the hands of the revolutionary government.

"I will tell you what I can do, Mademoiselle," Devinne resumed after a time, "and I hope my plan will meet your wishes. I am going straight into Choisy now, and will call on Docteur Pradel and use all the eloquence I possess to persuade him to put off his journey to England, at any rate for a few days. I shall be able to assure him that in his case it is not a matter of life and death, whilst, in any event, Mademoiselle de la Rodière and her family are perfectly safe under the ægis of the Scarlet Pimpernel. And then I hope to bring you news within the hour that your friend will do nothing rash until after he has seen you again."

Blanche listened to him with glowing eyes. In every line of her pretty face the speaker could trace the mastery of hope over the doubts and fears of a while ago.

"You really would do that for me, Monsieur?" she exclaimed, and clasped her little hands together, while tears of emotion and gratitude gathered in her eyes.

"Of course I would, Mademoiselle. I shall only be doing what our brave Scarlet Pimpernel himself would have suggested."

Blanche's heart now felt so warm, so full of joy that she broke into a happy little laugh.

"It is my turn to write," she said almost gaily, and took up the pen and drew paper towards her. She only wrote a few lines:

"My Dear Simon.

"The bearer of this note is a gallant English gentleman who was instrumental in saving the Abbé Edgeworth from being murdered by the mob. You know all about that, don't you? And cannot wonder therefore, that I beg you to trust him in everything he may tell you."

She signed the short missive with her name, strewed sand over the wet ink, folded the paper into a small compass and handed it to Devinne, who rose as he took it from her.

"I will fly on the wings of friendship, Mademoiselle," he said, and picked up his hat. "On my return I will pay my respects to Monsieur Levett. Will you tell him everything, and prepare him for the visit of adieu? Au revoir, Mademoiselle."

She went to the door and opened it for him.

"God guard you, Monsieur!" she said fervently, "and send an angel from heaven to watch over you, on your errand of mercy."

She accompanied him to the front door. As he was passing out into the cold and gloom, she asked naïvely:

"Your name, Monsieur? You never told me your name."

"My name is Collin, Mademoiselle," he replied with hardly a moment's hesitation, "a humble satellite of the brilliant Scarlet Pimpernel."

28 CHECK

Everything then had worked out to the entire satisfaction of this young traitor, who, unlike Judas, had no qualms of conscience for his shameful betrayal of his comrades and his chief. Not yet, at any rate. He had, of course, no intention of interviewing his enemy Pradel: in fact, he blotted the doctor entirely out from his scheme. It was good to think of him as remaining behind in Choisy while the girl whom he planned to marry was safely on her way to England without any help from him.

"What becomes of that miserable upstart after that I neither know nor care," was the substance of Devinne's reflections as he strode quickly downhill into town. A few minor details suggested themselves to him that would make his plan work more smoothly. He would stop the chaise at the smaller grille of La Rodière, the one opposite to the main gate, which gave on the narrow and less frequented cross-road to Alfort. Blanche Levet would take his message to Cécile, help her and Madame la Marquise to put a few things together, and accompany them to the chaise. She would have strict injunctions when going through the park with the two ladies to talk and move as if they were merely taking a stroll for the sake of fresh air. He certainly could reckon on Blanche to follow his instructions to the letter, she had as much at stake as he had himself, and jealousy, coupled with the desire to keep Simon Pradel in France, would be a powerful goad.

With the two ladies safely inside the chaise, he would then drive along to St. Gif as far as headquarters, where Galveston and Holte would be on the look-out for the chief and the refugees. This was a derelict house which had once been a wayside hostelry in the prosperous coaching days, but it had long fallen into disrepair, the landlord and his family having fled the country at the outbreak of the

Revolution. It was now used as headquarters by the League whenever its activities required the presence of its members in this part of France. It had the great advantage of stables and barns which, though in the last stages of dilapidation, offered some sort of shelter for man and beast. Three or four horses were usually kept there in case they were wanted, and two members of the League took it in turns to remain in charge. There was always of course, a certain element of risk in all that, but what were risks and dangers to these young madcaps but the very spice of their lives?

Luck had favoured St. John Devinne from the start, since it was he who had been deputed to seek out Galveston and Holte, who were in charge at St. Gif, and give them the chief's instructions for the provision of horses, of fresh disguises and above all of passports, some of them forged, others purchased from venal officials or merely stolen, of everything, in fact, that was required to ensure the success of the expedition that was contemplated for the rescue of the La Rodières and their servants and their ultimate flight to England. Mention had been made of the coach, but not of the likely number of its occupants nor of the size of the escort, and whether it would be headed by the chief himself or not. Galveston was to remain on the lookout at headquarters with horses ready saddled, and Holte was to make for Le Perrey with all speed and make provision there for relays.

And chance continued to favour the traitor's plans.

He had no difficulty in hiring a coach in the town, giving himself out as an American merchant, a friend of General La Fayette, desirous to join a ship at St. Nazaire, and having no time to lose. The first halt would be made at Dreux. In manner, his well-cut clothes, his money of which he was not sparing, gave verisimilitude to his story and enabled him to secure what he wanted. He required, he said, an

extra man on the box beside the driver, as his sister would be travelling with him; he understood that the road past Le Perrey was lonely, and she was inclined to be nervous. His papers were in order, as papers in the possession of members of the League always were, and forty minutes after his departure from the Levets' house he was back there again and ringing the bell at the front door.

Blanche was on the look-out for him. As soon as she had opened the door he stretched both his hands out to her, and in a quick whisper said:

"Everything is well! I have seen Docteur Pradel. He laughed the idea to scorn that he was in any danger, and assured me that he had no intention of emigrating. Not just yet, at all events. I did not mention Mademoiselle de la Rodière's name, but he himself spoke of you and announced his intention of coming over to see you to-morrow."

The girl was dumb with emotion. All she could do was to allow her hand to respond to the pressure of his. He asked permission to pay his respects to Monsieur Levet. But father, it seems, was not in a mood to see anyone just now.

"I told him about the message which I was to take up to Mademoiselle," Blanche explained, "and he quite approved of my doing it. I told him that you were escorting me and that you were a friend of Professeur d'Arblay. This he already knew. He had also guessed, before I told him, that Professeur d'Arblay was in reality the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Did you mention Docteur Pradel, also?"

"No, I did not. That is a matter which will remain between Simon and myself. I shall be eternally grateful to you for what you have done for him. But for you he would have made shipwreck of his life. Now he

will, I know, take up its threads with its usual energy as soon as all this matter is past and forgotten."

"You are the best friend any man ever had," Devinne concluded as he escorted the girl to the coach; "Docteur Pradel is indeed a lucky man."

To himself he added: "And I hope that my luck will hold out to the end, and that Cécile and I will be well on the way to England before those two meet again."

Devinne ordered the driver to pull up on the Alfort road at a couple of hundred metres from the small grille of La Rodière. Grilles and gates were never bolted these days, by an order of the government which decreed that all parks and pleasure grounds were as much the property of the people as those aristos who had stolen them, and that every citizen had the right to use them for pleasure or convenience. Devinne jumped out of the chaise and helped Blanche to alight. Together they walked up to the grille, and the girl passed through into the park. The young man remained standing by the low wall close to the gate in the shadow of tall bordering trees. He strained his ears to listen to Blanche's light footstep treading the frozen ground. The road was quite deserted, and the moon had hidden her pale face behind a bank of clouds. Only the pale face behind a bank of clouds. Only a pawing and snorting of the horses in the near distance broke the silence of the night. Wrapped in his cloak Devinne appeared, but as part of the shadows that enveloped him. A dark, motionless figure.

A distant church clock struck eleven and then a quarter past. Devinne thought of all those men whom Blakeney, with his usual recklessness, had rendered helpless with drugged wine, of Chauvelin cursing in his dank prison, and of Blakeney himself and his satellites in the squalid hostelry the other side of the part, still discussing and elaborating the marvellous plan of rescue, which they little thought

was frustrated already. And, thinking of all that, the young traitor felt wonderfully elated, proud of himself for the ease with which he had gone athwart the schemes of the invincible Scarlet Pimpernel, proud, too, of the fact that his nerves were perfectly calm, that he felt neither compunction nor fear. His heart beat perhaps a little faster than usual, but that was all.

Nearly half an hour went by before his ear once more caught the sound of a light footstep treading the frozen garden path. One step only. He heard it a long way off, but tripping very quickly. Running now. It must, he thought, be Blanche returning for something she may have forgotten or, perhaps, with a message for him from the château. It was Blanche, of course. The clouds overhead rolled slowly away. The pale light of the moon revealed the dark figure of the young girl against the white background of frozen lawn. And she was running. Running. She was alone, and Devinne felt that his heart suddenly froze inside his breast. He held open the grille. Blanche almost fell into his arms.

"They have gone," she gasped.

"Gone? Who?"

"All of them. There is no one in the château. Not a soul. The doors are all left open. I ran upstairs, downstairs, everywhere. There is no one. Madame la Marquise, Monsieur, Mademoiselle Cécile, Paul, Marie. They have all gone. What does it mean?"

Aye! What did it mean, but the one thing? The one awful terrible thing, that it was his treachery that had been frustrated by the man whom he had betrayed. What had happened exactly, he could not conjecture. The plan was to effect the mock arrest of the La Rodières in the early dawn, and it was not yet midnight. Had suspicion of treachery lurked in the mind of the Scarlet Pimpernel? He was not the

man to change his plans once he had mapped them out, for every phase of them fitted one into the other, like the pieces of those puzzles that children love to play with. Or had a real arrest been effected by soldiers of the Republic? Had Chauvelin contrived to escape? To liberate the men imprisoned in the stables? To order the arrest of the aristos, pending the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel? Anything may have occurred during these past three hours, and Devinne almost hoped that this last conjecture would prove to be the solution of the appalling riddle that faced him now. With half an ear he heard Blanche Levet tell him of her further adventures in the château.

"It seemed peopled with ghosts," she said, "for when I ran down into the sous-sol, I heard strange sounds proceeding from the cellar. Groans and curses they sounded like. But I was frightened and ran upstairs again. I lost my head, I think, and lost time, too, by running towards the great gate. Then I met Antoine. He is the groom, you know. He said to me: 'They've all gone: Monsieur le Marquis, Madame and Mademoiselle, and Paul and Marie. They walked down the avenue and went through this gate. They didn't see me.' I asked him which way they went," Blanche continued, "and he said: 'Up Corbeil way; about an hour ago, it was.' But before I could ask him any more questions he was gone. Then I ran back to tell you."

As Devinne said nothing, Blanche began to cry.

"What are we going to do now?" she asked, and tried to swallow her tears.

Devinne roused himself from his torpor. What a chivalry there was left in him urged him first of all to see to the girl's safety.

"We'll drive back to your house, of course. Come."

He took hold of her arm and led her back to the chaise. She climbed

in and he gave instructions to the driver.

"Straight back to Citizen Levet's house in the Rue Micheline."

Not a word was spoken between the two of them on the way home. Blanche's delicate form was trembling as if in a fit of ague. A name and eager questions were forming on her lips, but for some inexplicable reason she felt averse to uttering them. It was only when the chaise drew up outside her house, and Devinne, after he had escorted her to the front door, was taking his leave of her, that she spoke the name that was foremost in her thoughts.

"Docteur Pradel?"

But apparently he didn't hear her, for he made no reply. The next moment the door was opened. Old Levet had been sitting up, waiting for his daughter. At sight of her he took hold of her hand and drew her into the house. She turned to say a last word to Devinne, but he had already crossed the short path that led to the gate. Blanche could hear his voice speaking to the driver, but it was dark and she could not see him. The next moment there was the crack of the driver's whip, the jingle of harness, the snorting of horses and finally, the rumble of wheels. She was left with heart full of anxiety and fear for the man she loved. Many hours must go by before she could hope to glean information as to what had happened to him. And here was her father waiting to hear what had occurred at the château. She tried to tell him, but she knew so little. The family had gone, that was all she knew. Were they under arrest, awaiting trial, and perhaps, death? Or was their mysterious departure connected in any way with that strange personage the Scarlet Pimpernel?

In either case, where was Simon now? In the cells of the Old Castle, awaiting the same fate as Cécile and the others? Or was he on his way to England and to safety, gone out of her life for ever?

"Yes, Father," she murmured in answer to old Levet's command that she should go to bed now and give him further details on the morrow: "I will go to bed now. I am very tired."

Wearily she crept up the stairs.

29 CHECKMATE

Devinne did not re-enter the chaise. He gave money to the two men, the driver saluted with his whip, clicked his tongue, whipped up his horses, and the vehicle went rattling down the cobbled street, leaving the young man standing by the Levets' gate. And here he remained for several minutes, until he heard the clock in the tower of the Town Hall strike midnight. This seemed to shake him out of his trance-like state. He started to walk up the street in an aimless sort of way. The whole town appeared deserted. Shutters tightly closed everywhere. Not a soul in sight. Two cats, chasing one another, raced across his path. But not a human sound to break the stillness of the night. Only caterwauling, weird sounds of prowling felines, and a bitter north-easterly wind moaning and groaning through the leafless trees of the Avenue Lafayette, and splitting of tiny dried branches, the cracking and shivering of woodwork shaken by the blast.

Devinne shivered. He was inured to cold weather as a rule; considered himself hard as nails, and he had on a thick mantle, but, somehow, he felt the cold to-night right in the marrow of his bones, right into the depth of his heart. Still walking aimlessly, he reached the Grand' Place. There on the right were the Café Tison and the Restaurant, the scene of one of Blakeney's maddest frolics. Blakeney! the leader, the comrade, the friend whom he, St. John Devinne, was about to betray! He had not betrayed him yet. He had tried to thwart his plans...and had failed, but he had done this from the sole desire to ensure the safety of the girl he loved. He had worked himself up into the belief that by dragging others into the rescue, Blakeney was jeopardizing the success of his plan. It might fail and Cécile's precious life be imperilled. No! there was no betrayal of a friend in that. Insubordination, perhaps, which Percy, in his arrogance, termed dishonour, but it was not betrayal. If his own plan had succeeded, the League and its chief, or for a matter of that,

the other refugees, would not have been any worse off, save for the failure of relays at Le Perrey, perhaps, which might have held up the flight, but only for a time; and that was all. His plan, however, had failed. He had been forestalled. How? Why? By what devilish agency, he did not know. But he was no longer in doubt now. The more he thought about it all, the more convinced he was that it was Blakeney who had forestalled him as a counter-blast to his insubordination. And a coach driven at breakneck speed was even now outstripping the wind on the road to St. Gif and Le Perrey.

An insensate rage took possession of Devinne's soul, for he had remembered Pradel. Pradel in that same carriage with Cécile, under the ægis of the Scarlet Pimpernel, who had never failed in a single one of his undertakings. Pradel and Cécile! The thought was maddening. It hammered in the young man's brain like blows from a weighted stick. Pradel and Cécile! Thrown together in England under the protection of Sir Percy Blakeney, the friend of the Prince of Wales, and arbiter of style and fashion. And then marriage. Of course, the marriage would follow. In England fellows like this Pradel, doctors, lawyers, and so on, were often held in high esteem, and if His Royal Highness approved, the marriage would come about as a matter of course.

Devinne felt that he was going mad. He still wandered aimlessly up one street and down another, like a Judas meditating treachery. He turned into the Rue Haute, and there was the Town Hall. The tower clock had just struck one. For an hour he had been roaming the streets like this. He was cold and very tired. He came to a halt now opposite the municipal building, and leaning against a wall, he stared up at the imposing façade. The place was closed for the night. It would not open probably before eight o'clock. Seven hours to kill while that hammering in his brain went on, driving him to insanity.

He didn't know where Pradel lived or he would have gone there, rung the bell, asked to see the doctor. If he was in, he would kill him. That would be the best way out of this trouble. Kill him and get away. Nobody would know. But if Pradel was gone, that would mean that he was on his way to England with Cécile and the others, under the protection of the League, and he, Devinne, would have no longer any compunction in doing what he had already made up his mind to do. No compunction now, and no remorse in the future.

After a time he turned his back on the Town Hall, and on the Rue Haute, crossed the Grand' Place once more, and almost against his will his footsteps led him in the direction of the derelict cottage, the headquarters of the League, where he had first dreamt of mutiny and Glynde and the others had been ready to knock him down. There it was, looming out of the darkness, a pale, moon mist covered, outlined its broken walls and tumbledown chimney. Devinne went in, groping his way for the tinder-box, knowing where it was always kept. His fingers came in contact with it. It was in its usual place, so was the piece of tallow candle in its pewter sconce. He struck a light, put it to the wick and then looked about him. The familiar place was just the same as it always was. Devinne half expected to see Ffoulkes and Tony and the others squatting round the fire, and to hear the voice of his chief, chaffing, laughing. Laughing? Surely there was still an echo of that laughter lingering within these dilapidated walls. Devinne put his hands quickly up to his ears, fearful lest they caught a sound which, of a certainty, would shatter the last shred of reason in his brain. He picked up the guttering candle and holding it high above his head he wandered round the room. Seeking for what? He couldn't say. Unless it was for the broken fragments of an English gentleman's honour.

What he did come across was a pile of garments in one corner. Coats, hats, phrygian caps, rags, tattered bits of uniforms and

accoutrements, the whole paraphernalia so often used in the pursuit of those stirring adventures the like of which he would never witness again after he had accomplished his final purpose. He would have to make his way back to England unaided by his comrades, lacking the advice of his chief. Well, he had papers and money, both of which would help him on his route. He had gained experience, too, under the guidance of the Scarlet Pimpernel, of how to travel through a country seething with insurrection and suspicious of strangers. He spoke the language well. Oh! he would get on all right without help from anyone. His clothes, perhaps, were rather too tidy and too well-tailored for the adventurous journey. He turned over the pile of garments. Found what he wanted. Clothes, boots and hat such as a well-to-do farmer might wear going from market-place to market-place. He would hire a cabriolet when he could, or a cart; avoid big cities and frequented roads. Oh, yes! he had experience now, he would get on all right.

He dressed himself up in the clothes he had selected. In this too, he had experience, gained through the teaching of a veritable master in the art of disguise: he knew the importance of minor details, the discarding of a fine linen shirt, the use of mud and sand to hide the delicacy of the hands and face. By the time the tallow candle ceased to flicker and died out, he had become the well-to-do farmer right down to his skin. He was left in total darkness, his eyes were heavy with want of sleep and his head ached furiously. There were yet some hours to live through before the dawn when he could make his way back to Choisy and the Town Hall. So he threw himself down on the pile of garments and tried to woo sleep which refused to come. His brain was so alert that all through the night he heard the tower clock strike every hour. Sleep does not come when the mind is busy evolving a plan of treason and dishonour. Seven o'clock. Aching in every limb, half-perished with cold, my Lord St. John Devinne, Earl Welhaven, son and heir of the Duke of Rudford, went forth on an

errand, which, for perfidy, was perhaps only rivalled once, nineteen hundred years ago. He has sworn to himself that he would have no compunction, if, on calling at Pradel's house, he was told that the doctor had gone away. He didn't know where Pradel lived, but it was morning now and he would find out.

His first objective was the Café Tison, for, besides being cold, he was also hungry. These sort of places, mostly new to provincial towns, usually opened their doors very early, and were frequented by men and women on their way to work: here for a few sous they could get a plate of hot soup, or, if they were more sophisticated, a cup of coffee. Devinne, in his rough clothes and with grimy hands and face, attracted no attention. There were a dozen or so workmen sitting at different tables noisily consuming their *croûte-au-pot*. The Englishman sat down and ordered coffee. This he sipped slowly and munched a piece of stale bread. The municipal offices in the Town Hall, he was told on inquiry, opened at eight o'clock. He then asked to be directed to the house of Docteur Pradel.

"Rue du Chemin Neuf, Citizen," some one told him, "corner of the Rue Verte. You will find him at home for certain."

Devinne paid his account and went out. He no longer felt cold now or stiff. His blood was tingling all over his body, only his finger-tips felt like lumps of ice. But nothing physical mattered now. Revenge for humiliation endured, satisfaction over a successful rival, were all that counted at this hour. He found the house at the corner of the Rue du Chemin Neuf. A painted sign hung before the door stating that Citizen Docteur Pradel de la Faculté de Paris lived here and received callers between the hours of eight and ten in the morning, and two and three in the afternoon. Devinne rang the bell, a middle-aged woman opened the door.

"The Citizen Doctor?" he demanded.

"He is not in," the woman answered curtly.

"Not in?"

"As I have told you, Citizen."

"Where can I find him? It is for an urgent case."

"I cannot tell you, Citizen. The doctor was sent for late last night for an urgent case. He has not yet returned."

The woman was apparently become impatient and was on the point of closing the door in the visitor's face, when something in the expression of his eyes seemed to arouse her compassion, for she added, not unkindly:

"It is probably a confinement, Citizen. These cases often keep the doctor out all night. He was fetched away in a cabriolet. I expect him back every moment. Would you care to wait?"

While Devinne parleyed with her a few callers had assembled on the doctor's doorstep. He thanked the woman, but no, he would not wait. He would have liked to ask one more question, but thought better of it and, turning on his heel, went his way.

Why should he wait? What for? Pradel had gone and Percy had done his worst. It was up him, Devinne, now to show that arrogant chief of a league of sycophants, who was the better man.

30 DISHONOUR

Although it was only a few minutes after eight, Devinne found the waiting-hall of the municipal building crowded with visitors waiting for an interview with the Chief Commissary. Men and women of all sorts, country bumpkins and townsfolk, ragamuffins scantily clothed, shivering with cold, business men in threadbare coats, women with a child in their arms and another clinging to their skirts.

When Devinne entered he was told to give in his name to a clerk who sat making entries at a desk. On the spur of the moment he gave his name as Collin and his nationality as Canadian.

"Your occupation?" the clerk asked him curtly.

"Farmer."

"What are you doing in Choisy?"

"I will explain it to the Citizen Commissary."

The clerk looked up at him and said peremptorily: "You will explain it to me, and state your business with the Citizen Commissary."

"My business is secret," Devinne retorted; "the Commissary himself will tell you so. Give me pen and paper," he demanded, "and I will write it down."

The clerk appeared to hesitate. He scrutinized the face of the visitor for a moment or two and seemed on the point of meeting the demand with a definite refusal, when something in the expression of this Canadian farmer's face caused him to change his mind. He pushed a paper towards Devinne and held out his own pen to him.

Pen in hand Devinne paused a moment, seeking for the right words wherewith to arrest the attention of the Chief Commissary. Finally he wrote:

"Citizen Chauvelin and a squad of Republican Guard are held in durance, the writer will tell you where. The aristos up at La Rodière have made good their escape. The writer will tell you how."

He put down the pen, read the missive through, was satisfied that it was to the point, strewed sand over the wet ink, then demanded curtly:

"Wax."

The clerk gave him the wax, he took his ring off his finger and sealed the note down. When handing it over to the clerk, he slipped a gold coin into the latter's hand. This settled the matter. The clerk became at once quite amenable, almost obsequious.

"One moment, Citizen," he said; "I will see to it that the Chief Commissary receives you without delay."

A few minutes later St. John Devinne was sitting in the Chief Commissary's private office, opposite that important personage, once again giving his name, nationality and occupation, which the Commissary duly noted down.

"Mathieu Collin, Citizen Commissary. Of Canadian nationality and French parentage. Spent most of my life farming in Canada, hence my foreign intonation in speaking your language."

The Commissary was fingering Devinne's note, the seal of which he had broken. He read and re-read it two or three times over, gave the Canadian farmer a searching glance, then said:

"And you have come to give me certain information relating to Citizen Chauvelin, member of the Committee of Public Safety?"

"Yes!"

"What is it?"

"As I have had the honour to inform you in my note, Citizen Chauvelin and a squad of Republican Guard are prisoners since yesterday afternoon."

"Where?"

"In the Château de la Rodière. Citizen Chauvelin and a sergeant of the Guard in the cellar, the men in the stables."

"But who dared to arrest Citizen Chauvelin?" the Commissary queried, almost beside himself with horror at this amazing statement.

"He was not arrested, Citizen. He was just thrust into the cellar with the sergeant and locked in."

"But by whom?" the other insisted.

"By the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"The devil!" cried the Commissary, and gave a mighty jump, causing every article on his desk to rattle.

"No, Citizen, not the devil, the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"One and the same."

"Not exactly. We do not believe in the devil in this free and enlightened country, but the Scarlet Pimpernel really does exist. He is

just a spy in the pay of the English Government, and has set himself the task of aiding the enemies of the Republic to escape from justice. It was in order thus to aid the aristos up at La Rodière that he and his followers, among whom must be reckoned that abominable traitor Docteur Pradel, plied the soldiers with drugged wine, and when they were helpless locked them up in the stables, then proceeded to kidnap Citizen Chauvelin."

The Chief Commissary appeared almost ludicrous in the excess of his stupefaction; he puffed and he snorted like an old seal, took out his handkerchief and mopped his perspiring brow.

"And do you mean to tell me," he gasped, "that all this is true?"

"As I live, Citizen."

"And...and...the citizen doctor...? You mentioned him just now. Surely-"

"I called Pradel an abominable traitor," Devinne asserted firmly, "for I know him to be a follower of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"But how do you know all that Citizen...er...Collin? What proof have you-?"

"I will tell you, Citizen Commissary," Devinne replied, but got no further, because the clerk came in at the moment and announced that Citizen Maurin had just come into the building and desired to speak with the Chief Commissary. The latter gave a great sigh of relief. Lawyer Maurin was a man of resource. His advice in this terrible emergency would be invaluable. The harassed Commissary gave orders that Citizen Maurin be admitted at once, and no sooner had the lawyer entered the room and the door been closed behind him than he was put au fait of the appalling event. The whole story was

retold by the Canadian farmer at command of the Commissary-the soldiers of the Guard drugged and locked up in the stables, a member of the Committee of Public Safety kidnapped and held in durance in the cellar, and finally the escape from justice of the ci-devant La Rodières when the order of their arrest had already been signed, and all through the agency of that limb of Satan, the English spy, the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, and his followers, including that abominable traitor, Docteur Pradel.

It was Maurin's turn to give a jump.

"Pradel?" He then added more soberly: "What makes you think that the citizen doctor is a member of the English gang of spies?"

"The simple fact," Devinne replied, "that he, too, has fled from justice, which he knew was about to overtake him and punish him for his crime."

"What do you mean?"

"Only this. All that I have told you I learned through listening to the talk of a group of vagabonds in the cabaret of the Chien sans Queue on the Corbeil road. They were musicians who had scraped their catgut and blown their trumpets all afternoon up at La Rodière. I was one of the crowd who had gone up there to see the fun, and then adjourned to the Chien sans Queue for a mug of ale. The vagrants were talking in whispers. I caught a word or two. To my astonishment those ragamuffins were speaking English, which I, as a Canadian, know well. I edged closer to them and heard every word they said. That is how I know everything and how I knew all about their plans. And," he concluded, with slow emphasis, measuring every word, "they spoke of Pradel as being a member of their gang and of their resolve to take him along with the la Rodières to England."

After Devinne had finished speaking there fell a stillness over this banal office, in the center of which, round the desk littered with papers and paraphernalia, three men sat pondering over what would follow the amazing events of the previous night. The Chief Commissary perspired more freely than ever and kept on muttering in tones almost of despair:

"What are we going to do? Nom d'un nom, what are we going to do?"

Maurin said nothing. He was thinking. Thing very deeply indeed, and at the same time trying to keep a mask of indifference over his face, so as not to allow that fool of a Commissary to guess that he felt neither doubt nor bewilderment at this turn of events, but only satisfaction. Pradel, his enemy, was disarmed. No longer could he be a rival in the affections of Blanche Levet. Neither as an émigré flying to England to save his skin, nor standing at the bar of the Hall of Justice under an accusation of treasonable association with a gang of English spies, could he ever hope to capture the glamour which had dazzled an unsophisticated young girl. And when the Commissary reiterated his complaint for the third time: "Non d'un nom, what am I to do?" the lawyer responded dryly:

"It is too late to do anything now. That wily Scarlet Pimpernel with his drove of traitors and aristos will be half-way to the coast by now."

"Not so bad as that, Citizen Lawyer," Devinne put in. "They will have to make a forced halt at Le Perrey for relays. Of course, they will drive like Satan himself as far as there, but the coach with its heavy load will be slow of progress."

A ray of hope glistened in the eyes of the Commissary at this suggestion.

"You are certain about Le Perrey?" he asked.

"Quite certain. I heard the gang discuss the question of relays and the enforced halt there. At any rate, it might be worth your while, Citizen Commissary," he went on in an insinuating manner, "to send a squad of mounted men in pursuit. They could get fresh horses at Le Perrey and ride like the wind. They are bound to come up with the lumbering coach."

"Do you know which route they mean to take, beyond Le Perrey?"

"Yes, I do. They will make straight for Dreux, Pont Audemer and Trouville. The Scarlet Pimpernel has established headquarters all along that route and it is the nearest way from here to the coast."

The Commissary brought his fist down with a crash upon the desk.

"Pardieu!" he said lustily. "Citizen Collin is right. There is time and to spare to be at the heels of these cursed spies. What say you, Citizen Lawyer?"

But the citizen lawyer really didn't care one way or the other. Whether Pradel was caught in the company of English spies, or was still in Choisy, when of a surety he would be arrested for treason on the evidence of this Canadian farmer, mattered nothing to Louis Maurin, the prospective husband of Blanche Levet. He gave a shrug of indifference and said casually: "You must do as you thing best, Citizen Commissary."

The latter by way of an answer tinkled his hand-bell furiously. The clerk entered, looking scared.

"Send Citizen Captain Cabel to me at once," the Commissary commanded. He was feeling decidedly better. Much relieved. He

mopped his still streaming forehead, picked up a pen and started tap-tapping it against the top of the desk. And while he did so a look of absolute beatitude crept slowly all over his face. He had just remembered that a reward of five hundred louis was offered by the government for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

To Captain Cabel, who entered the office a few minutes later, he gave quick orders:

"A gang of English spies, probably in disguise, and escorting a coach in which are the aristos from La Rodière, are speeding towards the coast by way of Le Perrey, Dreux and Pont Audemer. They will probably make for Trouville. Take a mounted squad of sixteen picked men and ride like hell in pursuit. The leader of the gang is the famous Scarlet Pimpernel. There is a reward of five hundred louis for his apprehension. Fifty louis will be for you if you get him and another twenty to be distributed among the men. Lose no time, Citizen Captain; your promotion and your whole future depend on your success."

Captain Cabel, dumb with emotion, gave the salute, and turning on his heel, marched out of the room. There was no mistaking the expression of his face as he did so. If it was humanly possible to accomplish such a thing, he would bring that audacious Scarlet Pimpernel back to Choisy in chains. The Commissary rubbed his hands together with glee. He had never done a better morning's work in all his life. Five hundred, or what would be left of it after he had shared it with the captain and the men, was a fortune in these days of penury. Yes, Chief Commissary Lacaune had reason to be elated. He rose and with an inviting gesture begged his distinguished visitors to join him in a vin d'honneur at the Café Tison.

Maurin accepted with pleasure. He liked to be on friendly terms with the Commissary, who was the most important personage in the

Commune. But Devinne asked politely to be excused. He was heartily sick of all these people, the like of whom in his own country he would not have touched with a barge pole. He longed to be back in England, where rabble such as ruled France to-day would be sent to gaol for venality and corruption. He took his leave with as polite a bow as he could force himself to make. The Commissary tinkled his bell, the clerk re-entered and ushered Citizen Collin out of the place.

Maurin gazed thoughtfully on the door that had closed behind the pseudo Canadian farmer.

"A strange person that," he remarked to his friend Lacaune. "Do you suppose he spoke the truth?"

The Commissary gave a gasp. He did not relish this sudden onslaught on his newly risen hopes.

"I'll soon ascertain," he replied tartly, "for I'll send up to La Rodière to liberate Citizen Chauvelin and the men from durance. If they are not there, it will give the lie to our Canadian; in which case--" he went on, and completed the sentence by drawing the edge of his hand across his throat.

"And, anyway, I am having him watched. You may be sure of that, my friend." After which he gave a short laugh and added lightly:

"But I am more than hopeful that my men will find the distinguished member of the Committee of Public Safety locked up in the cellar of the Château, as our friend the Canadian has truly informed us."

With that the worthy Commissary took his friend the lawyer by the arm and together the two compeers adjourned for a vin d'honneur at the Café Tison.

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31 THE DREAM

To Cécile de la Rodière that January day and night always seemed to her afterwards more like a dream than a reality. She certainly lived through those twenty-four hours more intensely than she had ever lived before. It seemed as if everything that the world could hold of emotion and excitement all came to her during that short space of time.

There was that awful rioting to begin with, the invasion of her stately home by that turbulent mob who shouted and sang and danced, and mocked and baited her in a manner that for years to come would always bring a rush of blood to her cheeks. And then the amazing, appalling and mysterious figure of that fiddler, who had suddenly grown in stature, and become a sort of giant, endowed with superhuman strength. She could see him at any time just by closing her eyes, stretching out his immense arms and picking up that small, sable-clad man as if he were a bale of goods, throwing him over his shoulder and carrying him away through the hall and down the grand staircase, followed by the yelling and cheering crowd. Cécile could see it all as a vision. Never would she forget it. She had by that time been worked up to such a pitch of excitement that the whole world appeared as if it tottered round her, and that at any moment she and all that awful rabble would be engulfed in the debris of the château.

After that intensely vivid picture, what followed was more dim and equally unreal. She remembered seeing poor François, who was nothing but a wreck of his former proud self, dragging himself out of the room and desiring her to come with him. But this she did not do. She remained in the great hall where a strange silence reigned after the din and hurly-burly of a while ago. The shades of evening were drawing in and she was alone with Simon Pradel. He talked to her at great length in a quiet measured voice, and she listened. He told her

of the danger in which she stood, she and all those she cared for. Strangely enough it never entered her head to doubt him. He said so, therefore it must be true. He then pointed out to her the way, the one and only way by which she could save maman and François and faithful old Paul and Marie from that awful, awful guillotine. Again she listened, and never doubted him for an instant. There was to be a mock marriage. She would have to bear his name, and nothing more, until such time as France and the people of France were granted a return to sanity. She and maman and François, and the two old servants, would have to live under his roof and accept his hospitality, for his name and his house would be a protection for them all against danger of death.

After that he went away and she was left alone to ponder over these matters. Since then so many more things had happened that she had no time to analyse her feelings. But now she was alone and she could think things over, all those things that seemed so like a dream. One thing was certain. After Pradel had left her, she did not feel altogether unhappy. Very excited, yes, but not unhappy. She had gone back to maman and François. Maman was quite placid, doing her usual crochet-work, not the least bit interested in hearing what had happened during those two hours of nightmare when what she termed the lowest dregs of humanity had polluted the old château with their presence. François tired out with emotion which he had been forced to suppress for so long, sat by sulky and taciturn, obviously pondering on what he could do to have his revenge.

All was quiet in the château then. After a time Paul and Marie gathered their old wits together and prepared and served supper for the family. It was taken almost in silence, all three of them being absorbed in thoughts they could not share one with the other. At nine o'clock they all assembled for prayers in the small boudoir, and at half-past nine came bedtime, and Paul was on the point of going

downstairs to put out lights and bolt the front door, when the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the grand staircase caused terror to descend once again like a thundercloud upon these five unfortunates. François cursed under his breath as was his wont. Madame la Marquise raised aristocratic eyebrows, and, with a sigh of resignation, resumed her crochet-work. Marie shrank into a remote corner of the room, while Cécile strained her ears to listen to those footsteps which had halted on the threshold of the grand salon for a moment, only to resume their march in the direction of the concealed door of the boudoir.

What did it all mean? Pradel had, of course, warned her of danger, but had also declared that danger was not imminent. He was to call for her to-morrow morning at ten o'clock and go with her to the mairie where, if she consented, the formalities connected with the new form of civil marriage would immediately take place. She, Cécile de la Rodière, would after that become nominally Madame Simon Pradel, and maman and the others would be safe against such awful contingencies as those ominous footsteps now fore-shadowed. Paul, with the instinct of the old retainer, set to guard the welfare of his masters, slipped out into the vestibule ready to face a whole crowd of miscreants, if they dared interfere with them. Before closing the door behind him he said to François in a half-audible whisper:

"While I parley with them, Monsieur le Marquis, take the ladies down the back staircase to the sous-sol. I will say that Marie and I are alone in the château, and that you all drove away an hour ago in the direction of Corbeil."

François saw the force of this advice. There were several good hiding-places in the vast area below the ground. There was even an underground passage which led to a dependency of the château, where the laundry, the buttery and so on were situated. At any rate the

advice was worth taking.

"Come, Maman," he said curtly to his mother, and with scant ceremony took crochet-needle and wool out of her hands, even while from the grand salon there rang out the harsh word of command:

"Open in the name of the Republic!"

"How did those devils know where we were," François muttered between his teeth: "and how did they find the door behind the tapestry?"

There was no time, however, to speculate over that. Suddenly there was a terrific bang, a deal of cursing and swearing and an agonizing cry of protest from Paul. The door had been broken open. Madame la Marquise, aided by her son and Cécile, was struggling to rise, but she was old and heavy. She got entangled in the wool and fell back in her chair dragging Cécile down with her.

Paul now slipped back into the room, but remained standing with his back to the door, holding it against the intruders.

"Quick, Madame la Marquise," he urged in a hoarse whisper, "the staircase."

It was too late. François wasted a few moments in fumbling in a drawer for a pistol and seeing that it was loaded, and he had just got the ladies as far as the opposite door, when Paul was violently thrown forward and sent sprawling right across the room. Four men pushed their way in. They wore shabby military uniforms and each carried a pistol. François levelled his, but one of the men who appeared to be the sergeant in command said sharply in a tone of authority:

"Put that down or I give the order to fire."

By way of a retort François cocked his pistol. It was promptly knocked out of his hand, and he was left standing like an animal at bay, glaring at the soldiers, the ladies and the old servants crowding round him. Even his facility for cursing and swearing had deserted him. Madame la Marquise was speechless and dignified. She would not allow that rabble to think that she was afraid. Paul and Marie took refuge in murmuring their prayers. Cécile alone kept a level head.

When the sergeant rapped out the order:

"Arrest these people in the name of the Republic," and all four men stepped forward, each to put a hand on her and those she cared for, she said, with as much pride as she could call to her aid:

"I pray you not to put hands on us. We will follow you quietly."

And seeing that the sergeant then gave a sign to his men to step back again, she added:

"I hope you will allow Madame la Marquise and myself, also our maid, to put a few things together which we may need."

"I regret, Citizeness," the sergeant replied firmly, but not unkindly; "time is short and my orders are strict. I have a coach waiting outside to convey you to Choisy without a moment's delay. Your requirements will be attended to to-morrow."

"But my man..." Madame la Marquise protested. They were the first words she had uttered since this unwarrantable incursion by these insolent plebeians into her privacy, but she did not get any further with what she would have liked to say. She had a great deal of dignity, had this foolish old lady, and a goodly measure of sound French common sense. The fact that the sergeant stood by like a wooden dummy, obviously just a slave to his duty, with no feeling or humanity

in him, helped her to realize that neither resistance, nor hauteur nor abuse, would be of the slightest use. The insolent plebeians stood now for Fate, inexorable Fate, and the decree of le bon Dieu who had chosen to inflict this calamity on her and her children, and against whose commandments there was no appeal.

Cécile did not speak again either. She picked up a shawl and wrapped it round her mother. She looked a pathetic little figure in her thin silk dress. The small room was warm with a wood fire burning in the grate, but it looked as if she would have to go and face a long drive with no protection against the cold save her lace fichu. She heard the sergeant say curtly:

"There are shawls and wraps in plenty downstairs, Citizeness."

That seemed a strange thing for a revolutionary soldier to say, for they had not the reputation of being considerate to state prisoners. Cécile glanced up at the sergeant, her lips framing a word of two of gratitude, but he stood back in the shadow and she could not see his face.

François had remained silent all this time, with still that look as of a baffled tiger in his eyes. His teeth were tightly clenched, so were his fists. Cécile was thankful that he did not make matters worse by indulging in violent curses or loud abuse. At one moment he made a movement and raised his fist as if he meant to strike that insolent sergeant in the face first and then make a dash for freedom, but immediately four arms were raised and four pistols were levelled at him. Madame la Marquise said dryly: "No use my son. You would, anyhow, have to leave me behind."

Each of the soldiers now took a prisoner by the arm. The sergeant leading the way with Madame la Marquise and poor old Marie left to follow on alone. The small procession then marched out of the room

in close formation. They traversed the wide salon and descended the grand staircase. Staircase and hall were only dimly lighted by one oil-lamp and placed in a convenient spot on a consol table. Cécile was walking immediately behind her mother. In the dim light she could vaguely see the tall sergeant walking in front of her. She could see his broad shoulders, one arm and the hand which held a pistol; the rest of him was in shadow.

Down in the hall, on the centre table—a masterpiece of Italian art left untouched after two raids by riotous mobs, because of its size and weight—there was a pile of rugs and coats and shawls. Madame la Marquise and François took it as a matter of course that these things should have been provided for their comfort by the same men, police or military, who had chosen this late evening hour for the arrest of three women and two men against whom no accusation of treason had yet been formulated. Marie fussed round her old mistress with shawl and mantle, and Paul round his young master with a thick coat. Cécile saw the sergeant pick up a cloak and hood. He came behind her and put it round her shoulders. She looked up at him while he did this and met his eyes, kind, deep-set eyes they were, with heavy lids, and in their depths a gentle look of humour which for some unaccountable reason gave her a feeling of confidence.

But there was no time now to ponder over things, however strange they might appear. Within a very few moments all five of them, maman, François, the two servants and Cécile herself were bundled out of the front door and into a coach which was waiting at the bottom of the perron. A man, dressed like the others in military uniform, stood at the horses' heads. He stepped aside when all the prisoners were installed in the coach. Looking through the carriage window Cécile was the sergeant talking for a moment to one of the men; he then climbed up to the box-seat and took the reins. It was very dark, and the carriage lanterns had not been lighted. One of the men led

the horses all the way down the avenue and through the main gate. The others had evidently climbed up to the roof, for there was much heavy tramping overhead.

Surely all that had been a dream. It couldn't all have happened, not just like that and not in the space of a few hours. And the dream did not stop there.

There were more happenings all through the night and the next day, all of which partook of the character of a dream. Outside the main gate of La Rodière the coach did not turn in the direction of Choisy, but to the right. It went on for a little while and then drew up. Some one lighted the carriage lanterns, and after that the horses went on at a trot. Cécile, whenever she looked out of the window, saw the snow-carpeted road gliding swiftly past. The moon had come out again and the road glistened like a narrow sheet of white crystals.

32 STRATAGEM

Cécile was wide awake for a long time. Her mother was asleep in the farther corner of the carriage, so was François, who sat between them, leaning against the back cushions. Paul and Marie had spent some time murmuring their prayers until they, too, fell asleep. She herself must have dozed off at one time, for presently she was roused with a jerk when the coach wheels went rattling over cobblestones. This must be St. Gif, she thought, for she could see houses and shuttered shops on either side and an occasional street lamp. At one time there was a peremptory call of "Halt!" followed by some parleying between the sergeant-driver and what was probably a police patrol. Cécile caught the words "citizen" and "papers" and "only my duty, Citizen Sergeant." And presently the call:

"Right. Pass on."

And the wearying drive went on along the jolting road. Progress was slow, because the ground was slippery for the horses, and the night intermittently very dark when heavy snow-laden clouds driven by the north-easterly wind obscured the pale face of the moon. The coach went lumbering on for hours and hours, an eternity, so it seemed to the unfortunate inmates, until presently the first streak of a cold grey dawn came creeping in through the carriage windows. After which the pace became less slow. The ground was, of course, as slippery as before, but there was obviously a very firm hand on the reins, and nothing untoward occurred to interrupt progress.

It was not yet daylight when once again the carriage wheels rattled over a cobbled street. There were gleams of light to be seen through shuttered windows on either side, and here and there a passer-by: men in blouses, women with shawls over their heads. Le Perrey in all probability, thought Cécile. The others were still asleep. Poor

maman, she must be terribly stiff and tired, and François looked more dead than alive. Paul and Marie were muttering even in their sleep, words that were prayers to God or protests against the cruel fate that befell their master and mistress. Cécile had no idea whither they were being driven, or whether this flight through the night would end in safety or disaster. Fortunately maman was obviously not thinking on the matter at all, whilst François effectually hid his own doubts and fears behind a mask of sullen indifference.

Le Perrey was soon left behind, and after a time the coach was again pulled up, this time in open country. There was a good deal of scrambling overhead, and a minute or two later the carriage door was opened and a pleasant, cultured voice said:

"I am afraid there is a piece of rough ground to walk over. Can you do it, Mademoiselle?"

This, of course, was still part of the dream. Cécile heard herself replying: "Yes, I can," and then adding tentatively: "But maman-"

And the pleasant voice responded: "I will carry Madame la Marquise if she will allow me. Will you and Monsieur le Marquis descend, Mademoiselle?"

Whereupon Cécile obeyed without demur. It seemed quite natural that she should. François appeared to dazed to raise his voice. He got down, and was followed by Paul and Marie, still mumbling prayers to le bon Dieu. Madame la Marquise did not apparently care what happened to her. She allowed herself to be lifted out of the coach without protest and Cécile heard that same pleasant voice saying in English:

"Cloaks and rugs, Tony, for the ladies, and, Hastings and Glynde, take the coach a couple of kilometres down that other road. Take out

the horses and bring them along with you to headquarters."

She understood what was said, though not quite all. A man put a shawl round her shoulders, over her cloak, whilst another busied himself by wrapping a rug round maman, who was lying snugly in the arms of the tall sergeant. After which the little procession was formed the sergeant on ahead carrying maman, who was no light weight. François came next with Paul and Marie, and finally she, Cécile walked between two soldiers, one of whom had her by the elbow to guide her over the rough ground, while the other, after a minute or two, performed the same kindly office to poor old Marie.

And walking thus, in the rear of the little procession, the girl all at once understood what was happening. These soldiers had nothing to do with the Gendarmerie Nationale, the uniform of which they only wore as a disguise. They were friends who were helping them all to escape from death, the same friends who had saved the Abbé Edgeworth from that awful, awful guillotine. And the sergeant on ahead was none other than the fiddler who had carried that small sable-clad form of a man on his shoulder as if he were a bale of goods, and was carrying maman now as if she were a child. She gazed almost awestruck on the silhouette of that broad back ahead of her, for if her conjectures were correct, then that pseudo-fiddler or pseudo-sergeant was none other than the legendary Scarlet Pimpernel himself.

After which surmises and reflections Cécile de la Rodière was entirely unconscious of the roughness of the road, of cold or hunger. She became like a sleep-walker, moving without consciousness. Presently a solid mass loomed out of the frosty mist. It was a house with trees clustered round it. Its aspect, as it gradually was revealed to her, appeared familiar to Cécile, but her brain was too tired to ponder over this. The place looked deserted, the house in a state of

dilapidation. It had evidently been suddenly abandoned and left to the mercy of rust and decay. The time-worn façade and crumbling stonework told the usual pitiable tale of summary arrest and its awful corollary.

The way up to the front door was along a short drive bordered by Lombardy poplars. There was a low perron of three or four steps. To Cécile's intense astonishment she presently perceived that the place was not deserted, as she thought, for two men were standing on the perron. At sight of the approaching party they came down the steps, and called out in English: "All well?" to which her own escort replied lustily: "Splendid!" They stood aside while the pseudo-sergeant carried Madame la Marquise into the house. The others, including herself, followed him. He crossed a narrow vestibule and went into what might have been a small salon at one time, but now presented a shocking spectacle of wreckage: windows broken, doors off their hinges, panelling stripped from the walls. There was no furniture in the room except a few chairs, a horsehair sofa and a kitchen table. The only cheerful thing about the place, and that was very cheerful indeed, was a log fire in the open hearth. In spite of the broken window the room was deliciously warm.

The sergeant deposited maman on the sofa, asked her in perfect French how she felt, and on receiving a grateful smile in response, he turned to Cécile.

"And now, Mademoiselle," he said, "We will get you some hot wine, after which you can all have a short rest. But I am afraid we must make a fresh start within the hour, and I shall have to ask you and Madame la Marquise, as well as Monsieur le Marquis, to don the country clothes which you will find the chest in the next room, together with all requirements to make yourselves look as like as possible to a company of worthy yokels and bumpkins on their way to the nearest

market town. One of us will, with your permission, put the finishing touches on your disguise."

And the next moment he was gone, leaving behind him an atmosphere of cheerfulness and of security. Even François reacted to that. The ladies trooped into the next room, burning with curiosity to see the dresses which they were ordered to wear. Maman said quite seriously: "I think God has sent one of His angels to protect us." Marie murmured a fervent: "Amen!"

But Cécile didn't speak. She was under the spell of the marvellous discovery she had made, namely, that maman, she and François, all of them, in fact, had been rescued from death by that marvel of God's creation, the Scarlet Pimpernel.

33 THE BALD PATE OF CHANCE

How surprised they would all have been could they have seen through the dilapidated walls of this ramshackle abode their rescuers sitting on the table in what was presumably the kitchen. They were sipping hot wine and talking over their impressions of this last glorious adventure. Their noses and hands were blue with the cold, and they were all going through the process of getting shaved. One of them had served the fugitives with the hot wine, and presently they were joined by Glynde and Hastings.

"Where did you leave the coach?" the chief asked them as soon as they appeared.

"Do you know Moulins?" Glynde responded.

"Quite well."

"Just the other side of it. Past the church. We rode back, of course, and Hastings was nearly thrown when his horse slipped on a sheet of ice."

"No other accident?"

"No."

"Good. Now, any news here?" He turned to my Lord Galveston.

"Yes. Rather strange. When Holte and I got here about an hour ago, we saw to our surprise smoke coming out of one of the chimneys. To make a long story short, we found that a vagabond had quartered himself in the place. We couldn't very well turn him out, and we felt that he was less dangerous here than at large. So we let him stay where he was."

"And where is he now?"

"In the room next to this with a fire, a chair and a bottle of wine."

"Let's have a look at him."

Blakeney and Galveston went into the room to have a look at the intruder. He was just a miserable wreck of humanity, of the type found, alas! all too frequently on the high roads these days. There were a few dying embers in the hearth and three empty bottles on the floor beside it.

"The miserable muckworm," my Lord Galveston muttered and swore lustily; "he has ferreted out our stores and stolen two bottles of our best."

The "miserable muckworm," however, was impervious to his lordship's curses. He was squatting on the floor, his head resting precariously on the hard seat of the chair, fast asleep.

Galveston was for shaking the fellow up and throwing him out of the place. But Blakeney took his friend by the arm and dragged him back forcibly into the kitchen.

"You lay a hand on that gossoon at your peril," he said, with his infectious laugh. "Do you know what he really is?"

"No, I do not."

"He is the one hair on the bald pate of Chance which you and Holte have enabled me to seize."

"I don't understand."

"No, but you will by and by. Is there a key to that door?"

"Yes, on the inside."

"Get it, my dear fellow, will you? Then lock the door and give me the key."

"Everything all right here?" he asked, turning to Holte (Viscount Holte of Frogham, familiarly known as "Froggie").

"I think everything."

"Horses?"

"With the two out of the coach we have six. Those here are quite fresh."

"And vehicles?"

"Two light carts. Covered."

"Good. Tony, you must take charge. You and Hastings on one cart. Glynde and Galveston on the other. I want Froggie to remain here with four horses which we shall want later. You fellows must drive by way of Dreux to that little village we all know they call Trouville. Avoid the main road and you will find the side tracks quite safe. Tony has all the necessary papers. I bought them of a poor caitiff in Choisy who works in the commissariat, and, as a matter of fact, the country on this side of the Loire is not yet infested by that murdering Gendarmerie Nationale. When you get to Trouville make straight for the Cabaret Le Paradis, a filthy hole, but the landlord is my friend to the death. He is noted in the district as a rabid revolutionary, but, as a matter of fact, he battens on me and is exceedingly rich. He is grimy and stinks of garlic like the devil, but he'll look after you till I come,

which won't be long. Of course, there are risks. You all know them and are prepared to face them. Bless you all."

There was silence amongst them after that for a moment or two. Four of them there had one name on their lips which they were loth to utter- Devinne. But Jimmy Holte and Tom Galveston, knowing nothing of the young traitor's mutiny, asked where he was.

"Back in Choisy," the chief replied simply.

There were one or two more details of the expedition to discuss. The present military uniforms must be discarded and simple country clothes donned.

"I have already told the ladies about that," Blakeney explained, "and I imagine you will find the whole party quite excited to play their rôle of country bumpkins. Froggie, who is such a dandy, will see that they have not forgotten any important detail. Madame la Marquise is quite capable of playing the part of a labourer's wife with a dainty patch under her left eye and her finger-nails carefully tended."

"But what are you going to do, Percy?"

"Ffoulkes and I have a little piece of business to transact here. He doesn't know it yet-that is why he looks such an ass, ain't it, Ffoulkes? But he'll know presently. As a matter of fact, we are going back to Choisy to get hold of Pradel. He must be in a tight corner by now, poor fellow. But that one hair on the bald pate of Chance is going to work miracles for us. I have all sorts of plans in my head and Ffoulkes and I are going to have a rattling day, eh, Ffoulkes?"

"I am sure we are if you say so," Sir Andrew replied simply.

After which the party broke up on a note of gaiety and excitement.

The refugees were found to have donned the required disguises. Madame la Marquise looked an old market woman to the life, Cécile was a very presentable cinder-wench, and even François had taken pains to enter into the spirit of the adventure and was as grimy and as unkempt as any vagabond might be. A few small details here and there suggested by my Lord Holte and the transformation from aristos to out-at-elbows patriots was complete, which does not by any means tend to suggest that elegance of mien is entirely a matter of clothes and cleanliness, but that it goes very near it.

The start was made at nine o'clock. Two covered carts had been got ready and their drivers were waiting in the road. Madame la Marquise was again carried over the rough ground by the pseudo-sergeant, who to her mind was more than ever a messenger from God. The whole party was bundled in the tow carts, the drivers cracked their whips and away they went.

The last picture that Cécile saw when she ventured to peep round the hood of the cart remained engraved in her memory for the rest of her life. This was the tall figure of the pseudo-sergeant standing by the road-side, his slender hand up to the salute, looking for all the world like one of those representations of the heroes of old which she had admired in the museums of Paris-tall, erect, a leader of men, the mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel.

34 THE ENGLISH SPY

Long before midday the whole of Choisy was seething with excitement. All sorts of rumours had been flying about for the past two hours and now they had received confirmation, and the most amazing happenings ever known even in these revolutionary times were freely discussed in the open streets, in every home and more especially in the cafés and restaurants of the commune.

It seems that no less a personage than Citizen Chauvelin, who, it appears, was an influential member of the Committee of Public Safety, had been discovered in the Château de la Rodière, locked up with a sergeant of the Gendarmerie Nationale in the cellar, and that thirty men of the same military corps were found to have been locked up in the adjoining stables. And the person who had single-handed perpetrated this abominable outrage was none other than that legendary English spy, that messenger of the devil known as the Scarlet Pimpernel. And would you believe it, he was the fiddler who with his band of musicians had played the rigaudon all the afternoon at the château! Of course everybody remembered how he had shouted: "A spy! A spy!" and "We shall all be massacred. Remember Paris!" and how he had picked a little man up as if he were a bale of goods and had carried him on his shoulder down the stairs and locked him up in the cellar. Well, that little man was no spy at all, but a very important personage indeed, member of the Committee of Public Safety, Citizen Chauvelin. The men of the Gendarmerie Nationale, when they were liberated from the stables, had hardly recovered from a drugged sleep. A large jorum of wine and a number of empty mugs all containing the dregs of some potent drug were scattered about the floor. The men knew nothing of what had happened to them. They understood that Citizen Chauvelin, under whose orders they were, had sent them some wine to keep them warm. They were not fully in their senses yet when presently they were

marched back to Choisy, there to give an account of how they came to have neglected their duty in such a flagrant manner by drinking and falling asleep.

These remarkable events, however, were not by any means the only ones that excited the population of Choisy almost to frenzy. There was the rumour, now amounting to a certainty, of what had happened to the citizen Dr. Simon Pradel. It appears that he had been out all night, having been called to a serious maternity case in the late evening. By the time he was free it was past nine o'clock and he went straight to the hospital situated about three kilometres outside Choisy in the little village of Manderieu. His regular time for attending there was seven o'clock, so he went straight there without going home first. But, mark what happened-and this was authentic-Dr. Pradel, founder and chief supporter of this hospital for sick children, was refused admission into the building. The gates were held by armed sentinels who crossed their bayonets in front of him. On his demanding an explanation an officer came across the forecourt and coolly informed him that the government had taken over the hospital, that no doctor, save those nominated by the National Convention, would be allowed to practise there, and that if there were any reclamations to be made, these must be addressed directly to them.

Of course no one could say exactly what Citizen Pradel thought of this insult to the dignity of his profession. What was known, however, was that he went straight back to Choisy and lodged a formal protest with the Chief Commissary at the Town Hall against what he called this outrageous action on the part of the government. It was also known that he was there and then put under arrest and conveyed under escort back to Manderieu, there to remain in charge of the Commissary of the Commune, until such time as it was decided what course should be taken with regard to conduct that was nothing short of an insult directed against the Republic. As a matter of fact, those in

the know asserted with a wink that the Chief Commissary of the district desired to hand over the responsibility of dealing with Citizen Pradel to his subordinate at Manderieu. The young doctor was so well known in Choisy that there was no knowing what the populace, already in ebullition over the incidents of La Rodière, might not do when it heard of the arrest of their popular townsman.

But even this extraordinary event paled before what really and truly was the most astonishing, the most marvellous, the most miraculous and most unexpected of all. The English spy, the mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel, who for over two years had led the police of France by the nose, who was the greatest and most dangerous enemy the Republic had yet known, was captured, caught on his way to the coast. Yes! captured, laid by the heels, trussed and manacled, and was now under lock and key in the dungeons of the old castle. And there was a big reward to come from the government for his apprehension. Five hundred louis to be divided between the Chief Commissary, who had ordered the pursuit, Captain Cabel co-operated in it with unexampled valour. What had actually happened was this: Captain Cabel at the head of a squad of Gendarmerie Nationale was in hot pursuit of the spy and the aristos from La Rodière who were fleeing from justice. Half-way between St. Gif and Le Perrey, they spied coming towards them, two horsemen who were riding like the wind. Captain Cabel, seized with suspicion, drew his men across the road, and was on the point of crying "Halt," when the two horsemen suddenly drew rein at a distance of not more than three metres, throwing their horses on their haunches. They, too, wore the uniform of the Gendarmerie Nationale, and one of them had a man riding on the pillion behind him.

"We've got him!" this man cried in a stentorian voice.

"Got whom?" the captain countered.

"The English spy! the Scarlet Pimpernel!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Where is he?"

"On the pad of my saddle."

The captain raised himself on his stirrups and beheld a kind of vagabond with head hanging down on his chest and blood streaming from his forehead. His legs were firmly secured together under the horse's belly and his arms were tied with a rope round the soldier's waist.

"What?" he cried in amazement, "that beggarly tramp, the Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"Beggarly tramp forsooth? He and his gang fought like ten thousand devils. There were eight of us. Six are now in hospital at Le Perrey with battered heads and broken bones. I downed him at last by giving him a crack on the head with the but end of my pistol. When the others saw him fall, they turned and fled taking their wounded with them."

"Wasn't there a coach?"

"Yes. Stuffed full of aristos. We saw that first and ordered them to halt, when were suddenly attacked from the rear, and while we fought for our lives, the coach was driven away. But," the man concluded with a shout of triumph, "we have got the leader of the gang, and we are taking him to Choisy to get the reward. Do not bar the way, Citizen Captain."

He set spurs to his horse, but Cabel and his squad did not move.

"One moment," the captain commanded. "Where do you come from?"

"From Dreux, of course," the other responded, and pointed to his regimental number on his collar. "And we are going to Choisy."

"By whose orders?" Cabel asked.

"The Citizen Commissary at Dreux."

"What orders did he give you?"

"To keep a sharp look out for a gang of English spies, disguised, of course, who are known to be in the neighbourhood, and, if we find them, to convey them under arrest to Choisy."

"And do you know who I am?"

"Yes! The captain commanding the second division of the Gendarmerie Nationale."

"Very well then, listen to my orders. You will immediately transfer your prisoner to the saddle of my sergeant here, and you and your comrade can go back to Dreux and report."

For a moment it seemed as if the other would refuse to obey. He and his comrade even turned their horses as if ready to gallop back the way they came, but at a word of command from the captain, the squad closed in round them and no doubt they realized the futility of rebellion. Within a very short time "the English spy" was transferred to the sergeant's saddle. The captain watched the operation with a grin of satisfaction. Here was luck indeed! He recalled the words

wherewith the Chief Commissary had finally dismissed him: "Lose no time, Citizen Captain, your promotion and your whole future depend on your success."

And here were promotion, reward, success, all within his grasp and without striking a blow. His name would ring throughout the length and breadth of the land as the saviour of the Republic, the man who had captured the Scarlet Pimpernel.

The squad was reformed, and soon the horses were put to a trot, leaving those two others in apparent discomfort in the middle of the road. Not a head was turned to see or an ear strained to hear what they said. If it had, a strange sound would have come wafted over the frosty air, a prolonged and ringing laugh, and a resonant voice calling gaily in a language not often heard in these parts:

"That's done it, eh, Ffoulkes? Gad! I never spent such a pleasant half-hour in my life. Now, hell for leather, dear lad. I know a short cut across those fields, which will save us at least four miles."

But Captain Cabel and the men of his squad heard nothing of that ringing laughter and resonant voice. They were trotting merrily along the hard road back to Choisy, bearing in triumph, on the pillion of the sergeant's saddle, the unconscious form of a beggarly vagabond who was none other than the daring English spy the Scarlet Pimpernel.

35 AN UNWELCOME GUEST

To say that the news of the arrest of Dr. Pradel caused agitation in Choisy would be to understate the true facts. The whole commune had been seething with excitement all day, and by the time the street lamps were lighted and the munition workers had trooped out of the factories, excitement had turned to frenzy. A frenzy fostered partly by indignation but mostly by fear. If the citizen doctor, as good a young man as any one could wish to see, as straight, as loyal, as generous, could without any warning see the bread taken out of his mouth, could be cast into prison without as much as an accusation being brought against him, could, *nom d'un nom* be brought to trial and perhaps to death, then what chance had any respectable citizen, father of a family perhaps, of escaping out of the clutches of such a relentless government? Guillotine to the right of them, guillotine to the left, guillotine and threat of guillotine all the time. Life would soon not be worth an hour's purchase. As for liberty, was there such a thing as liberty these days? Liberty to starve, yes, to send your sons to be slaughtered in wars against the foreigners, but slavery in everything else, and one trembled more fearfully these days before the Chief Commissary of the Committee of Public Safety, than one did in the past before those arrogant aristos.

Of course, none of these mutterings and grumbings reached the ears of the powers that be. They were all done in a whisper, for one never knew where government spies plied their dirty trade, nor in what disguise, witness the citizen doctor who was obviously a victim to one of that *canaille*. So everything that was said was said in a whisper, whilst furtive glances of contempt were cast on the inscriptions that decorated the portals of every public building: *Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité*.

Liberty, I ask you!

As usual the Restaurant and Café Tison were the chief centre of grumblings and discontent. Pradel! the doctor! the man who looked after one when one was ill and after the children! What was going to happen to the children when Pradel was no longer there? Oh! if one only dared!...

But one didn't dare, that was the trouble. All one could do was to troop down to Manderieu and there learn for certain what was happening to Pradel. It was evening now, nearly six o'clock. But no matter. It was dark, but every one knew the road to Manderieu. And so the company trooped out in a body from the Restaurant Tison. As they all emerged out into the Grand' Place, they called to their friends, and to casual passers-by to join them. "Art coming, Jean? And thou, Pierre?"

"Whither are you going?"

"The Manderieu. The hospital is closed."

"I know."

"And Docteur Pradel a prisoner in the Commissariat."

"I know, but what can we do?"

"Let's go and see, anyway."

The three kilometres to Manderieu were soon get over. The little village, usually so tranquil, had also caught the excitement which was raging in the town. In the market-place where stood the hospital and the Commissariat of Police, a small knot of country folk had assembled, some by the gates of the hospital, where sentinels stood on the watch, and others in front of the Commissariat. It was a silent crowd. Only now and again was a voice raised to murmur or to curse.

The place was only dimly lighted by a couple of oil-lamps at the hospital gates and one over the portal of the Commissariat. The crowd from Choisy joined in now with the villagers of Manderieu. After this fusion, silence was broken more frequently, but the attitude of Pradel's sympathizers remained subdued. They were sorry enough for him, and they were indignant, but they were also very much afraid. None of them quite knew what it was that had brought them out in a body to Manderieu, except perhaps the desire to ascertain just what was happening to the citizen doctor and to the children's hospital. A man down in the Restaurant Tison, they didn't know who he was, had urged them to it. "After all," he had said, "things might not be so bad as they seem. Docteur Pradel may not have been arrested and the hospital may not be closed." But the hospital was closed and the country folk of Manderieu declared that the doctor was a prisoner in the Commissariat.

"Let us ask and make sure," some one in the crowd suggested to his neighbour. And, as is the way with crowds, the suggestion was taken up. It traveled from mouth to mouth until there were quite two hundred malcontents who kept on reiterating: "Let us make sure," while others just muttered: "Doc Pradel. Doc Pradel. Where is Doc Pradel?"

The Commissary was beginning to feel worried. Manderieu was a quiet little hole where such things as turbulent crowds and rioters were unknown. The holding of the popular doctor in durance pending further instructions had been thrust upon him and he had been promised by his superior that he would be relieved of responsibility by nightfall, when the prisoner would be conveyed, under escort, back to Choisy. But here it was six o'clock and Dr. Pradel was still the unwelcome guest of Citizen Delorme, Commissary of Manderieu. The latter in his distress sent a mounted messenger over to Choisy with a hurriedly written note to his chief, demanding that the prisoner

be removed from the village as quickly as possible. But half an hour, at least, must elapse before the return of the messenger, and in the meanwhile the crowd had concentrated in front of the Commissariat and was striking terror in the heart of Citizen Delorme by its persistent parrot-cry of "Doc Pradel! Doc Pradel! We want to see Doc Pradel!" After a time the cry was accompanied by boos and hisses and banging of fists and sabots against the door of the Commissariat.

Delorme now was like Bluebeard's wife of the fairy tale. He had posted two of his gendarmes at the entrance of the village, at a point where a narrow side street led to the back of the Commissariat, with orders to intercept any messenger or escort from Choisy, take them round to the back gate of the building, then fetch the prisoner from the lock-up and hand him over to the escort for conveyance to the city. And like Bluebeard's wife, the unfortunate Commissary might have called in his agony of mind: "Sister Anne, Sister Anne, is no one coming down the road?"

His sergeant of the guard suggested his going to the door and talking to the people. Delorme demurred. He did not relish facing the crowd. There were a lot of loose stones lying about, one of them might be hurled at his head.

"Sister Anne! Sister Anne!" He didn't use these words exactly, but the sentiment that prompted the words he did use were the same as those that caused Bluebeard's wife to call to her sister in the depths of her terror and distress. In the end he had to come to a decision. Some kind of risk had to be taken, flying stones or the certain disapprobation of his superiors, if things went wrong with the prisoner or the crowd got beyond control. The thought of such disapprobation gave the unfortunate Commissary an unpleasant feeling round the neck.

"Sister Anne! Sister Anne! is no one coming down the road?"

At about this same hour in the late afternoon of this cold January day, Citizen Lacauene, Chief Commissary of Choisy, was going through a far more lamentable experience than that which befell his subordinate at Manderieu. He had had two hours of absolute bliss when Captain Cabel presented himself at the Town Hall with the marvellous, the miraculous, the amazing news that he had really and truly succeeded in capturing that damnable English spy, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and had brought him into Choisy strapped to the pillion of the sergeant's saddle, wounded and nearly dead, after a terrific fight wherein he, Cabel, and his squad had displayed prodigies of valour. The worthy Commissary nearly had a fit of apoplexy when he heard this wonderful news. He gave the order that the notorious spy, safely bound and gagged, be brought into his office and thrown down like a bale of refuse in a corner of the room. He gazed with awe not unmixed with astonishment at the helpless form of what seemed at first sight to be that of a drunken vagabond. Like Cabel himself, his first feeling was one of doubt that this miserable wreck of humanity could be the daring adventurer whose name was dreaded throughout the whole country and who had led the entire police force of the Republic for three years by the nose. It was only after he had learned from the captain the whole story of the amazing capture, the coach crammed full of escaping aristos, of the attack and desperate fighting, that his doubts were finally set at rest. Every one knew, of course, that spies are the scum of the earth, and English spies more ignoble than those of any other land. He ordered two of his gendarmes to stand guard over the prisoner and then sent word of the joyful news to Citizen Chauvelin, Member of the Committee of Public Safety. The latter was at the moment nursing his wrath and humiliation in the house of Citizen Maurin, the lawyer, who had offered him hospitality after his liberation from the cellar of La Rodière.

Chauvelin had not only suffered humiliation for close on four-and-twenty hours, but also bodily pain, lying on damp straw in an atmosphere of stale alcohol and decaying corpses of rats and mice. He had spent a few hours in bed, nursed devotedly by the lawyer, always on the look out for a chance to secure for himself influential friends. The news of the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel was real balm for his mental and bodily ills.

"I pray you, Citizen, come at once," the Chief Commissary had written in his hurried message. "I am keeping the prisoner here under guard so that you may have the satisfaction of seeing him yourself. I must say he is not attractive to look at, nor does he inspire one with awe. A big hulking fellow who looks like an unwashed mudlark. I had no thought that a reputable government would employ such canaille even as a spy."

A big hulking fellow who looks like an unwashed mudlark? How well did that description fit in with Chauvelin's recollections of the several disguises so cleverly assumed by that prince of dandies, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart. He could have laughed aloud, as that reckless Scarlet Pimpernel was ever wont to do, when he remembered Mantes and Limours and Levallois-Péret, the trial of Henri Chanel and Mariette Joly, the coal-heaver, the drunken lout of the Cabaret de la Liberté, the fiddler at La Rodière and the countless other times when he had been baffled by that pastmaster in the art of disguise. A big hulking fellow who looks like an unwashed mudlark may have raised doubts in the mind of the Chief Commissary of Choisy, but not in his. He sent word to Citizen Lacaune that he would be round at the Town Hall within half an hour, and while he rose and dressed himself, he forced his mind not to dwell on the triumph which awaited him there, for he felt that if he thought on it too much he would surely go mad with joy.

Then, of course, came the catastrophe. As soon as Citizen Chauvelin arrived at the Town Hall he was ushered with every mark of respect into the office of the Chief Commissary. It was a large room, lighted by an oil-lamp which hung from the ceiling and a couple of wax candles on the centre desk. In a far corner, to which the light did not penetrate, Chauvelin perceived the vague outline of a human form lying prone behind two men in uniform with fixed bayonets. His enemy! A deep sigh of contentment, of joy and of triumph escaped his breast. The excitement of the moment was almost more than he could bear. His hands were cold as ice and his temples throbbed with heat. He tried to appear calm, to show dignity and aloofness while receiving the deferential greeting of the Chief Commissary, and a brief report of the circumstances under which the amazing capture was effected. Then at last he felt free, free to gaze on the humiliation and the helplessness of the man who had so often brought him to shame. He picked up a candle and walked with a firm step across the room. The prisoner lay on his side, his head turned to the wall. He was bound round and round his whole body with a rope. Chauvelin stooped, holding the candle high, and with his thin, claw-like hand turned the man's head towards the light.

He gave one cry, like that of a man-eating tiger when robbed of its prey, and the heavy candlestick fell with a loud clatter on the floor. Then he turned like a fury on the Chief Commissary, who was standing by his desk, rubbing his hands complacently together, a smile of beatitude on his face.

"You oaf!" he cried out hoarsely. "You fool! You...you...!"

Words failed him. Lacaune's face was a picture of complete bewilderment, until Citizen Chauvelin finally almost spat out the words at him:

"This lout is not the Scarlet Pimpernel."

There followed a dead silence. The Commissary felt that his senses were reeling. He trembled as if suddenly stricken with ague and sank into a chair to save himself from falling. The candle sent a stream of wax on the carpet; Chauvelin stamped on it viciously with his foot.

"Not the Scarlet Pimpernel?" Lacaune contrived to murmur at last.

"Any idiot would have known that," the other retorted savagely.

"But...but," the Commissary stuttered, "the captain-"

"I don't know what lies the captain told you, but they were deliberate lies, and he and you and the whole pack of you will suffer for this blunder."

With that he strode out of the room, thrusting aside the obsequious clerk, whilst Citizen Lacaune, Chief Commissary of Choisy, remained sunk in his chair in a state of collapse.

When presently the messenger from Manderieu was ushered into his presence, he was not in a fit state to give instructions to anyone. What he needed was first a tonic for his shattered nerves and then guidance as to what in the world he was to do now to save his own neck. The clerk who had introduced the messenger casually mentioned the name of Pradel, whereupon the Chief Commissary contrived to pull himself somewhat together. Pradel! Yes, something might be done with regard to Pradel, now in durance at Manderieu, a man of distinction who was both noted and popular. If a charge of treason could be proved against him, and he was brought to justice, the credit of it would be ascribed to the zeal of the Chief Commissary, and it would effectively counterbalance such accusations as Citizen Chauvelin would in his wrath formulate

against all those connected with this unfortunate affair. The risk of rioting in the city, following an unpopular arrest, appeared as nothing compared with this new terrible eventuality.

Lacaune remembered the talk he had earlier in the day with Louis Maurin, the lawyer, and the Canadian farmer. The latter had certainly denounced Pradel as being in league with the Scarlet Pimpernel, and Maurin had confirmed the charge. With a little luck, then, all might yet be well. Chief Commissaries in outlying districts had before now received important promotion through indicting notable personages in their district and bringing them to justice. Then why not he? His first move, then, was to send Delorme's messenger back to Manderieu with written orders to send Dr. Pradel at once under escort to Choisy; he then gave instructions to his clerk to seek out first Citizen Maurin, the lawyer, and tell him that his presence at the Town Hall was urgently required, and then the Canadian farmer named Collin, who had sent in a request for a special travelling permit and would probably be waiting at the Café Tison till summoned to come and get them.

37 ACCUSING SPECTRES

It was close on midday before the rumour of the arrest of Dr. Pradel reached the ears of St. John Devinne. He had spent the morning in planning and making active preparations for his journey first to Paris and thence to England. Although he, like every member of the League, was well provided by his chief with papers requisite for travelling across France, he, Devinne, had never done that journey by himself, nor had he done it since France and England were actually in a state of war, when difficulties that usually confronted travellers of foreign nationality would be considerably increased. Against that he flattered himself that he had made friends with the Chief Commissary and the staff at the Town Hall, and that he could apply there for special permits and papers that would greatly facilitate his movements across country, and this he did. The clerk received him most affably, took his petition in to the Chief Commissary and came back with the reply from his chief that Citizen Collin's request would be complied with as soon as the papers could be got ready. But, as in all official matters in France these days, the getting the papers ready took a considerable amount of time. Devinne had no fixed abode in Choisy. He did not feel that he could go again to the derelict cottage, so full of memories, and was compelled in consequence to kill time as best he could in one of the smaller cafés of the town. And here it was that he first heard the rumour of the closing of the hospital at Manderieu and of the arrest of Dr. Pradel.

He heard it with unmixed satisfaction. Blakeney's plans, then, had been brought to naught. Pradel was not being conveyed to England in the company of Cécile de la Rodière, and the almighty Scarlet Pimpernel had failed in his purpose. Failed lamentably, despite his arrogance and belief in himself. Devinne could have stood up on a table and shouted for joy. As to what would be the ultimate fate of that upstart Pradel, he cared not one jot. Anyway, he would be parted

from Cécile for ever. Time after that did not seem to hang quite so heavily on the young traitor's hands. He went two or three times over to the Town Hall to see about his papers, but he was still put off with vague assurances that they were being got ready. All in good time.

Then, in the early part of the evening, he heard the great news, the wonderful, miraculous news which spread through the little city like wildfire. The English spy, the daring and mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, had been captured by Citizen Captain Cabel of the Gendarmerie Nationale, captured and brought to Choisy, wounded and bound with cords, and was even now in the Town Hall pending his incarceration in the Old Castle. It must be said with truth that Devinne did not receive this news with the same satisfaction as he had that of Pradel's arrest. Something stirred within the depths of his soul which he could not have defined. He certainly could not have shouted for joy. It was not joy that he felt. Not elation. Not triumph. Was it the first stirring of remorse or of shame? He, St. John Devinne, Earl Welhaven, son and heir of the Duke of Rudford, the greatest gentleman, the finest sportsman that ever sat a horse, had done a deed of darkness which for infamy had not had a parallel for close on two thousand years. And as he sat there in this squalid café, he fell to wondering whether if, amongst that rag-tag and bob-tail round him, there was one man base enough to have done what he did. He was before his eyes a vision of the friend he had betrayed, light-hearted, debonair, the perfect type of an English gentleman, now lying bound with cords at the mercy of a proletarian government that knew no compunction.

So insistent was the vision and so harrowing, that he felt he could bear it no longer. He tried to visualize Cécile, the woman for whose sake he had committed this vilest of crimes, but her picture evaded him, and when his mind's eye caught sight of her fleeting image, she was looking down on him with horror and contempt. There rose in him

the desire to obliterate these phantasma, to saturate his brain with a narcotic that would rid him of their obsession. He ordered eau de vie, and drank till he felt a warm glow coursing through his veins, and his sight became so blurred that he could no longer see those accusing spectres. Soon he felt hilarious. Avaunt ye ghosts! ye vengeful apparitions with your flaming swords! Come pride, come triumph! The arrogant school-master, the tyrannical dictator has been effectually downed. Let us laugh and sing and dance, enjoy every moment of life as this half-starved rabble was doing, pending the inevitable day when that all-embracing guillotine would hold them in her arms.

St. John Devinne was not quite sober, nor was he very drunk when a couple of hours later he became aware of a certain agitation among the customers of the café. Words which at first had no meaning for him were bandied to and fro. Men rose from the tables at which they had been sitting and joined others, and remained with them in compact groups talking in whispers, gesticulating, ejaculating: "Impossible!" or "Who told thee?" together with plenty of cursing and mutterings. Excitement became more intense when André the street-cleaner came running in, brandishing his broom and shouting: "It is true. True. The man they have got is not the English spy." And those last words: "not the English spy," were taken up by others, until the low-raftered room seemed to ring from corner to corner with them. Devinne sat up and pricked up his ears, demanding a glass of cold water and drank it down at a gulp. Yes! some one was just saying: "Where didst hear all this, André?"

And the street-cleaner explained with volubility: "I have it from the clerk of the Town Hall himself. He was talking to the citizen captain and telling him, as he valued his neck, to go into hiding somewhere, anywhere, at once, if he could. It seems that the Member of the Committee of Public Safety who was locked up in the cellar of La

Rodière has sworn that every man connected with the affair would be sent to the guillotine within twenty-four hours."

Devinne never could have said afterwards what exactly were his feelings when he heard this news. It must have been relief, of course, to a certain extent. His crime was none the less heinous, of course, but, at any rate, the spectral vision of his friend, Percy Blakeney, lying at the mercy of a crowd of savage brutes thirsting for his blood, would no longer haunt him. He rose, paid for his drinks and with somewhat uncertain steps made for the door and the open. Here he paused a moment, leaning against the wall. His temples were throbbing, and at the back of his mind there stirred the recollection of those papers and the travelling permit which were to be delivered to him at the Town Hall. As soon as the cold, frosty air had revived him, he made his way to the Commissariat, hoping to get speech with the Chief Commissary or, at any rate, with the clerk.

But to his chagrin he found the gates closed and sentinels posted to warn off all visitors. Impossible to gain access even to the courtyard. An amiable passer-by, noting his distress, volunteered the information that the Citizen Commissary had given orders that no one was to be admitted inside the Town Hall under any circumstances whatever.

"I suppose you have heard the news, citizen," the passer-by continued affably. "It will be a regular cataclysm for all the officials in Choisy when the Committee of Public Safety gets hold of the affair . . ."

But Devinne listened no further. He suddenly had the feeling as if a trap was closing in upon him. Not that he was actually frightened, for he had not yet realized that his position after this might become serious, but he did suddenly remember that when he had applied for the special travelling permit he had been made to deposit his

existing passport at the Commissariat, but he had done it under a promise from his friend the Chief Commissary that all his papers and the special permit would be delivered to him in due course. But there was the question now, would this friend be in a position to keep his word with this awful cataclysm hanging over his head.

Anyway, there was nothing that could be done to-night. It was close on nine o'clock, and the various cafés did not of a certainty offer any attraction, with their squalor, their abominable coffee and their jabbering crowds. But there was always the derelict cottage which, though not very attractive either, did, at any rate, offer shelter for the night, and Devinne turned his footsteps thither, hoping that he might get a few hours' sleep, free from the nightmare that had haunted him for the past four-and-twenty hours. The place looked very much the same as it had done when he left it in the morning, the candle and tinder were in their usual place, but as soon as he had struck a light he got the impression that some one had been in the place during the day—was it Blakeney, by any chance?—surely not, for he must be half-way to Trouville by now with the refugees. There had always been the possibility of the cottage being invaded by vagabonds or even by the police. Certain it was that some one had been here, for the pile of garments in the corner had been disturbed, and on looking round Devinne spied on the floor near the empty hearth, a bottle of wine, half empty, and beside it a mug with dregs in the bottom. The place as a night-shelter would obviously not be safe. Devinne blew out the candle and made his way out once more, and then turned his steps back in the direction of Choisy.

There was a fairly decent inn in the Rue Verte. Devinne secured a room there. He was quite thankful now that he had been obliged to seek night quarters elsewhere than in the cottage, for he was badly in need of what the derelict cottage could not offer him, namely, a good wash.

38 SISTER ANNE

And all this time the tumult in the neighboring little village of Manderieu had been growing in intensity, and Citizen Delorme, Commissary, was at his wits' end and in a state bordering on despair. Then suddenly, when the crowd was on the point of storming the Commissariat, "Sister Anne," in the form of one of the gendarmes whom Delorme had posted at the entrance to the village, came running in with the welcome news that Chief Commissary Lacaune had sent an escort round with written orders to convey Dr. Pradel immediately to Choisy. Even Bluebeard's wife could not have felt greater relief than did the harassed Commissary.

"Where," he asked, "is the escort now?"

"At the back, Citizen," came the quick answer. "Waiting at the gate."

"On horseback?"

"Yes, Citizen."

"How many men?"

"Only two, but they are stalwarts. The Chief Commissary sent word that they would be sufficient. They have a third horse on the lead."

"Quite right. Quite right. Let the prisoner be smuggled out very quietly by the back way-he'll make no trouble, I'll warrant-and let him be handed over to the Chief Commissary's men. After that, we shall have peace in Manderieu, please God-"

He checked himself abruptly. On the spur of the moment, much relieved at the conclusion of this tense situation, he had forgotten that the Government had decreed by law that God no longer existed.

Delorme, a loyal servant of the Republic, hoped that the gendarme had not heard his pious ejaculation.

Five minutes later, satisfied that his unwelcome guest had been duly handed over to the men from Choisy, and was well on the way to the city, he made up his mind to face the noisy crowd outside. No sooner he had commanded the door of the Commissariat to be opened than he was greeted with hoots and boos, and a first shower of loose stones, which, fortunately, failed to hit him. The gendarmes then charged into the crowd and thrust it back some way down the place, whilst Commissary Delorme's voice went ringing across the market-square.

"Citizens all," he bellowed at the top of his voice, "you are mistaken in thinking that Docteur Pradel is in my charge. By order of my superior he was conveyed to Choisy some time ago."

As was to be expected, this assertion was received with incredulity. There were more boos and hisses, and one stone flung by a practised hand hit and broke a window. The crowd then stormed the Commissariat, and made their way down to the lock-up, where they found the door wide open and the captive bird very obviously flown. They also wandered in and out of the offices and the private rooms of the Commissary, but, not finding the man they sought, they went away again in a subdued mood, some to their own homes in Manderieu, others to more distant Choisy. They all shook their heads thoughtfully when they went past the hospital and past the two sentinels at its gate.

It was some time later, when the small village had re-assumed its air of tranquility and one by one windows and shutters had been closed for the night, that the watchman asked leave to say a word to the Citizen Commissary. The clock in the market-place had not long before struck ten. The Commissary was in his nightshirt, about to get

into bed, but he ordered the watchman to come up.

"Well? What is it?"

"Only this, Citizen Commissary," the man said, and held up a grimy piece of paper.

"What's that?"

"I don't know, Citizen. A letter, I think. I was doing my round and had got as far as the cross-road, when a man of the Gendarmerie Nationale gave me the paper and said: 'Take this to the Citizen Commissary; he will reward you for your pains, and here is something for your trouble.' And he gave me a silver franc."

Delorme took the paper and turned it round and round between his fingers. There was something queer, almost eerie about this missive, sent at this hour of the night.

"How long ago was this?" he asked.

"About half an hour, I should say. I finished my round and then came on here. Is it all right, Citizen?"

"Yes," the Commissary replied curtly. "You may go."

Only when the watchman had gone did Delorme unroll the mysterious missive. It turned out to be nothing but a hoax. There were four lines of what looked like verse, but as these were written in a foreign language which he, Delorme, did not understand, the joke, if joke there was, failed to amuse him. The only thing that interested him was a rough device at the end, by way of a signature possibly. It represented a small five-petalled flower and had been limned in red chalk.

The worthy Commissary put the note on one side, thinking that, perhaps, on the morrow he might meet a learned man who was conversant with foreign tongues. He would show the funny message to him.

After that he got into bed, snuffed out the candle, and went peacefully to sleep.

39 THE CANADIAN

Chief Commissary Lacaune had spent a restless night. His mind was not altogether at ease when he thought over the happenings of the past eventful day. The tragic farce of the pseudo Scarlet Pimpernel, and his capture by that dolt Cabel, weighed heavily on his soul. As for the wrath of Citizen Chauvelin, whenever Lacaune thought of that a cold shiver would course down the length of his spine. Somehow he had a presentiment which drove away sleep from his weary lids. A prevision of worse calamities yet to come.

And whey they came, which they did early in the morning, they proved to be more dire than he had anticipated. No sooner had he settled down to work in his office than his clerk brought in the staggering news that the two men of the Gendarmerie Nationale whom he, Lacaune, had dispatched in the course of the evening to Manderieu in response to an urgent request from his subordinate, had been discovered half an hour ago, lying bound and gagged in a field a hundred or so metres from the roadside, half-way between Choisy and Manderieu. The third man, who belonged to the village gendarmerie and had been Delorme's messenger, was found a couple of hundred metres farther on in a field the opposite side of the road. He had started from Choisy a quarter of an hour before the other two. All three men, when freed from their bonds, told the same pitiable tale. They were attacked in the dark by what they supposed were common footpads, when there were no passers-by on the road. The rogues had suddenly jumped out from behind a clump of trees and were on them before they had a chance of defending themselves. Commissary Delorme's messenger had been quickly knocked out. He was alone. The other two vowed that they had put up a good fight, but the miscreants were armed with pistols, while they only had their cutlasses, which they never had a chance of drawing. They were dragged out of their saddles by a man who was a

veritable giant for strength, and knocked on the head so that they lost consciousness and remembered nothing more till they found themselves in the field, trussed like fowls and frozen stiff. Their horses were nowhere to be seen.

The three men were ushered into the presence of the Chief Commissary, but they could only reiterate their story. They supposed that robbery was the object of the attack, but none of them carried anything of value. One certainly had the written order of the Chief Commissary tucked in his belt, but that would be of no use to highway robbers; at any rate, it had disappeared, supposedly been lost in the scuffle.

At first the incident, grave as it seemed, could not be called staggering. Three valuable horses were lost, and there were two desperate footpads at large, but that was all. On the other hand Commissary Delorme over at Manderieu was doubtless fretting and fuming, waiting for the orders which had not come, and Chief Commissary Lacaune now set to at once to re-indite the order to his subordinate that the prisoner Pradel be at once sent under escort to Choisy. He had just finished writing this out when another messenger from Manderieu came riding in with the report from the Commissary of the happenings of the evening before. After a graphic account of the riots which had disturbed the peace of the little village and had only been quelled by his, Delorme's presence of mind and courage in facing the irate mob, the Commissary went onto say:

"You may imagine, Citizen, how thankful I was when your men arrived on the scene with your orders to deliver the prisoner to them. I am glad to be rid of him, as the people here would never have quietened down while they knew that Pradel was held in durance in the Commissariat. I presume you have him locked up in the Old Castle and can but hope that the citizens of Choisy will prove less

choleric over the incarceration of their favourite leech than the country-folk of Manderieu."

Chief Commissary Lacaune had to read these last lines over and over again before their full significance entered his brain. When it did he was on the verge of an attack of apoplexy. What in the devil's name did it all mean, and where in h--was Pradel? The escort whom he, Lacaune, had sent to fetch him, had been put out of action before they ever got to Manderieu. Then what happened? Where did it happen? and what had become of Simon Pradel? Ah! if he ever put hands on that stormy petrel again, the guillotine would not be robbed of its prey. But in the meanwhile, what was to be done? He sent a mounted carrier in haste to Manderieu to ask for fuller details. The courier returned in less than half an hour with a further report from the Commissary, stating that the prisoner, Dr. Simon Pradel, was duly handed over to the two men of the Gendarmerie Nationale on a written order from the Chief Commissary himself. To prove his assertion, Citizen Delorme enclosed the order which one of the soldiers had handed over to him. Moreover, he respectfully would ask his chief why his own messenger had been detained in Choisy; he wanted all his men in Manderieu, as the temper of the village folk was far from reassuring.

This second report, on the face of it, only made matters worse. Chief Commissary Lacaune thought that both he and his subordinate were going mad. Who were the two men of the Gendarmerie Nationale who had come to fetch away the prisoner? How did the written order come into their hands? What had they done with Pradel once they had got him? Was he, Lacaune, awake or dreaming?

Luckily for him, his friend Louis Maurin presented himself just then. At any rate, here was a sane man with whom one could talk things over fearlessly. But the lawyer was in an unhelpful mood. He

appeared entirely indifferent as to the whereabouts of Simon Pradel.

"My good friend," he said with a shrug, "your stormy petrel, as you rightly call him, is on his way to England by now, you may be sure, and a good thing too. Let him be, I say. Once he is in the land of fogs and savages, he can do no more mischief. If you start running after him you will only get yourself into more trouble...like you did yesterday. Let him be."

"But why should you say that he is on his way to England?"

"I am sure he is."

"But two of my men fetched him away from Manderieu."

"They were not your men at all."

"Who were they?"

"The English spies."

"You don't mean-?"

"The Scarlet Pimpernel whom that fool Cabel failed to lay by the heels, and who has tricked you, my friend, as he has tricked our police and our spies all over the country for nigh on two years. Yes! that's the man I mean, and if I were you I would make the best of what has happened and leave others to fish in those turbid waters."

At mention of the Scarlet Pimpernel, Chief Commissary Lacaune felt thoroughly uncomfortable. Since the establishment of a free-thinking and enlightened government, one had to be rational, what? Had to be a man and not a weakling with mind full of superstitious nonsense such as the calotins used to put into one in the past days. But nom de nom! there was something unpleasantly mysterious

about this elusive English spy. Here one day, across country the next. A regular will-o'-the-wisp. He slipped through one's fingers when one thought one had him and trouble awaited any man who ever came across him. Lacaune drew a deep sigh.

"You may be right, my friend," he said, "but it goes against the grain and against my duty to let things be. I have always been a faithful servant of the Republic, and I will not rest till I get to the bottom of this extraordinary occurrence. I am already in bad odour with the Committee of Public Safety over that unfortunate affair yesterday, and I feel that nothing but zeal will save me from disaster."

"Well, you will act as you think best," the lawyer said, and rose to take his leave, "but, believe me—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the clerk who handed him a letter which had just come from the Committee of Public Safety, sitting in special session at Sceaux, the capital of the department. He asked at the same time if the Citizen Commissary would receive Citizen Collin, who had come to inquire about his papers.

"Collin? Collin?" the jaded Commissary exclaimed, and fingered with obvious apprehension the letter from the Committee of Public Safety. Did it contain good or bad news for him? A threat? A warning? Or what? To the clerk he said: "Tell Citizen Collin to wait." And when the clerk had gone he turned to his friend.

"It was that Canadian, or whatever he is, who led me into sending Cabel after that cursed English spy. I believe that it was all a conspiracy to lead me off the scent, and that this man Collin is the prime mover in it all. But I'll have him under lock and key at once. I'll send him to join that ruffian who impersonated the Scarlet Pimpernel and led us all by the nose."

After which piece of oratory, delivered with all the spite which he felt against everything and everybody, he at last made up his mind to read the letter which had been sent to him from Sceaux. First he looked at the superscription. The letter was signed "Armand Chauvelin, Member of the Committee of Public Safety," and its contents were the following:

"Citizen Commissary.

"We, the Committee of Public Safety, sitting in extraordinary session at Sceaux, desire you to send over to us for special enquiry the man who impersonated the English spy and was brought a prisoner to you in the course of yesterday. Our sittings are held in the Mairie. If you have any other prisoner or suspect of note in your district, send him also. The bearer of this note is in our employ. He knows just what to do. Your responsibility ceases with the handing over of the prisoner or prisoners to him."

Lacaune held the missive out to his friend, the lawyer. His hand was shaking with excitement. His face was beaming both with joy and with triumph. There was not a word of threat or warning in the letter. It was quite simple, official, almost friendly; it showed, in fact, that he had not forfeited the confidence of his superiors since it left it to his direction to send along "any other prisoner or suspect in his district." Here was relief indeed after the torturing fears of the past twelve hours.

"My friend! my friend!" he cried, and rubbed his hands gleefully together. "I feel a new man for all is well."

He took pen and paper and wrote a few words rapidly.

"What are you going to do?" Maurin asked.

"Send that damned Canadian too before the Committee of Public Safety for special inquiry."

He tinkled his bell, and on the entrance of the clerk, handed him the paper he had just written.

"Here," he said, "is an order for the arrest of the man, Collin. See it carried out, then send the messenger from Sceaux in to me."

The lawyer now finally took his leave. The matter of the Canadian and the pseudo Scarlet Pimpernel did not interest him in the least. With Pradel out of the way he cared about nothing else. Left to himself, Commissary Lacaune strode up and down the room, unable for sheer excitement to sit still. At one moment he pricked up his ears when he heard a tumult and some shouting outside his door. "The Canadian is giving trouble," he muttered complacently to himself.

Presently the messenger was ushered in. He was a sober, fine-looking official dressed in dark clothes. He wore a hat of the new sugar-loaf shape which he took off when he entered. He also turned back the lapel of his coat to show the badge which he wore indicative of his status as representative or employee of the government. Lacaune addressed him curtly:

"Who gave you this letter?"

"Citizen Chauvelin."

"You know its contents."

"Yes, Citizen."

"Your orders are to convey a certain prisoner to Sceaux."

"That is so."

"Are you riding or driving?"

"Driving, Citizen Commissary. I have requisitioned a cart with a hood and a couple of good horses from a guard just outside this city. Citizen Chauvelin said he did not wish the prisoner to be seen."

"A very wise precaution. Now listen. One prisoner will be handed over to you here. Keep a special eye on him, he is dangerous. There is another whom you will go and fetch at the Old Castle. One of my men will accompany you as far as there with an order from me that the prisoner be delivered over to you."

"I understand, Citizen."

"Would you like an escort as far as Sceaux?"

"Not unless you desire to send one, Citizen Commissary. But it is not necessary. I am well armed and so is the driver."

"Very good, then. You can go."

The man saluted, turned on his heel and went out. The Commissary wrote out the order to be taken to the Old Castle, gave it to his clerk and then went to the window from which he had a view of the street. He saw a cart with hood up, standing outside the gates. A pair of horses were harnessed to the cart, they looked strong and fresh. After a moment or two he saw the Canadian being brought across the courtyard by two soldiers. He was in chains, wrist to ankle both sides of him, and was apparently only just able to walk. Obviously he had given trouble. His clothes were torn, his hair dishevelled, and his knuckles stained with blood. The soldiers did not deal any too gently with him, and bundled him like a bale of goods into the cart. The government representative watched the proceedings with an official

eye. When he had satisfied himself that the prisoner was safely out of mischief, he beckoned to one of the soldiers to sit on the tailboard of the cart while he himself took his seat beside the driver. The latter flicked his whip and away they went down the Rue Haute.

Chief Commissary Lacaune watched all these doings with utmost satisfaction. He strode back to his desk, turned a few papers over, but he felt too excited to settle down to business. He thought a glass of wine would do him good; he picked up his hat and coat and went out, telling his clerk that he would be back in an hour.

He didn't go straight to Tyson's for his glass of wine, being tempted to stroll down as far as the Old Castle and see that miserable ruffian who had hood-winked him take his place, also in chains, by the side of that cursed Canadian. He was just in time to see this pleasing spectacle; there is always something very soothing to the nerves to witness the discomfiture of one's enemies. Citizen Lacaune exchanged a few affable words with the government official, gave orders that the two prisoners be chained one to the other for additional safety, and when this was done, he went with a light, springy step to enjoy a quiet half-hour with a glass of wine at the Café Tison.

40 REMORSE

Under the hood of the cart, St. John Devinne gradually came to the consciousness that this was in very truth the end of his inglorious life. Shame and remorse both held him in their grip, and not only because he had staked his honour on a despicable gamble and lost, but also because he had at last realized the utter baseness of what he had done. Visions of happy days under the leadership of a man who was the bravest of the brave, who sacrificed his comfort, his happiness, even his love, in order to succour the helpless and the innocent, to follow whom was in itself a glory, tortured him with the knowledge that they could never come again. They were past for ever because of his own black treachery and there was nothing now ahead of him save darkness, and in the end a shameful death.

It was not of death itself that he was afraid, but of the awful, awful shame of it all, and of this racking remorse which might unnerve him when the end came. That Chief Commissary had played him false, trapped him like a noxious feline, and here he was now lying like a captive beast driven to the slaughter-house, chained to a malodorous mudlark- he, St. John Devinne, Earl Welhaven, son and heir of the Duke of Rudford! Oh, the shame, the shame of it all! He ached in every limb, his ankles and wrists were bleeding under the weight of the irons. The close proximity of his grimy companion made him feel sick. The cold was intense. Devinne trembled under a thick cloak that had been thrown over him at one time, he did not recollect when. The day wore on with agonizing slowness. At first Devinne had wondered whither he was being driven, but soon he knew that he really didn't care. The ultimate end of his journey would anyhow be the guillotine, so what did the halts on the way matter? There were one or two halts, probably in order to give the horses a drink and a rest. Several villages were passed on the way, and at one time the cart rattled over what obviously was a cobbled street, at the end of which the driver

pulled up. There was a good deal of talking and shouting. Apparently fresh horses were being put to. Presently Devinne heard subdued voices quite close to him in a rapid colloquy:

"You know the way, Citizen?"

"Quite well. I thank you."

"You will find good accommodation there for the night. Tell landlord Freson I sent you. Henri Gros, that's my name. He will do the best for you."

"And what do I owe you, Citizen Gros?"

"Twenty gold louis, Citizen. That will be for the two horses and the cart. And if you ever bring them back this way and the horses are in good condition, I will buy the lot back from you."

There followed obsequious thanks, from which Devinne gathered that the bargain had been concluded. Vaguely he wondered why it had been made. A change of driver apparently as well as of horses, but what did it all matter to him? Somewhere in the town a clock struck three. The shades of evening were beginning to draw in and through a chink in the hood Devinne saw that snow was falling.

After many hearty "Good-byes" and "Bon voyages" a fresh start was made. Soon the road became very rough and the jostling of the cart added greatly to Devinne's discomfort. He felt terribly tired and drowsy, but too ill to get any sleep. Everything around him now seemed to be very still; the only sounds that reached his ears were the clap- clap of the horse's hoofs over the snow-covered road and the stertorous breathing of his fellow-captive. Weary almost to death, Devinne fell into a trance-like somnolence. What roused him was the presence of someone bending over him and the sound of the grating

of a steel file near his ankle. The cart was at a standstill and it was getting dark; only the feeble glow of a small storm-lantern threw a narrow circle of light round where his foot was. The pain of it was almost intolerable, even when after a few minutes he felt those heavy irons lifted away from his ankle. Through half-closed eyes he saw a dark form bending to the task. As soon as his ankles were free, dexterous fingers, armed with the file, started working on the irons on his wrists.

Devinne thought that he was either delirious or dreaming. A sense of well-being spread right through him when those horrible irons were removed, and presently an arm was passed under his shoulders and the neck of a bottle was pushed into his mouth. He took a great gulp, a fiery liquid flowed down his throat, he coughed and spluttered and then fell back in a real state of unconsciousness.

Again he woke, this time feeling a different man. His ankles and wrists were free and he was not nearly so cold. He sat up and looked about him. The vehicle was still at a dead stop, and the night was fast drawing in. All that Devinne could perceive through the gloom was the body of his fellow-captive being lifted out of the cart by a pair of powerful arms; the head was just vanishing beyond the tail-board. Then he heard footsteps, heavy measured footsteps receding into the distance. For a long time he was alone in the semi-darkness, sitting up with his legs drawn up and his arms encircling his knees. He wanted to think, but couldn't. His mind was at a standstill, as it is in a dream.

All was silence around him, save for those footsteps treading the snow-covered earth, receding at first, then a pause while he heard nothing at all, and then the same footsteps returning. His heart was beating furiously. He tried to call out, but the one word which he longed to utter was smothered in his throat. It was the name of the

friend whom he had betrayed and who had risked his life to save him. He could vaguely discern through the gloom the familiar tall form mounting the driver's seat and picking of the reins, and after that just the broad back, a solid mass hardly distinguishable now. He had never felt quite so alone in his life, not even during that night in the derelict cottage when he had planned his abominable treachery. He had the company of his thoughts then, black, ugly thoughts and torturing visions of past joys and future ignominious triumphs. Now he had nothing, just that indistinct shadow in front of him which seemed to be fading, fading into the gloom like his hopes, like his honour and his joy of life.

There was still a faint pale light in the sky when the cart turned abruptly to the left and then went plodding over very rough ground. Devinne crept on hands and knees to the tail-board, and squatting on his heels, he peeped out under the hood. Even in the gathering darkness the place looked familiar. Away on his right he could see the dim lights of what appeared to be a small city, but the cart was driven round it, always over very rough ground, gradually leaving those city lights behind. And suddenly Devinne realized where he was. The small city was Le Perrey, and he was being driven to the lonely house which was the headquarters of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

The cart drew up, and he heard a distant shout: "Hallo!" immediately followed by an eager question: "All well?" It was the voice of David Holte, familiarly known as Froggie. He was over at the house and came running along, swinging a lantern.

Whereupon there came the answer in a voice which Devinne thought he would never hear again.

"All well!"

The next moment he saw Blakeney through the gloom standing by the side of the car.

"Can you get down?" he asked, "or shall I give you a hand?"

Devinne was still squatting on his heels, but he couldn't move. Not at first. His eyes, peered through the darkness, trying to say Blakeney's face.

"Percy..." he murmured, but could say no more, for an aching sob had risen to his throat.

"Easy, lad," Blakeney responded; "pull yourself together. Froggie knows nothing."

Froggie was within earshot now. He began to talk. Devinne did not at once catch what he said, for all his senses were numb. But he did make an effort to drag himself out of the cart.

Holte greeted him with an exuberant: "Hello, Johnnie!" and Blakeney said: "Devinne is a bit stiff; he was badly knocked about at Choisy."

Whereupon Holte took Devinne by the arm and turned with him towards the house.

"Are you staying the night?" he asked of the chief.

"Yes. We can't make much headway this weather. The snow may give over after midnight and the moon may come out. If she does not, we'll start in the early dawn. Get along, Froggie," he went on; "I'll see to the horses. I suppose you've got something for us to eat."

"Yes," the other called out over his shoulder. "Stale bread and a piece of pig's meat, and I can hot up some sour wine for you. I've been to market this morning."

Blakeney took the horses round to the back while Holte guided Devinne's footsteps up to the house. He was one of those men who couldn't stop talking, and immediately he began: "You know, of course," and "Blakeney told you, I suppose." This, that and the other. Devinne, who knew nothing, only listened with half an ear. Presently he found himself sitting in front of a wood fire with Holte still talking volubly.

And then Blakeney came in. He asked:

"At what time did Ffoulkes and Pradel come through?"

"In the early morning, I couldn't say exactly when. My watch has stopped, curse it!"

"They had no adventures?"

"None. I soon had the fresh horses ready for them, you know, the ones from the coach, and off they went again. I made Ffoulkes tell me how you got the Frenchman away. He seemed a nice fellow, I thought. Very quiet. But, begad! according to Ffoulkes, the way you engineered that affair was-

"Perfectly simple," Blakeney broke in quickly. "You are a good fellow, Froggie, but you talk too much. Suppose you get us something to eat. Devinne is famished and so am I."

"All right! All right!" Holte retorted good-humouredly and turned to go. But at the door he halted.

"I'll tell you all about it, Johnnie," he said, "just as I had it from Ffoulkes. I tell you it was nothing short of-

He was interrupted by his own hat being hurled at his head, and his chief's voice saying peremptorily:

"And if you don't go and get that luxurious supper, I'll put you in irons for insubordination."

Holte went and the two men were alone. He who had done to his friend the greatest possible injury any man could do to another, was now face to face with the chief whom he had betrayed. Blakeney went over to the window and gazed out into the darkness and the thickly falling snow. Devinne rose and went across the room. He put out his hand. Tentatively. It was moist and shaking. He took Percy's hand which was hanging by his side, that slender hand which had so often grasped his in friendship, and with a heart-rending sob laid his hot forehead against it.

"Percy!" he murmured, "for God's sake, say something."

"What shall I say, dear lad?" Blakeney responded, and gently disengaged his hand. "That I could not bear to see an English gentleman, the son of my old friend, thrown to those hyenas."

"How you must despise me!"

"I despise no one, Johnnie. I have seen too much of sorrow, misguided enthusiasm, even of crime, not to understand many, many things I had not even dreamed of before."

"Crime? There is no worse crime in the world than mine."

"And no worse punishment, lad, than what you will endure."

"God, yes!" Devinne said fervently. "Then why did you risk your precious life to save my miserable one?"

Blakeney broke into his infectious laugh.

"Why? Why? I don't know, Johnnie. Ask Ffoulkes-he will give you a sentimental reason. Ask Tony and he will say it is for the love of sport, and I am not sure that good old Tony wouldn't be right after all. Thanks to you, lad, I have had one of the most exhilarating runs across country I have ever had in my life."

Devinne sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

"How they will all loathe the sight of me," he murmured.

"Well, you will have to put up with that, my good fellow, and with other things as well. Anyway, your father knows nothing and never will. After that...Well! England is at war with France, so you will know what to do."

"Percy...I..."

"Easy now. Here's Holte coming with his banquet."

And the three of them sat down to a sumptuous meal of pig's meat and stale bread and drank hot wine, which put warmth into them. Blakeney was at his merriest.

"You should have seen," he said to Holte, "that miserable catiff who, much against his will, impersonated the Scarlet Pimpernel. The one thing I shall regret to my dying day is that I was not present when my dear Monsieur Chambertin first gazed on his beautiful countenance and saw that it was not that of his friend, Sir Percy Blakeney."

Holte did a great deal of talking, and asked numberless questions, but Devinne, with aching soul and aching body, soon made his way to one of the other rooms in the house where there was a truckle bed on

which he had slept more than once in the happy olden days.

He sat down on the edge of it, and burying his head in his hands, he sobbed like a child.

41 EPILOGUE

Often, after the curtain has been rung down on the last act of a play, comedy or drama, one would wish to peep through and see what is going on on the darkened stage. A moment ago it was full of light, of animation, of that tense atmosphere which pervades the closing scene of a moving story, and now there are only the scene-shifters moving about like ghosts through the dimmed light, the stage-manager talking to the carpenter or the electricians, the minor rôles still chattering in the wings, or the principals hurrying to their dressing-rooms.

In the same way it seems to me that one would wish to see just once more those actors who each in their individual way have played their part in that strange drama which had for its chief characters a young traitor and a light-hearted adventurer, reckless of his life, a true sportsman who in a spirit of sublime devilry achieved one of the noblest exploits it has ever been the good fortune of an historian to relate.

Thus it is possible to have a peep at the minor rôles, to see Monsieur le Docteur Pradel and Cécile, his pretty young wife, in their humble home in the village of Kensington. They are supremely happy, but are as poor as the proverbial church mice, as poor as all those unfortunate French men and women whom a lucky chance has enabled to find a refuge in hospitable England—chance or the devotion of a man whose real identity they will never discover. Sometimes one among them who is over-sensitive, perhaps, will feel a thrill when meeting a pair of lazy, good-natured blue eyes, the true expression of which is veiled behind heavy lids. Such a one is Cécile Pradel who, when she meets those eyes, or hears the timbre of a quaint rather inane laugh, will suddenly recall a day of torment in the old château of La Rodière, a dance, the music of the rigaudon, a

fiddler with grimy face and ringing voice and strange compelling eyes. The same voice? The same eyes? No! no! it couldn't be! And she would look up almost with apology for those foolish thoughts on the magnificent figure of Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., the friend of the Prince of Wales, the most exquisite dandy that ever graced a ballroom, the most inane fop that ever caused society to laugh.

And she would see the greatest ladies in the land crowd round him, smirk and flirt their fans, entreating him to repeat the silly doggerel which he vowed had come to him as an inspiration while tying his cravat:

"We seek him here, we seek him there.

Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.

Is he in heaven! Is he in h-ll?

That demmed elusive Pimpernel."

He would recite this for the entertainment of his admirers with many airs and graces which of a certainty could only belong to a man who had no thought save of vanity and pleasure.

More often than not the talk in ballrooms would be of the Scarlet Pimpernel and his exploits, and Sir Percy Blakeney, who usually was half asleep in a chair whenever the subject cropped up, was dragged out of his slumbers by the ladies and asked with many a jest what he thought of the national hero. Whereupon he would endeavour to be polite and to smother a yawn, whilst he gave reply:

"Excuse me, ladies, but on my honour I would prefer not to think of that demmed fellow."

And he would turn to a group of friends and call to them:

"Come Froggie, Ffoulkes, you too, Tony, a manly game of hazard, what? while the ladies sit around and worship a cursed shadow."

No, no, a thousand times no! this empty-headed dandy, this fool, this sybarite, could never have been the grimy out-at-elbows fiddler who slung a man over his shoulder as if he were a bundle of shavings, or the sergeant who carried maman in his arms over rough ground from the coach to the lonely house by the roadside. But the next moment, as Sir Percy Blakeney strode out of the room, Cécile would catch a quick glance which flew to him from the deep violet eyes of Lady Blakeney, his exquisite wife, and another which that perfect grand dame exchanged with His Royal Highness, and Cécile Pradel, who owed her life to the Scarlet Pimpernel, was left wondering. Wondering!

Still peeping through the curtain which has fallen on the last act of the drama one likes to see little Blanche Levet as a young matron now, married to a well-to-do and kindly fellow who stands well with the authorities that are in power after the terrible days of the Terror and the fall of Robespierre. There are times when memories and regrets become over-poignant, and she sheds tears over the bundle of tiny garments which she has fashioned in view of a happy eventuality, just as there are times when Dr. Pradel would gladly exchange the life of peace in England for one of activity in Choisy and in his beloved hospital in Manderieu. But with him regrets soon vanish, whereas with Blanche they will always abide.

And one last peep at St. John Devinne, home on leave after the English victory over the French at Valenciennes, and kneeling by the death-bed of his father. Percy Blakeney stands beside him. Some of the last words the old man spoke were:

"Percy, you will look after the boy, won't you? He is headstrong, but his heart is in the right place, and, thank God! his honour is intact."

THE END

Mam'zelle Guillotine

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Book One

Chapter I: THE DAWN OF REVOLUTION

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Chapter I: 1789: THE DAWN OF

REVOLUTION

"Arms! Arms! Give us arms!"

France to-day is desperate. Her people are starving. Women and children cry for bread; famine, injustice and oppression have made slaves of the men. But the time has come at last when the cry for freedom and for justice has drowned the wails of hungry children. It is Sunday the twelfth of July. Camille Desmoulins the fiery young demagogue is here, standing on a table in the Palais Royal, a pistol in each hand, with a herd of gaunt and hollow-eyed men around him.

"Friends," he demands vehemently, "shall our children die like sheep? Shall we continue to plead for ears that will not hear and appeal to hearts that are made of stone? Shall we labour to feed the welled-filled and see our wives and daughters starve? Frenchmen! The hour has come: the hour of our deliverance. To arms, friends! to arms! Let our oppressors look to themselves. Let them come to grips with us, the oppressed, and see if brutal force can conquer justice."

With burning hearts and quivering lips they listened to him for a while, some in silence, others muttering incoherent words. But soon they took up the echo of the impassioned call: "To arms!" and in a few moments what had been a tentative murmur became a delirious shout: "To arms! To arms!" Throughout the long afternoon, until dusk and nightfall, and thereafter the call to arms like the roar of ocean waves breaking on a rocky shore resounded from one end of Paris to the other. And all night long men in threadbare suits and wooden shoes roamed about the streets, gesticulating, forming groups, talking, arguing, shouting. Shouting always their rallying cry: "To arms!"

By dawn the next day the herd of gaunt, hollowed-eyed men has

become a raging multitude. The call for arms has become a vociferous demand: "Give us arms!" Right to-day must be at grips with might. The oppressed shall rise against the oppressor. But the oppressed must have arms wherewith to smite the tyrant, the extortioner, the relentless task-master of the poor. And so they march, these hungry, wan-faced men, at first in their hundreds but soon in their thousands. They march to the Town Hall demanding arms.

"Arms! Arms! Give us arms!"

It is Monday morning but all the shops are shut: neither cobblers, nor weavers, barbers nor venders of miscellaneous goods have taken down their shutters. Labourers and scavengers are idle, for every worker to-day has become a fighter. Alone the bakers and the vinters ply their trade, for fighting men must eat and drink. And the smiths are set to work to forge pikes as fast as they can, and the women up in their attics to sew cockades. Red and blue which are the municipal colours are tacked on to the constitutional white, thus making of the Tricolour the badge of France in revolt.

The rest of Paris continues to roam the streets demanding arms: first at the Hôtel de Ville, the Town Hall where provost and aldermen are forced to admit they have no arms: not in any quantity, only a few antiquated firelocks, which are immediately seized upon. Then they go, those hungry thousands, to the Arsenal, where they only find rubbish and bits of rusty iron which they hurl into the streets, often wounding others who had remained, expectant, outside. Next to the King's warehouse where there are plenty of gewgaws, tapestries, pictures, a gilded sword or two and suits of antiquated armour, also the cannon, silver mounted and coated with grime, which a grateful King of Siam once sent as a present to Louis XIV, but nothing useful, nothing serviceable.

No matter! A Siamese cannon is better than none. It is trundled along the streets of Paris to the Debtors' prison, to the Chatelet, to the House of Correction where prisoners are liberated and made to swell the throng.

News of all this tumult soon wakens the complacent and the luxurious from their slumbers. They tumble out of bed wanting to know what "those brigands" were up to. The "brigands" it seems were in possession of the barriers, had seized the carts which conveyed food into the city for the rich. They were marching through Paris, yelling, and roaring, wearing strange cockades. The tocsin was pealing from every church steeple. Every smith in the town was forging pikes; fifty thousand it was asserted had been forged in twenty-four hours, and still the "brigands" demanded more.

So what were the complacent and the luxurious to do but make haste to depart from this Paris with its strange cockades and its unseemly tumult? There were some quick packings-up and calls for coaches, tumbrils, anything whereon to pile up furniture, silver and provisions and hurry to the nearest barrier. But already Paris in revolt had posted its scrubby hordes at all the gates, with orders to stop every vehicle from going through and to drag every person who attempted to leave the city, willy-nilly to the Town Hall.

And the complacent and the luxurious, driven back into Paris which they wished to quit, desire to know what the commandant of the city, M. le baron Pierre Victor de Besenval is doing about it. They demand to know what is being done for their safety. Well! M. de Besenval has sent courier after courier to Versailles asking for orders, or at least for guidance. But all that he gets in reply to his most urgent messages are a few vague words from His Majesty saying that he has called a Council of his Ministers who will decide what is to be done, and in the meanwhile let M. le baron do his duty as beseems

an officer loyal to his King.

Besenal in his turn calls a Council of his Officers. His troops are deserting in their hundreds, taking their arms with them. Two of his Colonels declare that their men will not fight. Later in the afternoon three thousand six hundred Gardes Françaises ordered to march against the insurgents go over to them in a body with their guns and their gunners, their arms and accoutrements. Gardes Françaises no longer, they are re-named Gardes Nationales, and enrolled in the fastgrowing Paris Militia, which is like to number forty-eight thousand soon, and by to-morrow nearer one hundred thousand.

If only it had arms, the Paris Militia would be unconquerable.

And now it is Tuesday, the fourteenth of July, a date destined to remain for all time the most momentous in the annals of France, a date on which century-old institutions shall totter and fall, not only in France, but in the course of time, throughout the civilized world, and archaic systems shall perish that have taken root and gathered power since might became right in the days of cave-dwelling man.

Still no definite orders from Versailles. The Council of Ministers continues to deliberate. Hoary-headed Senators decide to sit in unbroken session, while Commandant Besenal in Paris does his duty as a soldier loyal to his King. But what can Besenal do, even though he be a soldier and loyal to his King? He may be loyal but the men are not. Their Colonels declare that the troops will not fight. Who then can stem that army of National Volunteers, now grown to a hundred and fifty thousand, as they march with their rallying cry "To arms!" and roll like a flood to the Hôtel des Invalides?

"There are arms there. Why had we not thought of that before?"

On they roll, scale the containing wall and demand entrance. The

Invalides, old soldiers, veterans of the Seven Years' War stand by; the gates are opened, the Garde Nationale march in, but the veterans still stand by without firing a shot. Their Commandant tries to parley with the insurgents, but they push past him and his bodyguards; they swarm all over the building rummaging through every room and every closet from attic to cellar. And in the cellar the arms are found. Thousands of firelocks soon find their way on the shoulders of the National Guard. What indeed can Commandant Besenval do, even though he be a soldier and loyal to his King?

Chapter II: PARIS IN REVOLT

And now to the Bastille, to that monument of arrogance and power, with its drawbridges, its bastions and eight grim towers, which has reared its massive pile of masonry above the "swinish multitude" for over four hundred years. Tyranny frowning down on Impotence. Power holding the weak in bondage. Here it stands on this fourteenth day of July, bloated with pride and, conscious of its impregnability, it seems to mock that chaotic horde which invades its purlieus, swarms round its ditches and its walls, and with a roaring like that of a tempestuous sea, raises the defiant cry: "Surrender!"

A tumult such as Dante in his visions of hell never dreamed of, rises from one hundred and fifty thousand throats. Floods of humanity come pouring into the Place from the outlying suburbs. Paris in revolt has arms now: One hundred thousand muskets, fifty thousand pikes: one hundred and fifty thousand hungry, frenzied men. No longer do these call out with the fury of despair: "Arms! Give us arms!" Rather do they shout: "We'll not yield while stone remains on stone of that cursed fortress."

And the walls of the Bastille are nine feet thick.

Can they be as much as shaken, even by a hurricane of grapeshot and the roaring of a Siamese cannon? Commandant de Launay laughs the very suggestion to scorn. He has less than a hundred and twenty men to defend what is impregnable. Eighty or so veterans, old soldiers who fought in the Seven Years' War, and not more than thirty young Swiss. He has cannons concealed up on the battlements, and piles of missiles and ammunition. Very few victuals, it is true, but that is no matter. As soon as he opens fire on that undisciplined mob, it will scatter as autumn leaves scatter in the wind. And "No Surrender!" has already been his answer to a deputation which came to him from

the Town Hall in the early morning, suggesting parley with the men of the National Guard, the disciplined leaders of this riotous mob.

"No surrender!" he reiterates with emphasis; "rather will I hurl myself down from these battlements into the ditch three feet below, or blow up the fortress sky-high and half Paris along with it."

And to show that he will be as good as his word, he takes up a taper and stands for a time within arm's length of the powder magazine. Only for a time, for poor old de Launay never did do what he said he would. All he did just then was to survey the tumultuous crowd below. They have begun the attack. Paris in revolt opens fire on the "accursed stronghold" with volley after volley of musket-fire from every corner of the Place and from every surrounding window. De Launay thrusts the taper away, and turns to his small garrison of veterans and young Swiss. Will they fire on the mob if he gives the order? He has plied them with drink, but feels doubtful of their temper. Anyway, the volley of musket-fire cannot damage walls that are nine feet thick. "We'll wait and see what happens," thinks Commandant de Launay, but he does not rekindle the taper.

Just then a couple of stalwarts down below start an attack on the outer drawbridge. De Launay knows them both for old soldiers, one is a smith, the other a wheelright, both of them resolute and strong as Hercules. They climb on the roof of the guard-room and with heavy axes strike against the chains of the drawbridge, heedless of the rain of grapeshot around them. They strike and strike again, with such force and such persistence that the chain must presently break, seeing which de Launay turns to his veterans and orders fire. The cannon gives one roar from the battlements, and does mighty damage down below. Paris in revolt has shed its first blood and reaches the acme of its frenzy.

The chains of the outer drawbridge yield and break and down

comes the bridge with a terrific clatter. This first tangible sign of victory is greeted with a delirious shout, and an umber of insurgents headed by men of the National Guard swarm over the drawbridge and into the outer court. Here they are met by Thuriot, second in command, with a small bodygaurd. He tries to parley with them. No use of course. Paris now is no longer in revolt. It is in revolution.

The insurgents hustle and bustle Thuriot and his bodyguard out of the way. They surge all over the outer court, up to the ditch and the inner drawbridge. De Launay up on the battlements can only guess what is happening down there. His veterans and young Swiss stand by. Shall they fire, or wait till fired on? Indecision is clearly written on their faces. De Launay picks up a taper again, takes up his position once more within arm's length of the powder magazine. Will he, after all, be as good as his word and along with the impregnable stronghold blow half Paris up sky-high? He might have done it. He said he would rather than surrender, but he doesn't do it. Why not? Who shall say? Was it destiny that stayed his arm? destiny which no doubt aeons ago had decreed the downfall of this monument of autocratic sovereignty on his fourteenth day of July, 1789.

All that de Launay does is to order the veterans to fire once more, and the cannons scatter death and mutilation among the aggressors, whilst all kinds of missiles, pavingstones, old iron, granite blocks are hurled down into the ditch, till it too is littered with dead and dying. The wounded in the Place are carried to safety into adjoining streets, but so much blood has let a veritable Bedlam loose. A cartload of straw is trundled over the outer drawbridge into the court. Fire! Conflagration! Paris in revolution had not thought before of this way of subduing that "cursed fortress", but now fire! Fire everywhere! The Bastille has not surrendered yet.

Soon the guard-room is set ablaze, and the veterans' mess-room.

The fire spreads to one of the inner courts. De Launay still hovers on the battlements, still declares that he will blow up half Paris rather than surrender his fortress. But he doesn't do it, and a hundred feet below the conflagration is threatening his last entrenchments. The flames lick upwards ready to do the work which old de Launay had sworn that he would do.

Inside the dungeons of the Bastille the prisoners, lifewearied and indifferent, dream that a series of earthquakes are shaking Paris, But what do they care? If these walls nine feet thick should totter and fall and bury them under their ruins, it would only mean for them the happy release of death. For hours has this hellish din been going on. In the inner courtyard the big clock continues to tick on; the seconds, the minutes, the hours go by: five hours, perhaps six, and still the Bastille stands.

Up on the battlements the garrison is getting weary. The veterans have been prone on the ground for over four hours making the cannons roar, but now they are tired. They struggle to their feet and stand sullen, with reversed muskets, whilst an old bearded sergeant picks up a a tattered white flag and waves it in the commandant's face. The Swiss down below do better than that. They open a porthole in the inner drawbridge, and one man thrusts out a hand, grasping a paper. It is seized upon by one of the National Guard. "Terms of Surrender," the Swiss cry as with one voice. The insurgents press forward shouting: "What are they?"

"Immunity for all," is the reply. "Will you accept?"

"On the word of an officer we will." It is an officer of the National Guard who says this. Two days ago he was officer in the Gardes Françaises. His word must be believed.

And so the last drawbridge is lowered and Paris in delirious joy

rushes into the citadel crying: "Victory! The Bastille is ours!"

Chapter III: ONE OF THE DERELICTS

It is best not to remember what followed. The word of an officer, once of the Gardes Françaises, was not kept. Old veterans and young Swiss fell victims to the fury of frenzied conquerors. Paris in revolution, drunk with its triumph, plunged through the labyrinthine fortress, wreaking vengeance for its dead.

The prisoners were dragged out of their dungeons where some had spent a quarter of a century and more in a living death. They were let loose in a world they knew nothing of, a world that had forgotten them. That miserable old de Launay and his escort of officers were dragged to the Town Hall. But they never got there; hustled by a yelling, hooting throng, the officers fell by the wayside and were trampled to death in the gutters. Seeing which de Launay cried pitiably: "O friends, kill me fast." He had his wish, the poor old weakling, and all of him that reached the Town Hall was his head carried aloft on a pike.

To the credit of the Gardes Nationales, once the Royal Regiment of Gardes Françaises, be it said that they marched back to their barracks in perfect order and discipline; it was this same Garde Nationale who plied hoses on the conflagration inside the fortress and averted an explosion which would have wrecked more than a third of the city.

But no one took any notice of the liberated prisoners. A dozen or so of them were let loose in this World-Bedlam, left to roam about the streets, trying all in vain to gather up threads of life long since turned to dust. The fall of the mighty fortress put to light many of its grim secrets, some horrible, others infinitely pathetic, some carved in the stone of a dank dungeon, others scribbled on scraps of mouldy paper.

"If for my consolation" [was the purport of one of these] "Monseigneur would grant me for the sake of God and the Blessed Trinity, that I could have news of my dear wife: were it only her name on a card to show that she is alive. It were the greatest consolation I could receive, and I would for ever bless the greatness of Monseigneur."

The letter is dated "A la Bastille le 7 Octobre 1752" and signed Quéret-Démery. Thirty-seven years spent in a dark dungeon with no hope of reunion with that dear wife, news of whom would have been a solace to the broken heart. History has no record of one Quéret-Démery who spent close on half a century in the "cursed fortress." What he had done to merit his fate no one will ever know. He was: that is all we know and that he spent a lifetime in agonized longing and ever-shrinking hope.

One can picture him now on this evening of July 14th turned out from that prison which had become his only home, the shelter of his old age, and wandering with mind impaired and memory gone, through the streets of a city he hardly knew again. Wandering with only one fixed aim: to find the old home where he had known youth and happiness, and the love of his dear wife. Dead or Alive? Did he find her? History has no record. Quéret-Démery was just an obscure, forgotten victim of an autocratic rule, sending his humble petition which was never delivered, to "Monseigneur." Monseigneur who? Imagination is lost in conjecture. The profligate Philippe d'Orleans or one of his like? Who can tell?

The attempt to follow the adventures or misadventures of those thirteen prisoners let loose in the midst of Paris in revolution, would be vain. There were thirteen, it seems. An unlucky number. Again history is silent as to what became to twelve of their number. Only one stands out among the thirteen in subsequent chronicles of the times:

a woman. The only woman among the lot. Her name was Gabrielle Damiens. At least that is the name she went by later on, but she never spoke publicly either of her origin or of her parentage. She had forgotten; so she often said. One does forget things when one has spent sixteen years--one's best years--living a life that is so like death. She certainly forgot what she did that night after she had been turned out into the world: she must have wandered through the streets as did the others, trying to find her way to a place somewhere in the city, which had once been her home. But where she slept then, and for many nights after that she never knew, until the day when she found herself opposite a house in the Boulevard Saint-Germain: a majestic house with an elaborate coronet and coat of arms carved in stone, surmounting the monumental entrance door: and the device also carved in stone: "N'oublie jamais." Seeing which Gabrielle's wanderings came to a sudden halt, and she stood quite still in the gutter opposite the house, staring up at the coronet, the coat of arms and the device. "N'oublie jamais," she murmured. "Jamais!" she reiterated with a curious throaty sound which was neither a cry nor a laugh, but was both in one. "No, Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-Lucque de Tourville," she continued to murmur to herself, "Gabrielle Damiens will see to it that you and your brood never shall forget."

There was a bench opposite the house under the trees of the boulevard and Gabrielle sat down not because she was tired but because she had a good view of the coronet and the device over the front door. Desultory crowds paraded the boulevard laughing and shouting "Victory!" Most of them had been standing for hours in queues outside the bakers' shops, but not everyone had been served with bread. There was not enough to go round, hence the reason why with the cry of "Victory!" there mingled one which sounded like an appeal, and also like a threat:

"Bread! Give us bread!"

Gabrielle watched them unseeing. She too had stood for the past few days in queues, getting what food she could. She had a little money. Where it came from she didn't know. She had a vague recollection of scrubbing floors and washing dishes, so perhaps the money came from that, or a charitable person may have had pity on her: anyway she was neither hungry nor tired, and she was willing to remain here on this bench for an indefinite length of time trying to piece together the fragments of the past from out the confused storehouse of memory.

She saw herself as a child, living almost as a pariah on the charity of relatives who never allowed her to forget her father's crime or his appalling fate. They always spoke of him as "that abominable regicide," which he certainly was not. François Damiens was just a misguided fool, a religious fanatic who saw in the profligate, dissolute monarch, the enemy of France, and struck at him not, he asserted, with a view to murdering his King but just to frighten him and to warn him of the people's growing resentment against his life of immorality. Madness of course. His assertion was obviously true since the weapon which he used was an ordinary pocketknife and did no more than scratch the royal shoulder. But he had struck at the King and royal blood had flown from the scratch, staining the royal shirt. In punishment for this sacrilege, Damiens was hung, drawn and quartered, but to the end, in spite of abominable tortures which he bore stoically, he maintained steadfastly that he had no accomplice and had acted entirely on his own initiative.

François Damiens had left his motherless daughter in the care of a married sister Ursule and her husband Anatole Desèze, a cabinet-maker, who earned a precarious livelihood and begrudged the child every morsel she ate. Gabrielle from earliest childhood had known what hunger meant and the bitter cold of a Paris of winter, often without a fire, always without sufficient clothing. She had relaxation

only in sleep and never any kind of childish amusement. The only interests she had in life was to gaze up at an old box fashioned of carved wood, which stood on a shelf in the living-room, high up against the wall, out of her reach. This box for some unknown reason, chiefly because she had never been allowed to touch it, had always fascinated her. It excited her childish curiosity to that extent that on one occasion when her uncle and aunt were out of the house, she managed to drag the table close to the wall, to hoist a chair upon the table, to climb up on the chair and to stretch her little arms out in a vain attempt to reach the tempting box. The attempt was a complete fiasco. The chair slid away from under her on the polished table, and she fell with a clatter and a crash to the floor, bruised all over her body and her head swimming after it had struck against the edge of the table. To make matters worse, she felt so queer and giddy that she had not the strenght at once to put the table and chair back in their accustomed places. Aunt and uncle came back and at once guessed the cause of the catastrophe, with the result that in addition to bruises and an aching head Gabrielle got a sound beating and was threatened with a more severe one still if she ever dared to try and interfere with the mysterious box again. She was ten years old when this disastrous incident occurred. Cowed and fearfull she never made a second attempt to satisfy her curiosity. She drilled herself into avoiding to cast the merest glance up on the shelf. But though she was able to control her eyes, she could not control her mind, and her mind continued to dwell on the mystery of that fatal box.

It was not until she reached the age of sixteen that she lost something of her terror of another beating. She was a strapping girl by then, strong and tall for her age and unusually good-looking inspite of poor food and constant overwork. Her second attempt was entirely succesful. Uncle and aunt were out of the way, table and chair were easily moved and Gabrielle waas now tall enough to reach the shelf and lift down the box. It was locked, but after a brief struggle with the

aid of an old kitchen knife the lid fell back and revealed--what? A few old papers tied up in three small bundles. One of these bundles was marked with the name "Saint-Lucque," a name quite unknown to Gabrielle. She turned these papers--they were letters apparently--over and over, conscious of an intense feeling of disappointment. What she had expected to find she didn't know but it certainly wasn't this.

The girl however, was no fool. Soon her wits got to work. They told her that, obviously, if these old letters were of no importance to her, Aunt Ursule would not have kept them all these years out of her reach. As time was getting on and uncle and aunt might be back at any moment, she made haste to replace the box on the shelf, carefully disguising the damage done by the kitchen knife. Chair and table she put back in their accustomed places and the old letters she tucked away under the folds of her fichu. By this time she had worked herself up into a fever of conjecture, but she had sufficient control over herself to await with apparent calm the moment when she could pursue the letters in the privacy of her own room. She had never been allowed to have a candle in the evenings, because there was a street-lamp opposite the window which, as Aunt Ursule said, was quite light enough to go to bed by. Gabrielle hated that street-lamp because as there were no curtains to the window, the glare often prevented her getting to sleep, but on this never-to-be-forgotten night she blessed it. Far into the next morning sitting by the open window, did the daughter of François Damiens read and re-read those old letters by the flickering light of the street-lamp. When the lamp was extinguished she still remained sitting by the window scheming and dreaming until the pale light of dawn enabled her to read and read again. For what did those old letters reveal? They revealed the fact that her unfortunate father who had been sent to his death as a regicide had not been alone in his design against the King. The crime--for so it was called--had been instigated and aided by a body

of noble gentlemen who like himself saw in the profligate monarch the true enemy of France. But whilst Damiens bore loyally and in silence the brunt of this conspiracy, whilst he endured torture and went to his death like a hero, those noble gentlemen had remained immune and left their miserable tool to his fate.

All this Gabrielle Damiens learned during those wakeful hours of the night. A great deal of it was of course mere inference; the letters were all addressed to her father apparently by three gentlemen, two of whom with commendable prudence had refrained from appending their signature. But there was one name "Saint-Lucque" which appeared at the foot of some letters more damning than most. Before the rising sun had flooded the towers of Notre Dame with gold Gabrielle had committed these to memory.

Yes! Memory was reawakened now, and busy after all these years unravelling the tangled skein of the past. Sitting here on the boulevard opposite the stately mansion with the coat of arms and the device "N'oublie Jamais" carved in stone above its portal, Gabrielle saw herself as she was during the three years following her fateful discovery. Her first task had been to make a copy of the letters in a clean and careful hand, after which there were the days spent in establishing the identity of "Saint-Lucque" and tracing his whereabouts. M. le Marquis de Saint-Lucque turned out to be one of the greatest gentlemen in France, attached to the Court of His Majesty King Louis XV. He lived in a palatial mansion on the Boulevard Saint-Germain and was a widower with one son. His association with François Damiens had seemingly never been found out. Presumably the whole episode was forgotten by now.

Then there came the great day when Gabrielle first called on Monsieur le Marquis. It was not easy for a girl of her class to obtain an interview with so noble a gentleman, and at once Gabrielle was

confronted with a regular barrage of lackeys, all intent apparently on preventing her access to their master. "No, certainly not," was the final pronouncement of the major-domo, a very great gentleman indeed in this lordly establishment, "you cannot present yourself before Monsieur le Marquis, he will not see you." Gabrielle conscious of her personal charm tried blandishments, but these were of no avail, and undoubtedly she would have failed in her purpose had not Monsieur le Vicomte, son and heir of Monsieur le Marquis, come unexpectedly upon the scene. He was in riding kit. An exceptionally handsome young man, and apparently more impressionable than the severe major-domo. Here was a lovely girl whose glance was nothing less than a challenge, and she wanted something which was being denied her by a lot of louts. Whatever it was, thought the handsome Vicomte, she must have her wish; preliminary, he added to himself with an appraising look directed at the pretty creature, to his getting what he would want in return for his kind offices. There was an exchange of glances between the two young people and a few moments later Gabrielle was ushered into the presence of Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-Lucque by a humbled and bewildered major-domo. Monsieur le Vicomte had given the order, and there was no disobeying him. "I'll wait for you here," he whispered in the girl's ear, indicating a door on the same landing. She lowered her eyes, put on the airs of a demure country wench, and disappeared within the forbidden precincts.

The first interview with the old aristocrat was distinctly stormy. There was a great deal of shouting at first on his part. A stick was raised. A bell was rung. But Gabrielle held her grounds: very calmly, produced the copy of a damnatory letter, and presently the shouting ceased, the stick was lowered, and the lackey dismissed who came in answer to the bell. The letter doubtless brought up vivid and most unpleasant memories of the past. Presently a bargain was struck, money passed from hand to hand—quite a good deal of money, more than Gabrielle had ever seen in all her life, and the interview ended with a promise

on her part to destroy all the original letters. She was to bring them to Monsieur le Marquis the next day and burn them before his eyes. She trotted off with the money safely tucked away in the fold of her fichu. The handsome Vicomte was waiting for her, and she duly paid the tribute which he demanded of her. But she did not call on the old the old Marquis either the next day, or the day after that, or ever again, because a week later Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-Lucque had a paralytic stroke, and thereafter remained bedridden for over four years until the day when he was laid to rest among his ancestors in the family mausoleum in Artois.

In the meantime Gabrielle Damiens's relationship with Vicomte Fernand de Saint-Lucque had become very tender. He was for the time being entirely under the charm of the fascinating blackmailer, unaware of the ugly role she had been playing against his father. He had fitted up what he called a love-nest for her in a rustic chalet in the environs of Versailles and here she lived in the greatest luxury, visited constantly by the Vicomte, who loaded her with money and jewellery to such an extent that she forgot all about her contemplated source of revenue through the medium of the compromising letters.

Everything then was going on very well with the daughter of François Damiens. Her uncle and aunt with the philosophy peculiar to hoc genus omne of their country were only too ready to approve of a situation which contributed largely to their well-being, for Gabrielle, ready to forget the cavalier way in which she had been treated in the past, was not only generous but lavish in her gifts to them. And all went well indeed for nearly three years until the day when Fernand de Saint-Lucque became weary of the tie which bound him to the rather common and exacting beauty and gave her a decisive if somewhat curt congé, together with a goodly sum of money which he considered sufficient as a solace to her wounded vanity. The blow fell so unexpectedly that at first Gabrielle felt absolutely stunned. It came

at a moment when, deluded into believing that she had completely enslaved her highborn lover, she saw visions of being herself one day Vicomtesse and subsequently Marquise de Saint-Lucque de Tourville, received at Court, the queen and leader of Paris society.

She certainly did not look upon the Vicomte's partin gift as sufficient solace for her disappointment. It would not do much more than pay her debts to dressmakers, milliners and jewellers. With the prodigality peculiar to her kind she had spent money as freely and easily as she had earned it. She had, of course, some valuable jewellery, but this she would not sell, and the future, as she presently surveyed it, looked anything but cheerful. Soon, however, her sound common sense came to the rescue. She took, as it were, stock of her resources, and in the process remembered the letters on which she had counted three years ago as the foundation of her fortunes. She turned her back without a pang on the rustic chalet, no longer a love-nest now, and returned to her uncle and aunt, in whom she now felt compelled to confide the secret of her disappointment in the present and of her hopes of the future.

She made a fresh attempt to see the old Marquis. Then only did she learn of his sickness and the hopeless state of mind and body in which he now was. But this did not daunt Gabrielle Damiens. Her scheme of blackmail could no longer be succesfully directed against the father, but there was the son, the once enamoured Vicomte, her adoring slave, now nothing but an arrogant aristocrat, treating the humble little bourgeoisie as if she were dirt and dismissing her out of his life with nothing but a miserable pittance. Well! He should pay for it, pay so heavily that not only his fortune but also his life would be wrecked in the process. Moreover, she, the daughter of that same François Damiens, who had been dubbed the regicide and died a horrible death, would see her ambition fulfilled and herself paid court to and the hem of germent kissed by obsequious courtiers, when she

was Madame la Marquise de Saint-Lucque de Tourville.

She started on her campaign without delay. A humble request for an interview with M. le Vicomte was at first curtly refused, but when it was renewed with certain veiled threats it was conceded. Armed with the copies of the damnatory letters Gabrielle demanded money first and then marriage. Yes! no less a thing than marriage to the heir of one of the greatest names in France, failing which the letters would be sent to the Comte de Meaurevaisre, Chief of the Secret Police of His Majesty the King. Well! When Fernand de Saint-Lucque had dismissed her, Gabrielle, with a curt word of farewell, he had dealt her a blow which had completely knocked her over. But it was her turn now to retaliate. He tried to carry off the affair in his usual high-handed manner. He began with sarcasm, went with bravado, and ended with threats. Gabrielle stood as she had done three years ago before the old Marquis. Already she felt conscious of victory, because she had seen the look almost like a death-mask which had come over Fernand de Saint-Lucque's face when he took in the contents of this the first of the fateful letters. When she held it out to him he had waved her hand aside with disdain. She placed it on the table, and waited until natural curiosity impelled him to pick it up. He did it with a contemptuous shrug, held it as if it were filth.

But the look so like a death-mask soon spread over his face. He did his best to disguise it, but Gabrielle had seen it and felt convinced that victory was already in sight. She left, not taking any money away with her, not exacting any promise at the moment save that her victim—he was her victim already—would see her once more. He had commanded her to bring the letters: "Not the copies remember! The originals!" which the Vicomte declared with all his old arrogance did not exist save in the imagination of a cinderwench.

For days and weeks after that first interview did Gabrielle Damines

keep the Vicomte de Saint-Lucque on tenterhooks without going near him. The old Marquis was still alive, slowly sinking, with one foot in the grave, and Gabrielle hugged herself with thoughts of the heir of that great name writhing under the threat of disgrace to the head of the house, disgrace followed by confiscation of all his goods, exile from court and country, his name for ever branded with the stigma of regicide: disgrace which would redound on his heir and on all his family, and might even be the stepping stone to an ignominious death.

When Gabrielle felt that Fernand had suffered long enough she sent him a harsh command for another interview. Devoured with anxiety, he was only too ready to accede. She came this time in a mood as arrogant as his own, exacting written promise of marriage: the date of the wedding to be fixed here and now. She did not bring the original letters with her. They would, she said curtly, be handed over to him when she, Gabrielle Damines, was incontestably Vicomtesse de Saint-Lucque de Tourville.

Fernand at his wits' end did not know what to do. He tried pretence: a softened manner as if he was prepared to yield. Quite gently and persuasively he explained to her that whatever his ultimate decision might be--and he gave her to understand that it certainly would be favourable--he was compelled at the moment to ask for a few days delay. He had been, he said, paying court to a lady, at His Majesty's express wish, had in fact become officially engaged, and all he needed was a little time for the final breaking off of his obligations. In the meanwhile he was ready, he said, to give her a written promise of marriage duly signed, the wedding to take place within the next three months.

As usual Gabrielle's common sense warned her of a possible trap. The Vicomte had made a very sudden volte-face and had become extraordinarily suave and engaging. He even went to length of

assuring her that he never ceased to love her, and that it was only at the King's command that he had become engaged to the lady in question. The breaking off of that engagement, he declared in conclusion, would cause him no heartache. A little doubtful, inclined to mistrust this plausible dissembler, Gabrielle remained impervious to his blandishments, even when she suddenly found herself in his arms, under the once potent spell of his kisses. No longer potent now. She smiled back into his glowing eyes, accepted the written promise of marriage and endured his kisses while keeping her wits about her. When she finally freed herself from his arms she merely assured him that the compromising letters would be returned to him when she had become his lawful wife.

She trotted home that afternoon happy and triumphant with the written promise of marriage duly signed "Fernand de Saint-Lucque de Tourville" safely tucked away in the folds of her fichu. Aunt Ursule and Uncle Desèze congratulated her on her triumph, and the three of them sat up half the night making plans for a golden future. Aunt and uncle would have a farm with cows and horses and pigs, a beautiful garden and plenty of money to give themselves every luxury.

"You need never be afraid of the future," Gabrielle declared proudly. "I'll never be such a fool as to give up the original letters. Even when I am Marquise de Saint-Lucque I will always keep that hold over my husband."

There ensued four days of perfect bliss, unmarred by doubts or fears. They were destined to be the last moments of happiness the blackmailer was ever to know in life. Saint-Lucque, whose engagement to Mademoiselle de Nesle had not only been approved of but actually desired by the King, was nearly crazy with terror at the awful sword of Damocles hanging over his head. Not knowing where to turn or what to do he finally made up his mind to confide the whole

of the miserable story to his future mother-in-law, the person most likely to be both discreet and helpful. Madame de Nesle was just then in high favour with the King, whose daughter Mademoiselle was reputed to be, and she was just as anxious as was His Majesty to see the girl married to the bearer of a great name who would secure for her the entrée to the most exclusive circles of aristocratic France. One could not, Madame declared emphatically, allow a dirty blackmailer to come athwart the royal plans, and at once she suggested a *lettre de cachet*, one of those abominable sealed orders which consigned any person accused of an offence against the King to lifelong imprisonment, without the formality of a trial. She was confident that she could obtain anything she desired from her adoring Louis, and anyhow incarceration in the Bastille was the only way of silencing that audacious malefactor.

And Madame was as good as her word. Four days later Gabrielle Damiens saw herself cast into a cell in the Bastille. All her possessions were seized by the men who came to arrest her. Pinioned between two of them she watched the other two turning out her table drawers, and pocket everything they found there, including the precious letters, the promise of marriage and the pieces of jewellery which she had saved from the débâcle of the love-nest. Neither tears, nor protest, nor blandishments were of any avail. Her demands for a trial were met with stolid silence, her questions were not answered. She had become a mere chattel cast into a dungeon, there to remain till she was carried out, feet first, to be thrown into an unknown grave. She never knew what had become of her aunt and uncle, nor did she ever hear the name of Saint-Lucque mentioned again while she spent her best years in a living death.

Gabrielle Damiens was nineteen years old when this catastrophe occurred. Sixteen years had gone by since then.

Book Two

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Chapter IV: London 1794

"Tell me more about that young woman, Blakeney. She interests me."

It was the Prince of Wales who spoke. He was honouring Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney with his presence at dinner in their beautiful home in Richmond. The dinner was over; the ladies had retired leaving the men to enjoy their port and their gossip. It had been a small and intimate dinner-party and after the ladies had gone only half a dozen men were left sitting round the table. In addition to the host and the royal guest, there were present on this occasion four of the more prominent members of that heroic organization known as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel: Lord Anthony Dewhurst, my Lord Hastings and Sir Philip Glynde, also Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, his chief's right hand and loyal lieutenant, newly wed to Mademoiselle Suzanne de Tournay, one of the fortunate ones whom the League had succeeded in rescuing from the horrors of revolutionary France.

Without waiting for a reply to his command, His Royal Highness went on meditatively:

"I suppose Paris is like hell just now."

"With the lid off, sir," was Blakeney's caustic comment.

"And not only Paris," Sir Andrew added; "Nantes under that fiendish Carrier runs it close."

"As for the province of Artois—" mused my Lord Hastings.

"That is where that interesting young woman takes a hand in the devilish work, isn't that it, Blakeney?" the Prince interposed. "You were about to tell us something more about her. I confess there is

something that thrills one in that story in spite of oneself. The idea of a woman--"

His Highness broke off and resumed after a moment or two:

"Is she young and good-looking?"

"Young? No sir," Blakeney answered. "Nearer forty than thirty, I should say."

"And not good-looking?"

"She must have been at one time. But sixteen years in the Bastille has modified all that."

"Sixteen years!" His Highness ejaculated. "What in the world had she done?"

"It has been a little difficult to get to the bottom of her story. But I was interested. So were we all, weren't we, Ffoulkes? As you say, sir, there is something thrilling-horrible really-in the idea of a woman performing the revolting task of a public executioner. For that is Gabrielle Damiens's calling at the moment."

"Damien's?" His Highness mused; "the name sounds vaguely familiar."

"Perhaps you will remember sir, that some twenty-five years ago a kind of religious maniac named François Damiens created a sensation by slashing the late King with a penknife, without doing real harm, of course; but for this so-called crime he was condemned to death, hung, drawn and quartered. He maintained to the end, even under torture, that he had acted entirely on his own and that he never had any accomplice."

"Yes! I remember the story now. And this female executioner is his daughter?"

"His only child. She was only a baby at the time. As far as we have been able to unravel the tangled skein of this extraordinary tragedy-comedy, Damiens bequeathed her a packet of old letters which involved the old Marquis de Saint-Lucque-the father of the present man-in that ridiculous conspiracy. Armed with these the girl-she was only sixteen at the time-started a campaign of blackmail, first against the old Marquis and, when he became bedridden, against his son, who, I understand, was deeply in love with her at one time."

"What a complication! But go on, man. Your story is as interesting as a novel by that French fellow Voltaire. Well!" His Highness continued, "and what happened to the blackmailer?"

"The usual thing sir. Saint-Lucque got tired of his liaison, broke it off, became engaged to Mademoiselle de Nesle . . ."

"Good old Louis's daughter, what?"

"Supposed to be," Blakeney replied curtly.

"I remember Madame de Nesle," His Highness mused. A beautiful woman! She even made the du Barry jealous. I was in Paris at the time. And her daughter married Saint-Lucque, of course . . . I remember!"

"Then you can guess the rest of the story, sir. Madame de Nesle wanted her daughter's marriage to take place. She had great influence over the King, and obtained from him one of those damnable lettres de cachet which did effectually silence the blackmailer by keeping her locked up in the Bastille without trial and without a chance of appeal. There she would have ended her days

had not the revolutionaries captured the Bastille and liberated the prisoners."

"Most interesting! Most interesting! And how did the blackmailer become the executioner?"

"By easy stages, sir."

"What was she like when she came out, one wonders."

"Like a raging tigress."

"Naturally."

"Vowing before anyone who cared to listen that she would make Saint-Lucque and all his brood pay eye for eye and tooth for tooth."

"That was inevitable, of course," the Prince mused, "and not difficult to accomplish these days. I suppose," he went on, "that this Gabrielle Damiens has already got herself mixed up with the worst of the revolutionary rabble."

"She certainly has. She began by joining in the crowd of ten thousand women who marched to Versailles demanding food. She seized a drum from one of the guard-rooms in the suburb where she lived, and paraded the streets beating the Generale and shouting: 'Bread! we must have bread! . . .' and 'Come, mothers, with your starving children . . .' and so on."

"You weren't there, were you, Blakeney?"

"I was, sir. Tony, Ffoulkes and I were the guests of the King that day at Versailles. We saw it all. It was the queerest crowd, wasn't it, Tony?"

"It certainly was," my Lord Tony agreed lightly; "fat fishwives from the Halles, chambermaids shouldering their brooms, pale-faced milliners and apple-cheeked country wenches. All sorts and conditions."

"And this Damiens woman was among them?"

"She led them, sir," Blakeney replied, "with her drum. The whole thing was really pathetic. Food in Paris was very scarce and very dear and there were many cases of actual starvation. The trouble was, too, that the Queen had chosen to give a huge banquet the day before to the officers of the army of Flanders who came over to take the place of certain disloyal regiments. Three hundred and fifty guests sat down to a Gargantuan feast, ate and drank till the small hours of the morning. It was most injudicious to say the least."

"Wretched woman!" the Prince put in with a sigh; "she always seemed to do the wrong thing even in those days."

"And did so to the end, poor woman," one of the others observed.

"Was that the banquet you told me about, Blakeney, where you first met your adorable wife?"

"It was, sir," Blakeney replied, while a wonderfully soft look came into his lazy blue eyes, as it always did when Marguerite's name was as much as mentioned. It was only a flash, however. The next moment he added casually:

"And where I first saw Mam'zelle Guillotine."

"Such a funny name," His Highness remarked. "As a rule they speak of Madame Guillotine over there."

"Gabrielle deserves the name, sir, odious as it sounds. I have been

told that she has guillotined over a hundred men and women and even a number of children with her own hands."

Then as they all remained silent, unable to pass any remark on this horrible statement, Sir Percy went on:

"After the march on Versailles she became more and more prominent in the revolutionary movement. Marat became her close friend and gave her all the publicity she wanted in his paper *L'ami du Peuple*. I know for a fact that she actually took a hand in the wholesale massacre of prisoners the September before last. Robespierre thinks all the world of her oratory, and she has spoken more than once at the Club des Jacobins and at the Cordeliers. I listened on several occasions to the harangues which she likes to deliver in the Palais Royal Gardens, standing on a table with a pistol in each hand as Camille Desmoulins used to do. They were the most inflammatory speeches I ever heard. And clever, too. The sixteen years she spent in the Bastille did not dull her wits seemingly. Finally," Blakeney concluded, "Robespierre got her appointed last year, at her own request, public executioner in his native province of Artois, and there she has been active ever since."

There was silence round the festive board after that. They were all men here who had seen much of the seamy side of life. Even His Highness had had experiences which do not usually come in the way of royal personages, and he was the only non-member of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel who knew the identity of its heroic chief. His eyes now rested with an expression of ill-concealed affection and admiration on that chief, whom he honoured with his especial friendship.

He raised his glass of port and sipped it thoughtfully before he spoke again, then he said with an attempt at gaiety:

"I know what you are thinking at this moment, Blakeney."

"Yes, your Highness?" Sir Percy retorted.

"That Mam'zelle Guillotine will soon be . . . what shall we say? . . . lying in the arms of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

This sally made everybody laugh, and conversation presently drifted into other channels.

Chapter V: A SOCIAL EVENT

There are many records extant to-day of the wonderful rout offered to the élite of French and English society in London by Her Grace the Duchesse de Roncevaux in her sumptuous house in St. James's Square. The date I believe was somewhere in January, 1794. The decorations, the flowers, the music, the banquet-supper surpassed in magnificence, it is asserted by chroniclers of the time, anything that had ever been seen in the ultra-fashionable world.

The Duchesse, as everybody knows, was English by birth, daughter of Reuben Meyer, the banker, and immensely rich. His Grace the Duc de Roncevaux, first cousin to the royal house of Bourbon, married her not only for her wealth but principally because he was genuinely in love with her. His name and popularity at court secured for his wife a brilliant position in Paris society during the declining years of the monarchy, whilst his charming personality and always deferential love-making brought her a full measure of domestic happiness. He left her an inconsolable widow after five years of married bliss. The revolutionary storm was by then already gathering over France. The English-born Duchesse thought it best to return to her own country, before the cloud-burst which appeared more and more threatening every day. She chose London as her principal home, and here with the aid of her wealth and a heart overflowing with the milk of human kindness she did her best to gather round her those more fortunate French families who had somehow contrived to escape from the murderous clutches of the revolutionary government of France. Thus a delightful set of charming cultured people could always be met with in the Duchesse de Roncevaux's luxurious salons. Here one rubbed shoulders with some of the members of the old French aristocracy now dispossessed of most if not all their wealth, but bringing into the somewhat free-and-easy tone of eighteenth-century London something of their perfect manners, their old-world courtesy and that

atmosphere of high-breeding and distinction handed down to them by generations of courtiers. The Comte de Tournay with Madame his wife and their son the young Vicomte were often to be seen at these social gatherings. Mademoiselle de Tournay had recently married Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, the handsome young leader of fashion, who was credited with being a member of the heroic League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. There was Félicien Lézenne, who had been chairman of the Club des Fils du Royaume, his young wife and Monsieur de Lucines, his father-in-law, who were actually known to have been saved from the guillotine by that mysterious and elusive person the Scarlet Pimpernel himself.

There were others, of course, for the list of refugees from revolutionary France waxed longer day by day and all found a welcome in the Duchesse de Roncevaux's hospitable mansion; and not only did they find a welcome but also a measure of gaiety! for the daughter of Reuben Meyer the Jewish banker had understanding as well as social ambition. Her aim was to make her salon the most attractive one in town, and what society could be more attractive than that of those French aristocrats, most of whom had palpitating stories to tell of past horrors, of dangers of death, and, above all, of those almost phenomenal rescues of condemned innocents sometimes under the very shadow of the guillotine, effected by that heroic organization known as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel and its lion-hearted chief.

To hear one of those deeds of unparalleled courage recounted by one of those who owed their lives to that intriguing personality was voted unanimously to be far more exciting than a melodrama at Drury Lane, and the Duchesse de Roncevaux could always be relied on to provide her guests with one of those soul-stirring narrations which caused every velvet cheek to flush with enthusiasm and every bright eye to glow with hero-worship. There were other entertainments too

to be enjoyed in the sumptuous mansion in St. James's Square, there were operas, ballets, comedies, concerts: young musicians often made their first formal bow before a discriminating company which often included the Prince of Wales himself and the élite of English society, and more than one disciple of the late Mr. Garrick first tasted the sweets of success in the Duchesse's salon. But none of these entertainments had the power to excite interest as did the relation of one of those hair-raising exploits of the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, told with fervour and a charming French accent by whoever happened to be the honoured guest of the evening.

On this occasion it was the abbé Prud'hon, lately come from France in the company of Monsieur le Marquis de Saint-Lucque and the young Vicomte. The arrival of Monsieur de Saint-Lucque had been a real event in the chronicle of London society. He was known to have been saved from death by the hero of the hour: in fact, he and the abbé had proclaimed this openly, and everybody--the men as well as the ladies--had been on tenterhooks to hear the true version of their amazing rescue. All sorts of rumours had been afloat, as they always were whenever a French family came to join the colony of recent émigrés who had found refuge in hospitable England. Everyone was agog to know how they had been smuggled out of France, for that was what it amounted to. Men, women and children, the old, the infirm, whenever innocent seemed literally to have been snatched from under the very noses of the revolutionary guard, and this led to all sorts of tales, medieval in their superstitious extravagance, of direct interference from the clouds or of a supernatural being, of unearthly appearance and abnormal strength who scattered revolutionary soldiers before him as easily as he would a swarm of flies.

There was a first-class sensation in fashionable circles when Madame la Duchesse de Roncevaux issued invitations for one of her

popular routs. The invitation promised a concert by the London String Band, a playlet to be performed by His Majesty's mummers, and a supper prepared by Monsieur Haon formerly cook-in-chief to Madame de Pompadour. But all these attractions paled in interest before the one brief announcement: "Guest of Honour: M. l'Abbé Prud'hon." Everyone in town knew by now that M. l'Abbé Prud'hon was tutor to the young Vicomte de Saint-Lucque and had been summarily arrested along with him and M. le Marquis by the revolutionary government under the usual futile pretext of having plotted against the safety of the Republic.

The salons of Madame la Duchesse de Roncevaux were thronged on this occasion as they had never been before, and there was such a chattering up and down the monumental staircase as the guests filed up to greet their hostess, as in an aviary of love-birds.

"My dear, isn't it too wonderful?"

"I declare I am so excited, I don't know if I am standing on my head or on my heels."

"I know I shall scream if that London String Band goes on too long."

"I call it cruel to put them on before we have heard M. l'Abbé."

"Hush! you mustn't say that. The dear Duchesse had them only in order to bring our blood to boiling point."

"Mine has been over boiling point all day, and I am on the verge of spontaneous combustion."

By ten o'clock all the guests had arrived, and the hostess, wearied after standing for over an hour at the head of the staircase receiving the company, had retired to the rose-coloured boudoir where His

Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney, Sir Andrew and Lady Ffoulkes and a small number of the more privileged guests were discussing the coming event somewhat more soberly than did the gaily plumaged birds in the adjoining ball-room. M. l'Abbé was there too, a pathetic figure in his well-worn soutane: his cheeks, once round and full, were pale and wan now, showing signs of the many privations, the lack of food and warmth, which he had suffered recently. He looked ill and very weary. It was only his eyes, tired-looking and red-rimmed though they were, that retained within their depths a merry twinkle which every now and then came to the fore, when his inward glance came to rest on a memory less cruel than most: that merry twinkle was the expression of a keen sense of humour which no amount of sorrow and suffering had the power wholly to eradicate.

At the moment he certainly seemed to have thrown off some of his lassitude; finding himself the centre of interest in a sympathetic crowd, all anxious to make him forget what he had suffered, and to make him feel at home in this land of freedom and of orderly government, his whole being seemed to expand in response. A warm glow came into his eyes and the smiles so freely bestowed on him by the ladies found their reflection round his pale, drooping lips. Everyone was charming to him. The Prince of Wales was most gracious, and his hostess lavish in delicate attentions. He had had an excellent dinner, and a couple of glasses of fine old Burgundy had put heart into him.

"Ah, Monsieur l'Abbé," sighed lovely Lady Lauriston, "you will tell us, won't you, the true, unvarnished facts about your wonderful escape."

"Of course I will, dear lady," the old priest replied; "nothing could make me happier than to let the whole world hear, if it were possible, the story of one of the most valorous deeds ever accomplished on

this earth. I have seen men and women, especially recently, show amazing pluck and endurance under the terrible circumstances which alas obtain in my poor country these days, but never did I witness anything like the courage and resourcefulness displayed by that noble gentleman who rescued us from certain death at risk of his life."

The abbé had spoken so earnestly and in a voice quivering with such depth of emotion, that instinctively the chatter around him died down, and for a few moments there was silence in the pretty rose-coloured boudoir, whilst the old priest and several of the ladies surreptitiously wiped away a tear. Everyone felt thrilled, emotional; even the men responded readily to that feeling of pride in the display of courage and endurance, those virtues which make such a strong appeal to the finest of their sex.

It was the hostess who first broke the silence. She asked:

"And you do not know who your rescuer was, M. l'Abbé?"

"Alas, no, Madame la Duchesse. Monsieur de Saint-Lucque, the Vicomte and I were locked up inside the coach which was conveying us to Paris for trial and, of course, execution. It was very dark. To my sorrow I saw nothing, no one. And that is a sorrow I shall take with me to my grave. To touch the hand of the most gallant man on earth would be an infinite joy to me. And I know that Monsieur le Marquis thinks as I do over that."

"How is Monsieur le Marquis, by the way?" His Royal Highness enquired.

The abbé shook his head and drew a deep sigh.

"Sadly, I am afraid. He is heart-broken with anxiety about his wife

and the other two children: and he keeps on reproaching himself for being safe and free while they are still in danger."

"Don't let him break his heart over that, M. l'Abbé. Didn't you tell us the other day that the Scarlet Pimpernel had pledged you his word to bring Madame de Saint-Lucque and her two little girls safely to England?"

It was Lady Blakeney who spoke. She was sitting on the sofa near the old priest and while she said those comforting words she put her hand on his arm. She was the most beautiful woman there, easily the queen among this bevy of loveliness. The abbé turned to her and met those wonderful luminous eyes of hers so full of confidence and encouragement. He raised her hand to his old lips.

"Yes," he said; "we did get that marvellous pledge, Monsieur de Saint-Lucque and I. How it came to us is another of the many miracles that occurred during those awful times after we were arrested and incarcerated in the local gaol. There was a funny old fellow, dirty and bedraggled, whom we caught sight of one day through the grated window of our prison-cell. He was stumping up and down the corridor outside singing the Marseillaise very much out of tune. Two days later we saw him again, and this time as he stumped along he recited in a cracked voice that awful blasphemous doggerel: 'Ça ira!' It was then that the miracle occurred, for after he had gone by we saw a crumpled wad of paper on the floor, just beneath the window."

Here the abbé's narration was suddenly broken into by a shrill little cry of distress.

"Sir Percy, I entreat, do hold my hand. I vow I shall swoon if you do not."

The cry broke the tension which was keeping the small company in the boudoir hanging on the words of the old priest. All eyes were turned to the dainty lady who had uttered the pitiful appeal. The Lady Blanche Crewkerne had edged closer and closer to the sofa where sat the abbé; her eyes were glowing, her lips quivered; she was in a regular state of flurry. As soon as she had attracted all the attention she coveted to her engaging personality she raised a perfumed handkerchief to her tip-tilted nose, fluttered her eyelids, closed her eyes and finally tottered backwards as if in very truth she was on the point of losing consciousness. From all around there came an exclamation of concern until a pair of masculine arms was stretched out to receive the swooning beauty, whereupon concern turned to laughter, loud and prolonged laughter while Lady Blanche opened her eyes, thinking to find herself reclining against the magnificent waistcoat of the Prince of Dandies. They encountered the timid glance of old Sir Martin Cheverill, who felt very much embarrassed in the chivalrous role of supporter to a lady in distress thus unexpectedly thrust upon him. Nor did the lady make any effort to conceal her mortification. Already she had recovered her senses, as well as her poise. With nervy movements she plied her fan vigorously and remarked somewhat tartly:

"Methought Sir Percy Blakeney was standing somewhere near."

There was more laughter after this, and old Lady Portarles who never missed an opportunity of putting in a spiteful word where the younger ladies were concerned, interposed mockingly:

"Sir Percy, my dear Blanche? Why, he has been fast asleep this last half-hour."

And picking up her ample train she swept across the room to where a rose-coloured portière was drawn across the archway of a recess. Lady Portarles drew the curtain aside with a dramatic gesture and

there of a truth across a satin-covered sofa, his head reclining against a cushion, fast asleep, lay the Prince of Dandies, Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart. An exclamation of horror, amounting to a groan, went round the room. Such disgraceful behaviour surpassed any that that privileged person had ever been guilty of. Had it been anyone else . . .

The groan, the exclamation of horror, had quickly roused the delinquent from his slumbers. He struggled to his feet and looking round on the indignant faces turned on him he had the good grace to look thoroughly embarrassed.

"Ladies, a thousand pardons," he stammered shame-facedly. "His Royal Highness deigned to keep me at hazard the whole afternoon and . . ."

But it was no use appealing to His Highness for protection against the irate ladies. He was sitting back in his chair roaring with laughter.

"Blakeney," he said between his guffaws, "you'll be the death of me one day."

And after a time he added: "It is to Monsieur l'Abbé Prud'hon that you owe an abject apology."

"Monsieur l'Abbé . . ." Sir Percy began in tones of the deepest humility, "to do wrong is human. I have done wrong, I confess. To forgive is divine. Will you exercise your privilege and pronounce absolution on the repentant sinner?"

His manner was so engaging, his diction so suave, and he really did seem so completely ashamed of himself that the kind old priest who had a keen sense of humour was quite ready to forgive the offence.

"On one condition, Sir Percy," he said lightly.

"I am at your mercy, M. l'Abbé."

"That you listen to me--without once going to sleep, mind you--while I narrate to Madame la Duchesse's guests the full story of how Monsieur de Saint-Lucque and his son as well as my own insignificant self were spirited away out of the very jaws of death, and at the risk of his own precious life, by that greatest of living heroes the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"I am at your mercy, M. l'Abbé ," Sir Percy reiterated ruefully.

"And now I pray you, Sir Percy," the Lady Blanche resumed, and gave a playful tap with her fan on Sir Percy's sleeve, "to hold my hand. I am still on the point of swooning, you know," she added archly.

She held out her pretty hand to Blakeney, who raised it to his lips, then turning to the Prince of Wales he pleaded: "Will your Royal Highness pronounce this painful incident closed and command Monsieur l'Abbé to give us the story of what he is pleased to call a miracle."

"Monsieur l'Abbé . . ." His Highness responded, turning to the old priest, "since you have been gracious enough to forgive . . ."

"I will continue, c'est entendu," Monsieur l'Abbé readily agreed. And once more the ladies crowded round him the better to listen to a tale that had their beau ideal for its hero. Nor were the men backward in their desire to hear of the prowess of a man whose identity remained as incomprehensible as were the methods which he employed for getting in touch with those persecuted innocents whom he had pledged himself to save.

"And what was written on that scrap of paper, M. l'Abbé?" His Highness asked.

"Only a few words, your Highness," the priest replied. "It said: We who are working for your safety do pledge you our word of honour that Madame de Saint-Lucque and her two children will land safely in England before long," and in the corner there was a drawing of a small flower roughly tinted in red chalk."

"The Scarlet Pimpernel!" The three magic words coming from a score of exquisitely rouged lips had the sound of a deep-drawn sigh. It was followed by a tense silence while the abbé mopped his streaming forehead.

"Your pardon, ladies," he murmured. "I always feel overcome with emotion when I think of those horrible and amazing days."

Chapter VI: THE PRINCE OF DANDIES

Thus was the incident closed. The hostess rose somewhat in a flurry.

"In my excitement to hear you, M. l'Abbé," she said, "I am forgetting my guests. Will your Royal Highness deign to excuse me?"

"I'll follow you in a moment, dear lady. Your guests I am sure are dying with impatience. And," he added, turning with a smile to the other ladies, "all the best seats will soon be occupied."

It seemed like a hint, which from royal lips was akin to a command. Lady Lauriston, Lady Portarles and the other ladies followed in the wake of Madame la Duchesse. Only at a sign from His Royal Highness did a privileged few remain in the boudoir: they were Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and his young wife, Lord Anthony Dewhurst, Monsieur l'Abbé Prud'hon and two or three others.

The Prince turned to the old priest and asked:

"And M. de Saint-Lucque you say, reverend, sir, could find no trace of the whereabouts of his wife and daughters?"

"None, monseigneur," the abbé replied. "When M. de Saint-Lucque did me the honour of seeking shelter under my roof with Monsieur le Vicomte, he entrusted his wife and daughters to the care of a worthy couple named Guidal, who had a small farm a league or so from Rocroi. They had both been in the service of old M. le Marquis, who had loaded them with kindness, and I for one could have sworn that they were loyalty itself. The night before our summary arrest—we already knew that we were under suspicion—the woman Guidal came

to my presbytery. She was in tears. I questioned her and through her sobs she contrived to convey to me the terrible news that her husband fearing for his own arrest had talked of denouncing Madame la Marquise to the police; that she herself had entreated and protested in the name of humanity and past loyalty to the family, but terror of the guillotine had got a grip over him and he wouldn't listen. The woman went on to say that Madame la Marquise had unfortunately overheard the discussion and in the early dawn before she and her husband were awake had left the farm with her two little girls going she knew not whither. "Your Highness may well imagine," the old man went on, "how completely heart-broken Monsieur de Saint-Lucque was and has been ever since. At times since then I have even feared for his reason. Had it not been for his son he would I feel sure have done away with himself, but never for one moment would I allow M. le Vicomte to be away from his father. This was not difficult as the guard put over us during our captivity and in the coach that was taking us to Paris kept the three of us forcibly together. The first ray of light that came to us through this abysmal horror," the abbé now concluded, mastering the emotion which had seized him while he told his pitiable story, "were the few lines written on the scrap of paper which a dirty and be-draggled scavenger threw in to us through the grated window of our prison-cell: 'We who are working for your safety do pledge you our word that Madame de Saint-Lucque and her two children will land in England before long.'"

"And you may rest assured, M. l'Abbé, that that pledged word will never be broken."

It was Marguerite Blakeney who said this, breaking the tense silence which had reigned in the gay little boudoir when the old priest had concluded his narrative. She put her hand on his, giving it a comforting pressure and the old man raised it to his lips.

"God bless you!" he murmured. "God bless England and you all who belong to this great country." He rose to his feet and added fervently: "And, above all, God bless the selfless hero of whom you are so justly proud and to whom so many of us owe life and happiness: your mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel."

"God bless him!" they all murmured in unison.

Over in the ball-room the London String Band had finished playing the last item on their programme and the final chords of the Magic Flute followed by a round of applause came floating in on the perfumed air of the rose-coloured boudoir.

"Your Royal Highness," came in meek accents from Sir Percy Blakeney, "will you deign to remember that I am forbidden to go to sleep until Monsieur l'Abbé has told us a lot more about that shadowy Scarlet Pimpernel, and frankly I am dead sick of the demmed fellow already."

The Prince had already regained his habitual insouciance.

"Nor do we wish," he said, and gave the signal for every one to rise and follow him, "to miss another moment of M. le Abbé's interesting talk. But I'll warrant, my friend," he added, with a chuckle, "that you won't get to sleep till after you have completely atoned for your abominable conduct."

He shook an admonishing finger at Sir Percy Blakeney, the darling of society, the pattern of the perfect gentleman, caught in flagrante delicto of bad manners, and finally led the way into the adjoining ball-room. It was crowded with an ultra-fashionable throng. The elite of English society was present in full force as well as a goodly contingent of French émigrés. Lady Lockroy was there with her two pretty daughters. The old Earl of Mainbron had brought his charming

young wife, and the Countess of Lauriston, acknowledged to be next to Lady Blakeney the best-dressed woman in town, had donned one of the new-fashioned dresses of clinging material and high waist said to be the latest mode in Vienna. And many others, of course. When His Highness entered the ball-room and the ladies swept their ceremonial courtesy to him down to the ground, there was such a rustling of silks and satins as if a swarm of bees had suddenly been let loose. His Highness had Lady Blakeney on his arm, and immediately behind him came Sir Percy with young Lady Ffoulkes. The Prince was in the best of humours.

"Ladies! Ladies!" he said gaily; "you have missed such a scandal as London has not witnessed for many a day. Has not our charming hostess told you?"

The select company who had trooped out of the boudoir in the wake of His Highness tittered as the word "scandal" went round the big ball-room in varied tones of horror or suspense.

"Your Highness, I entreat," Sir Percy whispered in the ear of his royal friend.

But the Prince solemnly shook his head and made to look very serious.

"No good your appealing to me, Blakeney," he said with mock severity. "The ladies must hear of your abominable behaviour. Monsieur l'Abbé has been most kind and forbearing, but our royal patience has been sorely tried, and we have decreed that your punishment shall fit your crime, and that you shall be pilloried before all these ladies as the most ill-mannered man in London. What say you, ladies? Lady Blakeney, have I your permission to proceed?"

The ladies with one accord begged His Highness to go on, whilst

Lady Blakeney, smiling at her discomfited lord, shrugged her pretty shoulders and said deferentially:

"As your Royal Highness desires."

"Then we will depute Lady Portarles to tell the awful tale." His Highness concluded, and deposited his bulky person in a capacious armchair. He begged his hostess to sit on one side of him and Lady Blakeney on the other. The story of how the Prince of Dandies had gone to sleep while M. l'Abbé Prud'hon was relating one of the miracles accomplished by the heroic Scarlet Pimpernel was told with obvious gusto and a suspicion of malice by Lady Portarles, who, by the way, was known in society as the queen of scandal-mongers. The story lost nothing in the telling and as the horrifying recital of his misdeed progressed, Sir Percy Blakeney became the target of a hundred frowning looks and was forced to listen to a veritable uproar of censure of "Shame on you, Sir Percy!" and "Would you believe it, my dear?" or "Did you ever hear the like?" The whole thing, of course, in a spirit of fun, for there was no more popular man in the whole of England than Sir Percy Blakeney.

Lady Blakeney sat by smiling sweetly whilst His Royal Highness obviously enjoyed the discomfiture of his friend. Protests on Sir Percy's part were of no avail. His Highness had decreed that he should be pilloried—and he was.

"I have often noticed," one of the ladies now remarked, "that Sir Percy makes a point of going to sleep whenever the rest of us are thrilled by one of those marvellous exploits of our beloved Scarlet Pimpernel related here in this very room by those who owe their life to him."

"I seem to have noticed the same thing," mused pretty Lady Blanche, "on more than one occasion."

"My belief," put in Lady Portarles, in a voice that dominated the din of conversation, "my firm belief, I may say, is that our Prince of Dandies is jealous of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"He is! He is!" came in a loud chorus from everyone around.

"Own to it, Sir Percy, that you are jealous of our wonderful hero."

Sir Percy no longer protested.

"I will own to it at your command, fair ones," he said ruefully. "What can a poor man say when the innermost workings of his heart are read like a book by a whole bevy of lovely ladies. How can I help being jealous of that demmed elusive fellow who monopolises your thoughts and conversations at all hours of the day? That, begad, shadow deprives us mere mortals of your attention when we would desire to lay our homage at your feet."

While this merry interlude went on, the servants had been busy arranging the chairs and putting the room generally in order for the hearing of Monsieur l'Abbé's recital. Now everything was ready. Heavy curtains masked the dais where the String Band had discoursed sweet music, leaving a semicircular alcove in the centre of which the major domo had placed a chair behind a table with a carafe of water and a glass. And gradually chattering and laughter ceased. There was a little whispering here and there, a few discreet ripples of laughter quickly suppressed, when Sir Percy after he had seen Madame la Duchesse to her seat, took up his stand with an air of resignation against the nearest window embrasure. Monsieur l'Abbé Prud'hon now mounted the few steps that led up to the dais whilst the company sat down, the ladies in the front displaying their brocaded gowns to the best advantage, and the men standing in compact groups all round them.

No actor of note or learned lecturer could have boasted of a more attentive audience than had this old Frenchman in the shabby soutane with the wan cheeks and the twinkling eyes. He sat down in the framework of the alcove, and once or twice passed his hand across his brow as if to collect his thoughts.

"Monseigneur," he began, "Mesdames et Messieurs." He spoke in French throughout. Most of the company which consisted exclusively of cultured, well-educated persons, understood every word he said, for his diction was of the clearest, and he spoke his own language with the exquisite purity of the Touraine district. It was Madame Descazes, wife of the eminent advocate at the Paris bar, who being an erudite as well as a meticulous lady, made copious notes of what Monsieur l'Abbé related to the elegant company assembled in the salon of Madame la Duchesse de Roncevaux on that never-to-be-forgotten evening in the winter of 1794; and it is on these notes that all records of the event are based, for Madame Descazes very kindly allowed her intimate friends to study her notes and make a translation of them if they had a mind.

"I am so thankful, my dear, that I learned French at school," the Countess of Mainbron whispered to her neighbour while the abbé paused for breath.

"I wish I had done better with it," the latter responded. "Luckily, the dear old man speaks very slowly, and I shall not miss much."

"I can understand every word he says," the youngest Miss Lockroy put in glibly.

"Hush! Hush over there!" Lady Portarles admonished. "We can't have any chattering or we may miss something."

For Monsieur l'Abbé, after a few preliminaries, had now embarked on the most palpitating point in his narrative.

"The great miracle, for I must call it that," he was saying, "occurred on a steep bit of road which cuts across the forest of Mézières. It was mid-afternoon and very dull and dark. We could see nothing inside the carriage for the windows were veiled by a curtain of misty rain which had fallen in a drizzle ever since early morning. We sat huddled up against one another. Monsieur le Marquis and I had the young Vicomte between us, trying to keep him warm, for as the shades of evening began to draw in, the cold grew intense, and the poor lad had been half starved ever since our arrest eight days before.

"As I say, we could see very little of what went on outside; only the dim outline of horses trotting on each side of the carriage. We were being strongly guarded. You must know, ladies, that Monsieur le Marquis and all his family are the special targets of an insane hatred on the part of the revolutionary government and of a cruel woman, whom may God forgive, who seems to have vast influence with them all."

"You mean the woman they call Mam'zelle Guillotine?" His Royal Highness here put in.

"Your Highness knows?" the hostess asked.

"We heard her life-story a little while ago," the Prince replied. "It is one of the most extraordinary ones we had ever heard."

"What has always remained a puzzle," the abbé continued after this slight interruption, "in the minds of those of us who have had the good fortune of coming in personal contact with the Scarlet Pimpernel is how he comes to be always in close touch with those who presently may have need of his help. I have heard it argued among some of my

English friends that on most occasions luck entered largely in the success of his plans. There never was a more false or more unjust suggestion. Let me assure you that certainly as far as we wretched prisoners were concerned it was pluck and pluck only, the courage and resourcefulness of one man, that saved the three of us from death."

From the elegant assembly, from those society ladies peacocking it in their silks and satins, from the men, some of whom spent the best part of their day at the gambling-tables, there came a sound like the intaking of one breath, a deep sigh which proclaimed more eloquently than words could do the admiration amounting almost to reverence laid at the shrine of the bravest of the brave. The sigh died down and a tense silence followed. Nothing was heard for a moment or two, save the faint rustle here and there of stiff brocade, or the flutter of a fan, until suddenly the silence was broken by a pleasant voice saying lightly:

"Surely not one man, Monsieur l'Abbé. I have it from M. de Saint-Lucque himself that there were at least three if not more of the rescuing party . . . and that your Scarlet Pimpernel did no more than . . ."

"Hush! Silence!" came in indignant protest from the ladies at this attempted disparagement of their hero.

"Sir Percy, you are impossible!" one of them declared resolutely, whilst another begged His Royal Highness to intervene.

"Jealousy carried to that point," concluded Lady Portarles, "amounts to a scandal. Your Royal Highness, we entreat . . ."

"Nay, ladies," His Highness responded with his cheery laugh. "Since you ladies have failed in inculcating hero-worship into this

flippant courtier of mine, what can I do? . . . a mere man!"

There were few things the Prince enjoyed more than the badgering of his friend over this question of the Scarlet Pimpernel, while he yielded it to none in his admiration for the man's superhuman courage and spirit of self-sacrifice.

"Lady Blakeney," one of the younger ladies pleaded, "have you no influence over Sir Percy? His flippant remarks cut most of us to the quick."

Marguerite Blakeney turned smiling to the speaker.

"I have no influence, my dear, over Sir Percy," she said, "but I am sure that he would sooner remain silent the rest of the evening rather than distress any of you."

"You have heard what her ladyship says, you incorrigible person," His Highness put in. "It amounts to a command which we feel obliged to second."

"What can I do," Blakeney responded humbly, "but bow my diminished head? Lady Blakeney is quite right when she asserts that I would rather remain for ever dumb than bring one tear of distress to so many lovely eyes. It was only a sense of fair play that caused me to say what I did."

"Fair play?"

"Why, yes. Fair play. In your over-estimation of one man's prowess, you, dear ladies, are apt to forget that there are other equally gallant English gentlemen, without whose courage and loyalty your Scarlet Pimpernel would probably by now have fallen into the hands of those murdering devils over in France. Now, I know for a fact, and I am sure

that Monsieur l'Abbé will bear my story out, that in this case . . ."

But the mere suggestion that the Scarlet Pimpernel might possibly one day fall into the hands of the Terrorists in France, raised such a storm of indignation from the entire assembly that Sir Percy was unable to proceed. He gave an audible sigh of resignation and thereafter leaned back once more in silence against the window embrasure. His eyes remained fixed on his beautiful wife. She was obviously smiling to herself. It was a mischievous little smile for she, too, like the Prince of Wales, enjoyed the good-humoured chaff to which her husband was invariably exposed when the subject of the Scarlet Pimpernel was on the tapis. She was sitting beside His Royal Highness now and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes sat next to her. There was no more ardent worshipper of his chief than Sir Andrew, the most faithful and loyal lieutenant a leader ever had, and an evening like the present one gave him a measure of happiness almost as great as that experienced by Marguerite Blakeney herself. She was looking radiant and her luminous eyes had a glow in them which had its counterpart in those of her friend. They were made to understand one another, these two, and now, unseen by the rest of the company, he raised her hand to his lips.

Chapter VII: A VALOROUS DEED

After this brief interval the old abbé was allowed to resume his narrative.

"I am quite prepared to admit," he now went on, "that Nature helped our rescuers all she could. It would have been more difficult, of course, had the afternoon been fine and clear. But even so, I am sure that the leader of that gallant league would have found some other means to save us. As it was, the drizzle mixed with sleet and driven by a cutting wind fretted the horses, and the driver had much ado to keep them in hand: a difficult task, as he himself was obliged to keep his head down and his hat pulled well over his eyes. So we went on for what seemed to me an eternity. I had completely lost count of time. We went on and on or rather were being dragged along in the jolting vehicle on the rough, muddy road until we wondered whether body and soul could bear the strain any longer, and would presently disintegrate, be forced to break apart and lose cohesion through the violence of those agonising shocks.

"A slight respite from this torture came presently when the road began to rise sharply, and the horses, sweating and panting, were put at foot-pace while they dragged the heavy coach up the incline, still in squelching mud. As I put it to you just now, I had lost count of time altogether; so, I know, had Monsieur le Marquis. The child was asleep in my arms, his curly head resting against my shoulder. His lips were parted and through them came at regular intervals a gentle, pathetic moan. The shades of evening were drawing in by now, darkness closed in around us; we were prisoners inside that jolting vehicle, aching in every limb, unable to see, unable to move, hearing nothing but the creaking of axles and of damp leather, and the squelching of horses' hoofs in the mud of the road.

"And suddenly out of the gloom there rang the report of a pistol-shot, followed immediately by a loud call: 'Stand and deliver!'"

At which palpitating point in the abbé's narrative one of the ladies gave a shrill cry, another exclaimed, breathless: "Oh, mon Dieu!" and there was a peremptory chorus of "Hush!" in which the men also joined.

"The first pistol-shot was followed by another and then by a third," Monsieur l'Abbé resumed. "The horses must then have reared and plunged wildly, for we were shaken right out of our seats and found ourselves on the floor of the coach in a tumbled heap one on the top of the other. We could hear a great deal of shouting, hoarse words of command from the officer in charge of our escort, and throughout it all a confused jumble of sounds, the jingle of harness, the stamping and plunging of the horses maddened by the noise, the creaking of the carriage wheels, dragged forwards and then backwards by their restless movements, and the constant lashing of wind and sleet beating against the carriage windows. Everything around the coach did, in fact, add to the confusion. We in the meanwhile did our best to extricate ourselves from our unpleasant position and had just succeeded in regaining our seats, when the carriage door was suddenly opened and the figure of a man appeared in the framework. He had a lantern in his hand which he swung about, lighting up the inside of the coach as well as our scared faces. The man wore a mask, and for all the world looked the very picture of a highway-man. The poor little Vicomte huddled up against me and began to whimper. I remember that at the moment my thoughts were busy with conjecture as to what would be preferable under these circumstances: to continue our fateful journey to Paris or to fall into the hands of highway robbers. Before I could make up my mind as to that, the man with the lantern said quite pleasantly: 'As you value your lives, keep as still as you can. There are four of us here working for

your safety.'

"And before we had recovered from the shock--the happy shock, I may tell you--which his words had brought to our nerves, the pseudo-highwayman had vanished and closed the carriage door behind him. We were left to marvel at this miracle which the good God had deigned to perform for our salvation. Monsieur le Marquis murmured faintly: 'It is surely that wonderful English gentleman they call the Scarlet Pimpernel who is working for us,' and after a time he sighed and said: 'If only my dear wife and my darling girls could have been here too.' But somehow I felt wonderfully elated. I had said my prayers of thankfulness to God, and after that I was granted the power to comfort our dear little Vicomte, by putting my arms round him and making him rest his head against my shoulder, and also to speak words of encouragement to M. le Marquis. Next to the good God himself, I felt in my very soul complete belief in the Scarlet Pimpernel and trust in his courage and his ability to save us."

The old man paused for a moment or two and mopped his streaming forehead. He had spoken at some length amidst breathless silence on the part of his hearers. Someone poured out a glass of water for him, and he drank this down eagerly. After this he resumed:

"As to what happened subsequently we knew nothing for certain till some days afterwards when we were on board an English ship and saw the shores of France receding from our gaze. Then it was that the details of our amazing rescue were related to me by one of the brave followers of the Scarlet Pimpernel. I believe that it was just boundless enthusiasm for his chief that caused him to speak to me as he did. He was not the Scarlet Pimpernel himself but was, I am sure, the leader's right-hand man. Let me tell you at once that I have pledged my word of honour that I would never reveal his identity under

any circumstances whatever. As a matter of fact, he was the pseudo-highwayman who came to comfort us when we were nearly scared to death. What he ultimately told us was in substance this: that the whole surprise attack was the foundation of an ingenious plan devised by his chief. It took no more than a few minutes to carry through. Surprise and swiftness were, as my informant said, the keynote of success. Had there been the slightest slackening of speed, a word of command wrongly interpreted, a mere second of hesitancy and the whole plan would certainly have failed. It was swift action that won the victory, because it brought about a confusion during which--can you believe it?--the Scarlet Pimpernel and his three followers were down on their knees in the squelching mud of the road, engaged in cutting the saddle-girths under the bellies of the troopers' horses. Imagine what pluck, what coolness such an action demanded in view of the fact that our brave rescuers were outnumbered three to one. It is, so I understand, a well-known form of attack practised in the East, fraught with deadly danger even when attackers are numerically stronger than their enemy. In our case I imagine that a kind of superstitious terror on the part of the revolutionary guard must also have played into the hands of those brave English gentlemen. The soldiers had no elbow-room for a good fight. The road was narrow, the afternoon light growing more and more dim. And with it all the constant cracking of pistol-shots, the snorting and terror of their horses, the confusion, the mêlée and the gathering gloom hindered the men from using what arms they had for fear of wounding their comrades or injuring their horses.

"We, of course, kept as quiet as our nerves would allow, marvelling what was happening and repeating our prayers to the good God for mercy and divine help. As a matter of fact, what was happening unbeknown to us remains to my mind the most wonderful act of audacity and contempt of danger I for one have ever heard of. It seems that at a given moment the Scarlet Pimpernel scrambled up

the box-seat of the coach, snatched the reins out of the driver's hands and in less time than it takes an old man to tell you of it he had calmed the poor horses down. This, of course, as I say, we did not know at the time, but it thrilled us poor prisoners, I can tell you, when we heard a voice, a wonderful, cheery and yet commanding voice speak the one word: 'Ready.'

"Was it intuition or inspiration, I know not; certain it is that I knew in my innermost soul, that the voice I heard at that moment, was that of the Scarlet Pimpernel. I can't tell you how I knew, but I did know, and I have often talked this over with Monsieur le Marquis and it seems that he too had the same conviction that I had. You must remember that we inside the coach know nothing of what was happening, and yet there we were suddenly convinced that the hour of our deliverance had come. Often since that fateful moment have I been stirred to the soul by the mere recollection of that voice speaking the word: 'Ready!' It was his voice, my friends! I believe I should know it again among thousands, or in the midst of the loudest uproar."

The priest had indeed no cause to complain of a want of attention on the part of his audience. Men and women alike hung upon every word he uttered. They held their breath, their glowing eyes were fixed upon the old man's face.

"But, M. l'Abbé . . ." one lady was heard gasping through the breathless silence that hung on this vast assembly.

"Yes, dear lady?" the abbé responded.

"As you say you would know the voice of the Scarlet Pimpernel again . . ."

"I should . . . anywhere . . ." he assented.

"Then you are the one to identify our mysterious hero . . . to tell us who he is and where, oh where, we are to find him."

This raised a wave of agitation, and a murmur of excitement. But Monsieur l'Abbé only shrugged.

"Alas!" he said. "I have not heard that voice again--only in my dreams."

"If you do not proceed, Monsieur l'Abbé," here interposed Sir Percy Blakeney with a genial laugh, "a number of ladies here will faint on the spot."

"Oh, yes, do go on, we beg of you, Monsieur l'Abbé," the ladies pleaded, and one of them added lightly:

"See, even Sir Percy, the arch scoffer, hangs upon your lips."

"There is not much more to relate," the priest now resumed. "I understand that the word 'Ready' was a command from the chief to his followers to take immediate cover, which they did, whilst he himself with one light click of the tongue whipped up the team, which plunged down the incline at breakneck speed.

"My informant, bless him, cowering with his two friends in the gloom of the thicket, told me that one of the most thrilling moments in the day's adventure was to see the revolutionary soldiers trying to give chase. Had they been circus-riders they might have given a good account of themselves, but never having learned how to sit a horse with their saddle-girths severed, they did not get very far. The three lieutenants of your gallant hero did not stay to see the rest of the fun. They had their orders and made their way to the place assigned to them by their chief. As to the rest of our journey it has always seemed both to Monsieur le Marquis and to me nothing but a dream. I

remember--but only vaguely--the dash down the forest road, and subsequently several halts for the night in wayside huts. I remember the three of us being ordered at one time to don the tattered garb of road-menders, and being jolted along interminable roads in a rickety cart driven by an old hunchback who appeared dumb as well as deaf; and I remembering staggering with surprise when I saw that same old mudlark straighten out his back and throw a purse of money to one of his own kind, who after that drove the rickety cart all the way to the coast.

"Many less important events do I remember also. We were I reckoned five days on the way, five days during which I was haunted by a clear, commanding voice calling 'Ready' and by the vision of an out-at-elbows' hunchback whose body presently appeared as tall and as straight as that of a young god, and who threw a purse of gold about as if it were dross.

"And that, your Royal Highness, my lords and ladies," the abbé now concluded, "is all that I can tell you of the great miracle accomplished on our behalf and under the guidance of God by the finest and bravest man that ever walked this earth."

"Marvellous!"

"Prodigious!"

"Incredible!"

"Quite uncanny!"

These were some of the words that flew from mouth to mouth. It had been a glorious story, told with the simplicity of truth. The audience rose soon after that and separate groups were formed, groups in which the palpitating tale of a man's heroism drove from the most

flippant minds all desire for frivolous chatter. The Prince of Wales held Monsieur l'Abbé in earnest conversation. There were many here present this evening who vowed that His Royal Highness was deep in the secrets of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, and could if he had a mind reveal the identity of the popular hero. Lady Ffoulkes had edged up close to Lady Blakeney and these two beautiful women, wives of two brave English gentlemen, exchanged glances not only of pride but also of anxiety for those precious lives so valiantly and constantly risked in the defence of the helpless and the innocent.

At the other end of the room a group of ladies were trying to remember the famous doggerel which that inimitable dandy, Sir Percy Blakeney, as great a poet as he was a sportsman, had conceived while tying his cravat.

"It went thus," Lady Blanche declared: "They seek him in England, they . . ."

"No! no! no," broke in the eldest Miss Lockroy. "I am sure there was no word about England . . . or France . . ."

"Yes, there was," asserted pretty Miss Norreys; "I remember the word England very distinctly."

"Besides, it stands to reason," argued another fashionable beauty, "they are seeking him in England, aren't they?"

"Wouldn't it be simpler, ladies," one of the men suggested, "to settle the argument by referring it to the author of the deathless rhyme?"

"Yes! Yes! Of course," the ladies agreed.

"Sir Percy! Where is Sir Percy?"

All eyes were turned to the window embrasure against which the darling of society had last been seen reclining with an air of resignation.

"Sir Percy!" the ladies reiterated. "Where is Sir Percy?"

But they looked for him in vain. That Prince of Dandies had, incontinently, it seems, taken his elegant self off to a more congenial atmosphere.

Chapter VIII: A ROYAL FRIEND

Madame la Duchesse de Roncevaux was preparing to bid good night to her guests. They were all standing in a wide semicircle at one end of the ball-room waiting for His Royal Highness to give the signal for departure before they in their turn took their leave. This he did raising his hostess's hand to his lips.

"We have spent a delightful evening in your charming house, Madame," he said graciously; "one that none of our friends will, I warrant, ever forget."

The frou-frou of brocaded skirts once more swept the parquet floor with a sound like the buzzing of bees; it came as an accompaniment to His Highness's departure. After he had taken final leave of Madame la Duchesse the Prince turned to Sir Percy Blakeney, who with Marguerite on his arm was also ready to take his leave.

"Nay, man," he said jovially. "I won't let you go quite so easily. You are coming with us for we want a turn at hazard."

He gave a gracious nod to Blakeney, who murmured obediently:

"As Your Highness commands."

"I vow," the Prince went on, "I was so thrilled by Monsieur l'Abbé's narration I must do something to take my mind off those horrors that go on continually the other side of the Channel. Come, man, I'll challenge you. The best of five throws, with doubles or quits a time. Lady Blakeney," he went on, addressing Marguerite, "will you honour my poor house by accompanying us? I feel I shall be in luck to-night and win some of that rogue's fortune which is far too great for the needs of any man. The Goddess of Fortune and the Goddess of

Love have him under their special care, he cannot expect Dame Chance to favour him also."

Thus chattering with his wonted good humour, His Royal Highness offered his arm to Marguerite who took it and led the way down the monumental staircase closely followed by Sir Percy. After he and his immediate entourage had left, the party broke up. There was a general rush for cloaks and mantles, calls outside for chaises and coaches, endless chattering and shrill little cries as in an aviary of love-birds.

Soon the whole company had dispersed, coaches and calèches rattled over the cobblestones of old London in this or that direction, and the magnificent mansion in St. James's Square was shuttered and presently was wrapped in sleep.

The Prince of Wales who had Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney with him, was being driven round in the royal equipage to Carlton House Terrace. Not a word was spoken during the drive. It was quite a short one. All three occupants of the carriage were absorbed in thought.

Half an hour later the royal host and his two privileged visitors were closeted in the small library adjoining the enfilade of reception-rooms. Attendants and servants had been dismissed and three chairs disposed in front of the mantelpiece in which blazed a cheerful fire of logs. In one of these reclined the rotund form of the future King of England; Lady Blakeney sat beside him, her luminous eyes fixed on the fitful play of the flames. Sir Percy was standing behind these two, close to a table on which was placed a steaming bowl of punch. He was intent on ladling out the hot liquid into a glass which he then placed at the elbow of his royal host. The latter took a long draught, smacked his lips and pronounced the drink to be first-rate.

"There is one thing, Lady Blakeney," he said jovially, "that this

scapegrace of a husband of yours can do to perfection and that is to brew a night-cap. This punch is superlatively good."

He had another drink, cleared his throat, and fidgeted with his lace-edged handkerchief. Obviously he had something to say and knew not how to begin.

"You have guessed, gracious lady, I'm sure," he began at last, "the reason why I have asked you to come here to-night knowing well how tired and anxious you must be."

Marguerite murmured: "Yes!" almost inaudibly. She seemed unable to speak.

"I desired your presence while I gave a serious talking to this mauvais sujet."

He then turned to Sir Percy.

"Blakeney," he commanded, "come hither and stand before me while I impart to you our royal behest."

Blakeney smiling and indifferent at once came forward and, leaning against the tall mantelpiece, stood facing His Royal Highness who then resumed:

"While we held converse with M. l'Abbé Prud'hon and afterwards when he gave us such a graphic account of the heroic way in which . . ."

He broke off with a jovial guffaw for Blakeney had made a sign of obvious impatience and put up a hand in protest.

"All right, all right man!" he said good-humouredly, "but don't forget that I who represent the King my father am speaking to you now and I

forbid you to interrupt. I was going to say that while our friend the emotional old priest was talking I watched your face, and I may say that this gracious lady here, your wife, did the same, and we both came to the conclusion that you were then and there making up your mind to go back to France in order to effect the rescue of Madame de Saint-Lucque and her children. That is so, is it not?"

He looked up enquiringly at Blakeney, trying to read in his somewhat clumsy way what went on behind those deep-set blue eyes with their far-away look of absorption in one single overwhelming purpose. How could he tell? How could anyone guess the workings of this self-centred mind intent on one thing and one only: the fulfillment of that one purpose? Indeed Blakeney's gaze at this moment, though fixed on his royal friend, was obviously unseeing. It took in nothing of these luxurious surroundings in happy England, the ease, the comfort and the peace. It had come to rest far away over there in France where a helpless woman and two innocent children would soon be facing death unless . . . And at the thought a happy smile came curling round his lips, and a great sigh not only of longing but of resolve rose from out the depths of his heart. The smile lingered until he saw Marguerite's lovely face turned appealingly up to his, saw her sweet mouth a-quiver with silent anguish and her lovely eyes shining with unshed tears. Then the smile faded from his lips, and a kind of grey veil seemed to spread right over his face. For one moment only. Just a few seconds and that look was gone, the grey veil lifted by some ghostly hand. Back came the smile and with it the merry laugh which proclaimed high animal spirits and a carefree heart.

"Blakeney, are you listening?" the Prince demanded sternly.

"At Your Highness's commands."

"My commands are these, man, and note the word 'command.' I am

not asking or suggesting. I am ordering you to accompany us to Bath to-morrow where we desire to spend the next month in taking the waters necessary for our health."

A few second's silence and Blakeney put in with seeming irrelevance:

"The thaw has set in, sir. They have resumed hunting in the Shires."

"Well! You may hunt till the frost begins again if you like. But it is Bath or the Shires, understand."

"Your Highness would not forbid me to hunt then?"

"Certainly not."

"Yet you would forbid me to go after a deadlier quarry than the fox. You deign to tell me that I may hunt till the frost begins again. And I will obey you, sir, and run a pack of wolves to earth who are after an unfortunate woman and two defenceless children. I will hunt them down and redeem my solemn word to a man who is breaking his heart at thought of what his wife and little children must endure in the hands of inhuman brutes. You would not forbid me to hunt the fox, sir. He has done nothing more heinous than rob a hen-roost or two. Then why should I run him to earth and let the wolves have their way?"

"Sport, man, sport!" His Highness broke in impatiently, "Fox-hunting is the noblest sport on earth, and methought you were a sportsman."

"And I'll back my favourite sport against any that has ever been invented for whipping up the blood of a man and making him feel akin to the gods. And now in winter with the keen air fanning one's cheeks, with the night wrapping you round with its sable mantle, with woman or child clinging to you, their weak arms holding tightly to your waist,

with human wolves behind you, while you ride for dear life through unknown country, riding, riding, not knowing where you may land, out of one death-trap into another, that, Your Highness, is the sport for me. I have tasted of it and so I know. Ask Ffoulkes, ask Tony, ask any of the others, heroes they, every one of them. Fine men all, brave men, and all of them obeying my slightest command. Sport, sir! Had you but tasted it once, you would never ask me to forgo it again!"

Never once did Blakeney raise his voice while he spoke. It never even shook. But the words came tumbling out of his mouth with the rapidity of running water. His voice while it was pitched low and as if muffled, became more sonorous, more vibrant, compelling attention with the overwhelming force of the passion within. He was looking straight out before him, with head thrown back, seeing as it were the vision which he had invoked: the loneliness, the blackness of the night, and those weak arms clinging round his waist. Hearing the thunder of hoofs behind him, scenting the hot breath of wolves in pursuit, and the approach of death which mayhap had marked him for its own. Ride on, thou gay adventurer! Ride on! For dear life, not your own but theirs, the weak, the innocent, the helpless. Ride on! Ride on! while beneficent darkness still lingers and the first grey streak of dawn tinges the east with its light. Ride! gaily ride while the thunder of hoofs behind you grows weaker and slowly dies away, and the breath of human wolves thirsting for blood is lost in the odour of the frosty air. Yes! here was the adventurer born, the reckless gambler, ready to toss his life against any odds of chance, forgetting everything save the thrill of the moment when even love is compelled to yield to the unconquerable spirit of dare-devilment in the name of mercy and the call of the oppressed for self-sacrifice.

Even the Prince, sybarite though he was, was held in thrall by the fascination of this extraordinary personality: courtier, lover, prince of dandies and king of adventurers. Less than an hour ago he had seen

him an a ball-room dressed in the latest fashion, with priceless lace at throat and wrists, bandying inanities with brainless women, the butt and darling of society, the maker of merriment and laughter. How difficult it was to imagine this same man in rough and scanty clothing, unwashed, unshorn, dwelling in derelict huts on vermin-infested boards, or cowering in the scrub like some wild animal in its lair.

He, the Prince of Wales, the future King of England, had listened to that man in silence realising how futile his royal commands must sound after the inspired words of this visionary. And when Sir Percy had finished speaking, the silence still persisted. Any comment after this would almost seem like sacrilege. There was a mission here expounded that must surely have its inspiration from the God of Love Himself.

After a time the silence, broken only by the solemn ticking of a monumental clock over the mantelpiece, became strangely oppressive. It seemed as if Fate had taken her stand at the gambler's elbow and defied the two opponents--the wife, the friend--who pitted their weakness against her strength. Blakeney himself was the first to break in with his shy laugh and a quaint ejaculation:

"Good Lord! It must be that demmed punch getting into my head. Will Your Highness forgive me?"

"Forgive you? What have I to forgive?"

"Disobedience to royal commands for one thing, sir. The way I've made a fool of myself for another."

"You are determined to go then?"

"Would Your Highness have an English gentleman break his solemn word?"

"The risks are too great, my friend," the Prince insisted. "You are getting too well known over there. And you will be up against a woman this time, remember."

"Marvellous thought, isn't it, sir?"

"And women have sharper vision than men."

"I hope this one has. If she is as stupid as my old friend Chauvelin she won't give us a good run for our money."

"Percy," the Prince protested, "you are incorrigible."

And thus was the incident closed, the interview at an end. Soon Blakeney begged permission to take his leave. He had ordered his coach to be brought round to Carlton House Terrace for he knew that there was nothing Marguerite loved better than a drive through the night air after ball or rout in a stuffy atmosphere.

The major-domo was summoned to see that the coach was duly at the gate. For a few minutes while Sir Percy went to have a last look at his horses Marguerite was left alone with the Prince of Wales. He took hold of her hand and raised it deferentially to his lips.

"I have done my best, Lady Blakeney," he pleaded.

"I am eternally grateful, Your Highness," she murmured.

He went on with unusual solemnity:

"I am not a religious man, gracious lady, but to-night I will implore the good God on my knees to guard your husband from any kind of danger."

After Blakeney and his wife had left, the Prince of Wales remained for a long time absorbed in a kind of contemplation. He had seldom if ever been so moved as he had been to-night by the stripping naked of a soul--the soul of his friend whom he had never truly understood until now. And he, the voluptuary, the hedonist, felt for the first--perhaps the only time in his life--a vague longing, almost an envy of that spirit which animated the personality of the Scarlet Pimpernel, and gave to him with all the hardships and selflessness necessary for the fulfilment of a self-imposed duty an overflowing cup of happiness and of joy.

"God grant her persuasive eloquence," he murmured to himself, when the time came to retire for the night. He was thinking of Marguerite, and the futile appeal she, poor woman, would also make to keep her beloved from fulfilling that duty which in this case might so easily lead to his death: one mistake, one slight mischance and one of the most precious lives in the land would be sacrificed on the altar of an ideal.

Chapter IX: THE BITTER LESSON

Marguerite had hardly spoken a word during the interview between her husband and his royal friend. She had sat by gazing into the fitful flames of the log-fire and listening, listening while torturing anxiety went on gnawing at her heart. Nor did she speak during the drive back to their home in Richmond. She loved the drive and to-night the air--which was damp and soft and had brought about the thaw--was sweet and invigorating. The four greys seemed to have the devil in their legs and Percy had another in his sensitive hands. He drove at breakneck speed over the cobblestones of suburban London, and over the squelchy road by the river.

An hour or so later Marguerite, having taken off her brocaded gown, donned a comfortable wrap and dismissed her maids, went to find her husband in the library where she knew he would be sitting now working away and elaborating the plan which he had formed for the rescue of Madame de Saint-Lucque and her children.

The evening in the salon of the Duchesse de Roncevaux had been torture to Marguerite, for while the abbé spoke so eloquently of the Scarlet Pimpernel she had detected every change in Percy's face. Others present only saw in him the fashionable dandy, the fop, the nincompoop who readily allowed himself to be the butt of empty-headed women, but she, his wife, knew just what was going on in his mind: she saw every subtle expression in the eyes, the flicker of the lids, the almost imperceptible set of his firm lips, and clenching of his hand.

But she never questioned him about his plans. She had learned the bitter lesson of waiting. She knew that no power on earth--not even his love for her--could move him once he had heard the call of innocents in distress.

Just when she reached the bottom of the stairs, the library door was thrown open by Percy's confidential valet. She heard Percy's voice from inside the room saying in French: "I will give you further instructions in the morning." A voice, unknown to her, replied: "At your commands, milor."

A small, spare man dressed in sober black came out of the room followed by the valet, who remained at attention whilst Marguerite, in her turn, passed into the library.

Percy was sitting at his desk with a map of Northern France spread out before him. He appeared to be tracing with one finger a route which he had marked out on it. At sight of that map and of Percy's obvious absorption, a pitiful cry was wrung from the poor woman's aching heart. She put her arms round him and murmured in a desperate appeal:

"If you love me, do not go!"

It was useless, of course. She knew that well enough. All he did was to take hold of her hands and press her soft palms against his lips. But his eyes soon wandered back to his desk. He picked up a paper on which were written a few lines in a small foreign-looking hand.

"Listen to this, m'dear," he said softly. "Our loyal friend Chartier of the Comédie Française has sent me the report I asked him for by special courier. You know how well informed he always is. He has such marvellous opportunities in the theatre and out of it. And this is what he says:

"Chauvelin has been summoned back to Paris. Is not expected to return to Mézières for some time. Has reported to the C. of P.S. on the subject of the St. L's. Committee is sending their most famous

spy to track down the woman and her two children. His name is André Renaud. He will arrive in M., so I understand, sometime in February. Up to the hour of writing no trace has been found of the woman and children, but believed to be still in the province not far from M."

He read the letter through quite slowly, as if he meant her to weigh every word. He then folded up the paper and slipped it in the inner pocket of his coat, murmuring softly the while:

"A stage coach plies between Barlemont in Belgium over the frontier to Mézières. That will be the best route for us to follow."

"Percy," she entreated, her voice choked with sobs.

Once again he pressed her soft palms to his lips.

"Light of my life," he said in a whisper close to her ear, "pray to God that I may not get there too late."

"Percy," she reiterated with infinite tenderness, "do not go."

She sank down on her knees. His arm rested on the arm of his chair. She laid her head down on it. Her hair fell in soft golden ripples all over her neck and shoulders. She felt his hand gently stroking her hair.

"Have no fear for me, my beloved," he said lightly, "those devils will never get me, I'll swear. But I am sorry," he added with a rueful smile, "that I shall not come to grips with my friend Chauvelin this time. This André Renaud won't be nearly so amusing. As for Mam'zelle Guillotine . . . Well! A nous deux, Mam'zelle."

He paused, gave a light-hearted laugh and then said with sudden

earnestness:

"Joy of my heart! Have I not pledged my word to Saint-Lucque?"

Yes! he had pledged his word. Marguerite knew that well enough, also that he had proudly asserted: "The Scarlet Pimpernel never fails."

Nor would he fail, of that Marguerite was convinced. Strange as it may seem she knew within herself even at this hour of torturing anxiety, that Madame de Saint-Lucque and the two little girls would be brought safely to England--and that very soon. But it was his life, his precious life, that was more and more certainly in jeopardy every time he went over to France. His anonymity was no longer absolute. Putting his arch-enemy Chauvelin aside, there must be quite a number of others who would recognise him as the Scarlet Pimpernel directly they saw him. Had he not spent weeks in the Conciergerie prison, when those devils tried to starve him into revealing the whereabouts of the unfortunate Dauphin? His warders and tormentors saw him day after day: any one of them would know him again, would even, perhaps, be able to pierce his cleverest disguise. And there were others! So many, many others and all of them on the look-out for the big reward promised for the capture of the English spy.

Useless? Of course it was useless. To-morrow or perhaps the next day he would steal away in the night, and she, Marguerite, would be left to mourn and to wait. Her arms tightened round him and she murmured in his ear:

"If you go, I go with you."

Before he could move or utter another word she had passed soundlessly out of the room.

And the day after next the social chronicle contained the announcement that Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney had left Richmond on a visit to friends in Leicestershire where they intended staying while the mild weather lasted. For the next twenty-four hours this somewhat sudden departure of these two leaders of fashion gave ample food for gossip over the coffee-cups. But everyone agreed that Sir Percy was eccentric. No one really knew how to take him, or Lady Blakeney for the matter of that. And then there were other matters to gossip about: the probable marriage of the Prince of Wales in the near future for one thing: the last phase of the trial of Warren Hastings for another.

And of course the Prince of Dandies and his lady would soon be back, for the thaw was not likely to last.

Book Three

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Chapter X: A UNIQUE PERSONAGE

There is actually no authentic portrayal in existence of Gabrielle Damiens, the daughter of the "regicide," who was known during the early days of the revolution throughout the province of Artois as "Mam'zelle Guillotine." The only inkling one has of what she probably looked like comes from a sketch attributed to Louis David, at that time Director of Fine Arts and member of the National Convention. It is without doubt, like all David's work, an idealised representation of that odious, if remarkable woman. Even through the artist's pure and classical treatment of his subject, the woman's coarseness, not to say brutality, is apparent in the low forehead, the wide flat nostrils, the prominent eyes beneath the heavy brows, and above all in the full thick lips slightly parted, displaying a row of teeth sharp and long like the fangs of a wolf.

Nevertheless, one or two intimate chronicles of the time assert that Gabrielle Damiens had une beauté de diable. Thus might a Queen of Darkness be beautiful. Her figure was tall and well-proportioned suggesting great physical strength, and though her dark eyes seldom betrayed any emotion save of fury or hatred, her coarse lips would sometimes part in a smile, not of joy but of sensual pleasure which fascinated when it did not repel. Women, even the most ignoble harpies of this revolutionary period hated and feared her, but men like Marat and Danton looked upon her as the arch-fiend of the revolution and worshipped her as those of their kind worshipped the devil.

It was said of that inhuman monster Marat that he had been passionately in love with her.

Gabrielle Damiens occupied an apartment in what had been until a year ago the episcopal palace in Mézières. The bishop was now

deposed. He was in hiding, so it was thought, somewhere in the forest, looked after surreptitiously by a few faithful peasants of the district, who did this act of charity at risk of their lives. The revolutionary government took over the palace, stripped it of everything of value that happened to be in it, desecrated the chapel and converted the fine reception-rooms on the ground floor into offices for the use of the local Committee of Public Safety, which now held its sittings in what had been the bishop's private oratory.

The floor above was assigned to Citizeness Gabrielle Damiens at her special request for her private residence. It was her friend Maximilien Robespierre, one of the most prominent members in the Convention who had obtained for her the position of Public Executioner in his native Province of Artois. The story of how a woman came to be appointed to such an odious post was a curious one. When Gabrielle Damiens was liberated from the Bastille after sixteen years' incarceration, and when full recollection came to her of how and by whose influence she came to be arrested, her one dominating thought was Revenge. Her mind, which had always been active, concentrated on schemes to accomplish that one supreme object. All sorts of different plans presented themselves before her in turn—spying, denunciations, underground work of every sort and kind—she rejected them all. Her diabolic temperament thirsted not for revenge only but for the actual blood of her enemies, of Saint-Lucque, who had engineered her incarceration in the Bastille, a living tomb in which she spent the best sixteen years of her life. And Saint-Lucque, it seems, was married and happy with his wife and young children. At thought of them Gabrielle Damiens became like those legendary vampires thirsting for the life-blood of the entire brood.

But how to attain her heart's desire? Gabrielle thought and thought and gradually a plan formed itself in her mind. A scheme. Only a vision at first but with the possibility of becoming a realisation, more

wonderful, more stupendous than anything that had ever been done before. She saw herself like Sanson of Paris or Carrier of Nantes, the promoter and artisan of her own desires. She saw her hands, those large hands of hers with the short spatulate finger-tips dealing out death not vicariously but actually; deaths which she had for years madly longed to witness. The guillotine! Why not?

What a vision! What if it became a reality? She foresaw difficulties, of course. Even in these topsy-turvy times a female wielder of the guillotine had not yet been thought of. But Robespierre was her friend and so was Marat. They were men of influence and both had the same kind of temperament as herself, cruel, vengeful and unscrupulous. It is to them that she turned. They whom she presently consulted, whose prestige she invoked. She was sure of Robespierre's approval. And Marat . . . ? Well, Marat would come to heel like a snarling dog whatever she demanded of him. A flash of her eyes, a touch of her hand and he became her slave.

She sent for those two men one day. There was a short recess in the sittings of the Convention at the time and Robespierre had taken the opportunity of going down to his native province of Artois on business of his own, whilst Marat at Gabrielle's summons posted at once from Paris as he would have done from the furthest confines of France if she had called to him.

And so they came to her apartment which had once been a saintly bishop's oratory, and Gabrielle Damiens, "the regicide's daughter," stood before them, tall, spare, admirably poised. She was dressed like a man in crimson shirt and breeches: the sleeves of her shirt were rolled up to display her muscular arms, her bare feet were thrust into sabots.

"Do I not look like a man?" she challenged them. Robespierre nodded assent. Marat measured her with a tigerish glance.

"Mam'zelle Guillotine, what?" he murmured raucously.

"You call me Gabriel Damiens," the woman went on, "and you will present me to your committees as the son, not the daughter of François Damiens who was tortured and put to death by cowardly aristos to conceal their own misdeeds. You will explain that I was imprisoned in the Bastille for sixteen years for being my father's son. A good story eh?" she concluded defiantly.

"Excellent!" was Maximilien Robespierre's curt comment whilst Marat looked her up and down and gave a harsh laugh.

"You'll get found out pretty soon, ma belle," he said.

The woman shrugged: "Would that matter?" she retorted. "If I do my work well, which I certainly will, they will be satisfied and not care whether I am man or woman."

And so it came to pass that the Province of Artois boasted of that unique personage, a female executioner. She did not get found out till after those awful days in September when two hundred helpless prisoners were massacred in the prisons of Paris and in the surging crowd the murderers had their clothes torn off their backs. "Gabriel Damiens," summoned from Artois by Danton to give a hand in the butchery, accomplished, they said, the prodigies of patriotic ardour, by slaying no fewer than twenty women with "his" own hand. The revolutionary government, overruled at the time by the Extremists, desired to reward those who had served it well on that horrible occasion and Gabrielle Damiens had her reward by seeing her appointment confirmed as Public Executioner in the Province of Artois, despite her sex. She had not overestimated her valor when she said to her friends: "I'll do my work well! They will be satisfied with me."

And they were. Gabrielle Damiens, whenever the guillotine in the Province happened to be idle, filled in her time with public speaking. The days were already dawning when the tigers of the revolution were ready to devour one another. Denunciation against one party was eagerly listened to by the other. Extremists were at the throats of the Moderates. Failing them they were at one another's. Not one man who had been foolhardy enough to throw himself into the vortex of public life felt that his head was safe upon his shoulders and the daughter of François Damiens "the regicide" saw to it that those who were avowedly or covertly her enemies became the victims of those who were her friends.

She had a caustic tongue and great power of oratory. Inflamed by her passions of hate and revenge she knew how to sway the populace by fierce attacks on those who had incurred her wrath. She would stand, as Camille Desmoulins had done four years before in Paris, on a table in the public park, holding a pistol in each hand; her harsh voice would ring out above the heads of the crowd gathered round her improvised rostrum. She knew, none better, how to pillory aristos and capitalists in the face of this poor, half-starved multitude, as potential assassins ready to sell the Republic to foreign usurers for gold. They would listen spell-bound, shivering under their miserable rags, a prey to a nameless fear of coming events which would mean death for them, and probably starvation for their wives and children.

And Gabrielle, feeling that she held these people by the magic of her eloquence, would stand there with flashing eyes, her cropped hair standing up on end around her head like a disordered mane, a blood-red flush covering her face like a veil. To the men her fascination soon became irresistible. When she spoke she could do with them what she liked, twist them round her little finger. Her face had in it at times an almost demoniac expression. She was no longer

young, and loneliness, semi-starvation for sixteen years in the Bastille had robbed her of any charm she may have had in youth, but there was no denying that she had an extraordinary and compelling personality; and that her very brutishness had a certain attraction for these half-crazed revolutionists.

Chapter XI: BAFFLED

Close upon a year had gone by since Gabrielle Damiens had donned male attire, and exercised the gruesome profession of Public Executioner. A year during which her hatred for an entire caste must--one would have thought--have been appeased to a certain extent, for in the Province of Artois, through its proximity to the capital where the storm of revolution raged more furiously than elsewhere, the guillotine wielded by her hand had been at work day after day, and noble heads, intellectual and saintly heads, had fallen like corn under the harvester's scythe. But Gabrielle's blood-lust knew no appeasement yet. Her desire for vengeance demanded the death of those who had ruined her life and made of it for sixteen years a real hell upon earth. It was Saint-Lucque now Marquis of that name, it was his wife and his children on whom Gabrielle had concentrated the full venom of her wrath. It was for their blood that her very soul had thirsted ever since she had been turned out of the Bastille a free woman, physically free, but an abject slave to her passions. Ever since that day she had worked for their destruction, had put spies on their track when they left their chateau in Artois and became wanderers on the face of France as so many of their kindred had done. At last the spies had run the head of the house to earth, he and his son, a boy of fourteen, who were hiding in the little village of Orcival close to Rocroi, under the protection of the old curé of the parish who had not yet been dispossessed of his benefice owing to the affection in which he was held by the village folk.

The old man had been expecting dispossession, with it arrest and the inevitable guillotine. It was the usual fate of those servants of God who were prepared to give up their lives rather than fail in their spiritual duties to their flock. He had been tutor to the young Vicomte de Saint-Lucque, and had gladly given shelter under his roof to Monsieur le Marquis and the boy, while Madame la Marquise and the

two little girls remained in hiding in another corner of the province not far from the Belgian frontier. The blow fell with such suddenness that neither Monsieur le Marquis and his son, nor the priest himself were able to escape arrest: they were incarcerated in the police commissariat of Mézières and the following day found them on the way to Paris for trial on a charge of high treason against the Republic. This was for Gabrielle Damiens the happiest day she had experienced for the past twenty years. Trusting in her powers of persuasion, she had no doubt that she could induce the authorities up in Paris to allow the execution of the three aristos to take place in Mézières. "It would," she argued in a letter which she wrote to the Public Prosecutor, "help to quell certain subversive tendencies in the province, and demonstrate as nothing else could do the power and the determination of the Republic to deal mercilessly with traitors and counter-revolutionists."

Twenty-four hours later the blow came crashing down over her fondest hopes. The coach which conveyed the aristos to Paris was held up by highwaymen in the late afternoon in the forest of Mézières. The brigands had commenced operations by cutting the saddle-girths under the bellies of the soldiers' horses, had held a pistol at the driver's head and driven away the coach under cover of the gathering night. The aristos had vanished. What the brigands had done with them was not yet known. But Gabrielle was not deceived by the story. She knew well enough that the pseudo-highwaymen were none other than the gang of English spies who were the avowed enemies of revolutionary France and spent their time in endeavouring to cheat the Republic of her right to punish the traitors who had conspired against her safety. In that endeavour be it said those abominable spies always succeeded. The escape of the ci-devant aristos and of the priest Prud'hon was a case in point.

Fuming with rage like a wild beast baffled and foiled of its prey,

Gabrielle Damiers appeared before the local Committee of Public Safety, in sitting the morning after the outrage, spouting forth invective and abuse, coupled with threats which caused every man there to put his hand up to his cravat. Every member of the august assembly endeavored to fasten the responsibility of the affair on his nearest neighbour, and tempers ran high while Gabrielle raged and stormed like a harpy.

The sergeant who had been in charge of the escort received a full measure of censure and vituperation. He had given a detailed account as far as he was able of the extraordinary event from the moment when the first pistol-shot was fired and the words "Halt and deliver!" rang suddenly out of the gloom. This was immediately followed by a general mêlée, and when a few minutes later the coach was incontinently driven away and he and the troopers were on the point of re-mounting they found that their saddle-girths had been tampered with and they, not being circus-riders were unable to give chase.

"With that infernal din going on," the unfortunate man went on to explain, "with pistols cracking all the time, with hoarse words of command from the unseen foe, with the plunging and rearing of horses and the creaking of coach-wheels, I could not get my men to hear me. They had drawn their sabres but found that in the narrow road, with the thicket on either side and with the fast gathering gloom they could not use their arms without fear of wounding their horses or their comrades. Not one of us had actually seen the attackers, they seemed to have emerged out of the ground, and at once to have vanished again. Rain and sleet were lashed into our faces by the wind. It was hell and pandemonium, I assure you, citizens. You may send me to the guillotine, but all I could say before my judges would be to repeat the story that I have told you now, which is the truth."

The sergeant was not sent to the guillotine for the simple reason that revolutionary France, now at war with half Europe, had need of all the man-power she could muster. High-placed officers might be put to death without compunction for they were aristos and therefore traitors to the Republic, but men like this wretched sergeant were trained soldiers, and they were of the people, nor could they very well be spared. The man, then, was kept in gaol for a week: he was browbeaten and kept in constant fear of death, until the Committee of Public Safety was satisfied that his spirit was sufficiently broken, after which he was sent with written orders to the General commanding the revolutionary troops in the eastern provinces that he be put in the thickest of the fight so that he might have a chance of showing his mettle and redeeming by outstanding bravery his tarnished reputation.

So much for him. It is to be supposed that out there on the Belgian front he spent many a sleepless night brooding over the extraordinary events of that memorable afternoon, and that the story of the mysterious English spies and their legendary chief was told and retold many a time round the bivouac fires, together with several additions and improvements to make it more palpitating than it already was!

Chapter XII: CHAUVELIN TAKES A HAND

A few days later in the luxurious apartment on the first floor of the episcopal palace Gabrielle Damiens was pacing up and down the floor like a hungry panther that has been cheated of its prey. Her dark hair, still innocent of grey, stood out all round her head in a crazy tangle, for she had been pulling at it with both hands whenever a fresh access of rage got beyond her control. Hoarse ejaculations found their way from time to time through her quivering lips. She would then pause by the centre table, pick up a bottle and pour some of its contents into a glass. The liquid was clear like water. But it was water only in name: eau de vie, water of life, Gabrielle drank it down at one gulp.

"The fools!" she muttered thickly after she had drunk; "the cowards!"

And then she went on: "If I had my way with them . . ."

"You would deprive the armies of the Republic of a number of good soldiers," a quiet voice here broke in. "Is that it?"

"Bah!" the woman retorted, "the armies have no use for cowards!"

The man who had spoken was sitting by the table, with elbows resting thereon. His long claw-like fingers were interlocked and made a support for his chin. He was a small spare man who would have appeared insignificant but for his pale, sunken eyes, which now and then flashed with a cold, glittering light like those of a cat on the prowl in the night. He was dressed in sober black and wore his dark hair tied at the nape of the neck with a black bow.

"It is not like you, Citizeness Damiens," he went on, with a sarcastic curl of his thin lips, "to brood over the past."

The woman shrugged.

"I would have liked to have the handling of that sergeant's head," she admitted.

"Of course you would," the man responded, with a note of irony in his even voice. He paused for a moment or two, his pale eyes fixed on Gabrielle and then went on coolly:

"But you would rather have the handling of the ci-devant Marquise de Saint-Lucque and her daughters. Am I not right?"

Gabrielle made no immediate response to this. She had come to a halt in the middle of the room with a half-filled glass of eau de vie in her hand, which she was on the point of conveying to her lips. At the name, Saint-Lucque, she suddenly became as if petrified. She stood absolutely still with the glass in her hand half-way up to her lips, rigid as a granite statue. Her face was entirely expressionless, like a death-mask, her eyes were entirely glassy, her lips were pressed tightly together. The man noted all this and smiled. It was a complacent, satisfied kind of smile, and his head nodded up and down once or twice.

"I am right, am I not, citizeness?" he reiterated after a moment or two.

Gabrielle drank down the eau de vie. Life appeared to come back into her eyes. She put the glass down and sank into a chair as if exhausted, passed her outspread fingers through her tousled hair, gave a deep sigh and said finally:

"Chauvelin, if you mention that woman again, I believe I should strangle you."

Chauvelin gave a dry chuckle.

"As bad as that, citizeness?" he queried.

"And worse," she retorted.

"And useless, shall we say?" the man went on flippantly. "My death would serve no purpose as far as you are concerned, and it would be good old Sanson of Paris who would have the handling of your handsome head."

He paused a moment, his pale eyes fixed on the woman as a snake fixes its eyes on the prey it covets. She said nothing either. Her mouth was set in a line of obstinacy and her eyes still glowered with fury. And so there was silence between these two, while up on the wall the old white-faced clock ticked away the seconds of time with irritating monotony. Chauvelin picked up a long quill, held it between two claw-like fingers and toyed with it, tap-tapping it against the table. He never took his eyes off her, noted every quiver of her over-strung nerves, and the power of his own self-control over her unruly temper. As soon as he was satisfied that he had obtained a certain mastery over her he resumed:

"Do not let us quarrel, citizeness," he said, with smooth urbanity, "or bandy empty threats. We have need of one another, you and I, as I will presently show you . . . if you will listen to me."

And as she still remained obstinately silent he added more insistently:

"Will you listen, citizeness?"

Whereupon she replied sullenly:

"I am listening. What is it you want?"

"Nothing but your attention for the moment."

"Well? Go on."

"I am about to give you sound advice, and I know that you do not usually take advice kindly. But will you make an exception in my favour, circumstances being what they are?"

"Well!" she rejoined with a shrug; "I sent for you, didn't I? It wasn't in order to get you to make love to me."

Chauvelin ignored the gibe and went on placidly:

"The escape of the three aristos through the agency of those damnable English spies is a nasty blow, not only for you personally, citizeness, but a blow to the prestige of all the local authorities of this province. That is so, is it not?"

As she gave no reply, he continued in the same suave, urbane tone:

"You will also admit, citizeness, that a repetition of such an incident would gravely compromise the reputation, not to say the lives of all the members of your local government."

He paused for a moment or two, and then added with ironic emphasis:

"Including yours, Mam'zelle Guillotine."

He no longer waited for her to speak. He could read the workings of her mind as he would an open book, knew that she cared for nothing at this moment, except the satisfaction of her vengeful hate, and that he would get nothing out of her until he had finally succeeded in

persuading her that her interests and her desires were identical with his. And so he went on:

"That is why, citizeness, you and I must become allies--not enemies. Your one desire in life, now that Saint-Lucque himself has escaped you, is to bring the rest of the family--the wife and the two remaining children--to justice. My one aim so long as I have breath in my body left will be to lay the English spies and their chief, the Scarlet Pimpernel, by the heels."

Gabrielle gave a shrug. "Pshaw!" she muttered contemptuously. What cared she about Chauvelin's grudge against the English spies? Give her the Saint-Lucque woman and her two brats and let Chauvelin deal with that legendary Scarlet Pimpernel as best he could. She for one did not believe in his existence at all.

"I care nothing about your English spies," she said presently. "Give me the Saint-Lucque brood . . ."

"You'll never get them, citizeness," he retorted with firm emphasis, "while the Scarlet Pimpernel is alive."

"Bah!"

"Never!" he reiterated forcibly.

"Well! You have tried often enough to get him, my good man, and you have failed every time, haven't you?"

"I know it. The man is a genius. A devil, if you like. So far he has baffled me. I am willing to admit my many failures. But I'll not fail this time if you, citizeness, will help me."

Gabrielle broke into a loud, prolonged, mirthless laugh.

"So that's it, is it?" she rapped out harshly. "I am to be the tool of your selfish intrigues."

She jumped to her feet, and brought her clenched fist banging down upon the table.

"It is not for me," she went on, hurling vituperation upon vituperation on the silent, smooth-tongued man, who sat quietly by allowing the flood of her wrath to pass unchallenged over his head: "it is not for me and my just cause that you are setting your crooked mind at work. Allies indeed! Friends! You care nothing for the punishment of traitors like that Saint-Lucques brood; all you think of is your petty revenge on the man who has made a fool of you, that creature of your own imagination--the Scarlet Pimpernel."

She sank back into the chair, pausing for want of breath, for she had gradually raised her voice to a strident pitch, screaming at Chauvelin, who for once in his life was completely dumbfounded. He had not expected this outburst, had apparently not read quite deeply enough into the workings of this half-demented woman's mind, a woman whom, by the way, he heartily despised but whom he believed to have so completely mastered that she would be as putty in his hands. In point of fact, she was right when she said that he cared nothing about the Saint-Lucque women, except as a means to his ends. It was the Scarlet Pimpernel he wanted to destroy and he had set his brain to work to devise a trap into which that chivalrous dandy would be fated to fall.

For the moment, however, he allowed the full flood of Gabrielle's vituperations to flow unchecked over his head. He was not the man to be intimidated by the fury of any woman, not even of this one who had the reputation of always getting the better of those who were bold enough to oppose her. He remained silent for the moment, with pale

eyes fixed upon the irate harpy, his long, thin fingers drumming a tattoo upon the table-top. Soon, however, a thin, sarcastic smile curled around his lips, and when Gabrielle came to a halt, panting with exhaustion, he put in calmly:

"Are you not rather unjust towards me now, citizeness? You accuse me of scheming for the destruction of the Scarlet Pimpernel rather than for the punishment of three aristos. But let me remind you that while that audacious spy and his accursed league are at large they will never allow the Saint-Lucque women to be tried and condemned either here or in Paris. Never! They will plan their rescue, wherever they may be, and they will succeed in snatching them from under your nose, whatever you may do, even from the very steps of your guillotine."

He paused, letting his words sink into the woman's consciousness, and he had the satisfaction of noting that comprehension of his point of view did gradually filtrate into her mind. The look of rage slowly faded out of her eyes and her breath came and went more slowly through her parted lips. Presently she said with amazing calm:

"Yes! I see what you mean, and I dare say you are right. It would be the death of me if those women slipped through my fingers in the end."

"They won't," Chauvelin rejoined decisively, "once you have those English spies out of the way, and do not forget, citizeness, that the capture and death of the Scarlet Pimpernel will be a political event of the first magnitude and that you will reap as rich a reward as has ever been bestowed on any man or woman before."

He could no longer be in doubt now that he held her attention. Her expressive face showed plainly that she was listening, listening eagerly, and that it rested with him to hold her attention to the end and

to force his will upon her. His will! She must bow to it. She must! His plan was so fine, so perfect! So certain of success. But he must have her co-operation. Without it he could not succeed. What a humiliation for this master-sleuth, this incomparable tracker of spies, to see himself dependent on a woman's whim for what meant his whole future, probably his life!

Ah, well! Ends had justified the means in many intrigues before now. Mentally, Chauvelin had counted his cards and could well be satisfied that he held the ace of trumps. Leaning well forward, with forearms resting on the table and hands clasped, he took as it were a final survey of this woman on whom so much depended. She sat opposite to him, lounging in an armchair, one leg crossed over the other, her hands thrust in the pockets of her breeches. She was the first to speak.

"Well!" she said, "what about that wonderful scheme of yours? Your tongue does not seem to be as glib as usual, I am thinking."

"I want to put the matter as briefly as I can before you, citizeness," Chauvelin gave answer; "but first of all, tell me, do you know where the Saint-Lucque women are hiding?"

"No, I don't," she replied curtly.

"Why not?"

"Because I am surrounded by fools and cowards" traitors I call them. . . . The committee and their sleuths are all alike. . . . Dolts, I tell you."

"Obviously then, if your own people cannot track those aristos we have got to find someone who can."

"I won't have a stranger meddling here, you know," Gabrielle

snapped out quickly; "I sent for you because it is you I want. Why cannot you . . .?"

Chauvelin gravely shook his head.

"Impossible, citizeness."

"Why?"

"I have been summoned back to Paris, and I must return immediately. It is a matter connected with the arrest of a ci-devant sewing-maid who was intimately acquainted with the Capet family. The Committee of Public Safety fear the intervention of the English spies on her behalf. They have sent for me," he reiterated solemnly, "and I must go."

"I can arrange that," she retorted with her usual arrogance.

He shook his head once again.

"It would be the guillotine for us both," he rejoined, "if owing to any failure on my part or to any interference from you, the ci-devant sewing-maid were spirited away by the Scarlet Pimpernel."

He gave a short dry laugh and added:

"I don't know what you feel about it, citizeness, but there are one or two things I want to do before my unworthy head rolls into old Sanson's basket."

Gabrielle swore under her breath.

"I hate strangers," she reasserted, muttering hoarsely through her teeth: "I will not have a stranger here."

"The man I have in my mind, citizenship, is one of the finest trackers of aristos in the country."

"I hate strangers," she reiterated sullenly.

"Yet, you admit that you cannot trust your own spies to track the Saint-Lucque women to their hiding-place."

Gabrielle gave no reply to that and for a few minutes there was absolute silence in this room where two minds were busy scheming for the death of a helpless woman and her innocent children. Absolute silence, but the white-faced clock ticked on marking the passage of time towards eternity.

"What's the man's name?" Gabrielle queried at last.

"André Renaud, one of the ablest men on the staff of the Chief Commissariat in Paris," was Chauvelin's glib answer.

"And you are sure," she insisted, "that he can run that hateful brood to earth?"

"Quite sure. He will bring his own subordinates with him and within three days you will know where the three women are in hiding."

"And twenty-four hours later we have them under lock and key," she concluded with a sigh of satisfaction.

"Ready for conveyance to Paris. . . ."

But Gabrielle wouldn't have that.

"Don't be a fool, Chauvelin," she snapped out at him; "haven't I told you that I want the handling of those three cursed women myself. Isn't my guillotine good enough for that vermin? I tell you I will not have

them sent to Paris."

"And they won't be. Not all the way, at any rate."

"I don't understand what you mean by 'not all the way.' I wish you wouldn't talk in riddles."

"It is quite simple, citizeness. As soon as the aristos are under arrest, let the fact be bruited abroad far and wide. The ci-devant Saint-Lucques are, I understand, very well known in the province and their arrest is sure to cause a sensation. In fact the greater the sensation the better it will suit my . . . our plan. After that let it be also known that the three women will be conveyed to Paris on a given day, for trial and summary condemnation. Surely you can guess what will inevitably follow?"

"You mean that the English spies . . .?"

"Exactly. Flushed with their recent success, they will at once be on the warpath, devising a plan for the rescue of these so-called innocent victims of our wicked revolution."

"Go on, man! Go on! I am getting interested."

"For the journey to Paris--do not interrupt me again I pray you--you must choose just such another day as served the English spies so well in the case of the other Saint-Lucques and the priest--you want a mist or thin drizzle, lashing wind or driven rain. Do not have too big an escort: four to six men will suffice. Having settled on the day you will have a diligence ready in the earliest dawn shuttered so that no one can get so much as a peep into the interior."

"You don't want the crowd to see the prisoners inside the coach?"

"The prisoners will not be in the coach, citizeness."

"What do you mean? . . . not in the coach?"

"In the coach, citizeness, there will be a half a dozen picked men of your own local gendarmerie armed with pistols, ready to meet the surprise attack, which those English spies will of a certainty have engineered for the rescue of the aristos."

Gabrielle now was sitting quite still, with elbows on the table, her head resting against her hand. Her eyes were aglow gazing straight out before her as if she were already seeing a vision of the drama which Chauvelin had so graphically foreshadowed.

"I see it all," she murmured after a minute or two.

"You can rely on the Chief Commissary here, I suppose," Chauvelin added.

"He is my friend," she replied curtly; "he will do what I want."

"That's good, as we must have his co-operation. Will you tell him to order the driver, who had best be a trained soldier, to arrange a breakdown at twilight on the loneliest bit of road in the forest."

"That's simple enough as you say, providing . . ."

"Providing what?" Chauvelin threw a quick anxious glance at Gabrielle. Her manner had suddenly undergone a change. A moment ago her enthusiasm had seemed at fever-pitch. The scheme was grand and certain of success. She saw it all in a series of mental visions. The coach coming to a halt, the spies on the watch. The sudden attack on the diligence filled with stalwarts armed to the teeth. Yes! armed to the teeth. Six to one or more. All very well, providing

they had to deal with an ordinary human being, say an eccentric Englishman. Or the usual type of adventurous spy, out for money or promotion. But this man--this legendary creature with his impenetrable anonymity--the Scarlet Pimpernel . . .

Instinctively she shrugged, obviously in doubt, her expressive face showing an inkling almost of fear. Chauvelin was sharp enough to note all this. Her doubts, her fears, and the reason for both. He gave a harsh mocking laugh and said in direct answer to her thoughts:

"Those misgivings which I can see have reared their ugly heads in your mind are unworthy of you, citizeness. I know that people in this country have talked of the Scarlet Pimpernel as if he were some kind of superhuman being bearing a charmed life, and those fools over in England are inclined to foster that belief. Now I know the man. I have seen him and spoken with him and I give you my word that there is nothing unearthly about him except his unfailing luck and . . . well, yes! . . . his physical courage. But let me assure you once more, citizeness, that the aristos whom you hate will never be sent to the guillotine while the Scarlet Pimpernel is alive. Never."

Chauvelin had risen from the table while he gave Gabrielle this assurance. She made no movement while he picked up his hat and cape and made a move towards the door, but he was quite shrewd enough to note that at last his solemn words of warning had their desired effect. His hand had already hold of the latch when she spoke abruptly:

"Where are you going, Chauvelin?"

"To interview the Chief Commissary of your section . . . with your permission that is . . . By the way, what is his name?"

"Lescar."

"Well! I'll go and have a talk with Citizen Lescar. I shan't have the same difficulty with him as I had with you, citizeness," he went on with a wry smile. "There is a reward of ten thousand livres for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel, if taken alive. The largest share of that will go to the Chief Commissary of the district in which the capture has taken place. I imagine that our friend Lescar will not be lacking in zeal."

"No," Gabrielle returned with a mocking laugh; "money is the goad which moves you all."

"Perhaps," Chauvelin was willing to admit. After which he asked: "Is there anything else you wish me to do, citizeness?"

"No," she replied at first and then said: "Yes!"

"At your service, citizeness."

"You can tell those dolts up in Paris to send their sleuth down at once. We'll see what he can do."

Chapter XIII: The English Spy

The whole Province of Artois was seething by now with the wrath at the audacity of the English spies, and during the long winter evenings, round homely firesides or cabaret tables, that masterstroke accomplished in the forest of Mézières was discussed and commented on in all its aspects.

Just think on it! Three aristos who were being sent to Paris for trial were absolutely spirited away from under the very nose of the highly efficient police administration of the province. Spirited away! There was no other word for it! And the whole thing was obviously the work of those abominable English, who were emissaries of the devil, for no flesh and blood human creature could have engineered so damnable a trick and then disappeared as if the earth had swallowed them up.

No wonder that the good Artesians looked upon this hoodwinking of their Chief Commissary as the work of the devil, and their desire for revenge of the impudent spy was roused to positive fury. The very name of the Scarlet Pimpernel, the leader of that gang of brigands, had but to be mentioned to make the entire population of the province see red.

That barefaced, insolent Englishman and his equally brazen followers must be laid by the heels and handed over to the tender mercies of the citizeness Damiens who would have her quick way with them. Everyone was contemplating with joy the prospect of seeing those blonde heads—they must be blonde since they were English, drop one by one into the basket of Mam'zelle Guillotine. "Not before she had slapped their ugly faces for them," was the express wish formulated by the women, who, as usual, were more rabid than the men.

The intensity of public feeling in Artois against the English spy soon became known in the capital, and Chauvelin, as soon as he arrived in Paris, did his best to magnify every incident that went to prove that the Artesians would be heart and soul in any enterprise directed against the Scarlet Pimpernel. In spite of his many failures in the direction of that elusive personage, he still had the ear of the Committee of Public Safety who did not undervalue his real worth, and though, at the special sitting convened for the purpose, several members were inclined to scoff when Chauvelin expounded his plan for the capture of the spies--seeing the number of times that his masterstrokes had ended in failures--nevertheless when it was put to the vote, the majority decided in favour of the plan being carried through, starting with the arrest of the Saint-Lucque woman and her two daughters. They were to be the bait that must inevitably draw that league of dare-devils into the clever trap laid for them.

Citizen Renaud who had earned his spurs as the most astute sleuth in the service of the Committee, second only to Citizen Chauvelin himself, was the man finally selected for this preliminary work. The three aristos were in hiding somewhere between Mézières and the Belgian frontier, where picked men of the revolutionary guard were on duty night and day as a living barrier against the escape of traitors over the border. Commissioned and non-commissioned officers were one and all ready to swear that no women had crossed the frontier into Belgium since last the aristos took flight from their old home and became wanderers in the land. The ci-devant Marquis and his son, together with a priest, had in due course been arrested, rescued and taken to England, while the three women had disappeared.

Chapter XIV: LE PARC AUX DAIMS

In these days travellers whose calling or business took them through Arras and Mézières to the Belgian frontier could not fail to note the derelict piece of land situated off the main road some two or three leagues before coming to Rocroi. The land still showed signs of having once been an extensive park surrounding a small château. The château in this year of the Republic was falling into ruins. It had been abandoned close on ten years ago, when the then owners, scenting the fast approaching revolutionary storm tried to sell it, failed after repeated efforts, and finally abandoned it, taking themselves and their goods over to their native Flanders and leaving Mother Nature in possession of the house and the park, hoping no doubt to return after the storm had broken or blown over, and to find the château, if not the garden, very much as they had left it.

But Mother Nature is noteworthily the worst care-taker in the world. Civilisation and man's handiwork are needed to fight rust and decay. The park was first to go back to the wild. Flower-beds quickly became weed-beds; shrubs and fruit trees died for lack of pruning and of water, garden statuary split and broke in the course of two severe winters, and lay on the ground, pedestal and all beneath a blanket of fungus and of moss. After three years under Mother Nature's régime le Parc aux Daims près Rocroi, dans la province d'Artois, was nothing but a piece of derelict land and its château a mere mass of brick and crumbling plaster, broken woodwork and leaky roof, through the cracked tiles of which rain quickly found its devastating way.

Soon the place got the reputation of being haunted. Country folk avoided going near it. At first, when the family had gone, leaving no one to look after the place, enterprising schoolboys would roam through the orchard in quest of apples, and thrifty housewives tried to

raise cabbages and spinach on what had once been the vegetable garden. But after a time strange noises were heard to proceed from the château on dark winter nights, while certain mysterious lights were seen through the windows to be moving erratically to and fro, to flicker and presently to die out, only to reappear later or else on the next dark night. The enterprising schoolboys were scared out of their wits one evening in November, when unseen feet trod over the rough ground, making a noise like the crackling of firewood, although there was no firewood lying about; thrifty housewives had seen to that. After this mysterious episode apples hung unheeded on the old trees, and in due course fell to the ground and lay there rotting until the next season, and housewives gave the vegetable garden a wide berth, fearing the bane of cabbage grown on unhallowed soil.

And here in the derelict Parc aux Daims there was enacted in the year three of the Republic--corresponding with our 1794--a quiet little idyll of loyalty on the one hand and of courage on the other.

At the earnest entreaty of his wife, and the advice of devoted friends, Monsieur de Saint-Lucque, taking his young son with him, had sought shelter in Abbé Prud'hon's presbytery, situated in a village in the vicinity of Rocroi; he confided his wife and two little daughters to the care of an old couple on whose loyalty he would have staked his life. The Guidals had been faithful servants of his family for close on half a century. They owned a small farm in the next village and were people to whom the unfortunate Saint-Lucque felt he could entrust with the utmost confidence those three women so dear to him. This occurred in the early autumn of 1793, and for time everything went well both in the presbytery and in the farm near Rocroi. But the trouble was that communication between the two places was fraught with so much danger that it had to be discontinued chiefly at the demand of old man Guidal.

Weeks and months went by while the unfortunate Saint-Lucque nearly broke his heart with anxiety over his beloved wife and daughters and Madame de Saint-Lucque was equally distraught with grief at being parted from her husband and only son. Matters, however, unfortunate though they were, might have gone on a little while longer, had not Christmas come along. The kind hearted abbé determined on that solemn occasion to carry a message through to the farm.

The inevitable happened. The old priest was waylaid by spies of the local Committee of Public Safety and caught in the act of carrying about with him papers of a suspicious nature. The immediate result of his well-meant action was a perquisition in the presbytery, followed by the arrest of Monsieur de Saint-Lucque with his young son, and also of the abbé himself; the latter on a charge of harbouring aristos who were traitors to the Republic.

But the cruel hand of fate had not done with striking at the unhappy Saint-Lucques yet. The law of the Suspect--that most iniquitous of all the edicts passed by the National Convention--had just come into force. By its enactment the very fact that a man or woman or even a child, was as much as suspected of treason, made them liable to summary arrest and more often than not to the sentence of death.

Guidal, a worthy and timorous peasant, was terrified of the guillotine. He flatly refused to allow Madame de Saint-Lucque and her children to remain at the farm any longer. How did he know when he might become suspect of harbouring aristos? He had not the pluck to say this to the unfortunate lady himself, but deputed his wife for this very unpleasant task. The woman, genuinely horrified at what she called the act of an ingrate and a coward, argued and protested, but the old farmer was adamant. There is no worse counsellor or tempter in the world than fear, and Guidal was frightened to death.

At first, no doubt, he had been actuated by loyalty to his former employers, but as times got more and more troublous and the revolutionary waves rose higher and higher, when they broke over the countryside, it became more and more dangerous to aid aristos to escape from justice. To harbour them was reckoned to be a capital offence punishable by death.

And now this awful Law of the Suspect! Guidal was loyal, he was good and honest, but he was not going to risk his neck for anybody. In the end he told his wife, Marianne, that if Madame de Saint-Lucque did not leave the farm within twenty-four hours, he would himself denounce her and her children to the Commissary of Police.

With her heart beating well-nigh to suffocation, Eve de Saint-Lucque overheard the discussion that was going on. Her fate and that of her little girls were being debated by these two poor ignorant rustics. There could be only one issue to the threat uttered by Guidal. She was a pious woman and a loving wife and mother; what could she do but remain on her knees praying to God for protection, while the woman Guidal ran to the next village, to the presbytery and in a flood of tears told the heart-rending tale to the kind old abbé.

Before anything could be done, however, or any decision come to, the Marquis de Saint-Lucque, the little Vicomte and the abbé himself were arrested and dragged to Mézières pending their being taken to Paris for trial and sentence.

And when Marianne returned to the farm, she found that Madame de Saint-Lucque had left the house at dead of night with her two little children.

She had put together a small bundle of primary necessities, had wrapped the children up in all the warm clothing she possessed, and holding each one by the hand, she wandered down the road in the

direction of Mézières. Where to go she knew not, only away, away from the danger of denunciation, of arrest and the awful, inevitable guillotine. Her two little girls! Innocent children! To think that there could be such inhuman beasts in the world, in this beautiful France, who would injure them. Who would, Heavens above! put them to death!

Of her husband and her son she had no news whatever. In her heart she cherished the one hope that they were still safe under the care of the Abbé Prud'hon. But of this she could not be sure, and she dared not question people, for fear of compromising those whom she cared for most in all the world.

There followed for the poor woman days of unspeakable misery: days in which she heard her children cry out: "Maman, j'ai faim!" and was unable to give them food. Her children! days, when feeling herself tracked like a wild animal, she became a wanderer on the face of the earth. The weather was cold, but, fortunately, it was dry. With the two little girls clinging to her skirts she roamed down the country roads around Rocroi getting as near the Belgian frontier as she dared, plunging into the woods, hiding in the undergrowth whenever her keen ear detected the slightest sound of approaching footsteps, or the clatter of distant horses' hoofs. And there she would remain crouching sometimes for hours on end, hugging the children as close to her as she could so as to impart some of the warmth inside her to their tender bodies. Then when she felt that immediate danger was past, she would wander out of the wood once more and go along the road, begging for a few sous or something to eat for her hungry little ones from the barefooted passer-by or at the door of the meanest-looking peasant's hut, where news of whole-sale arrests or the iniquitous Law of the Suspect had not yet found its way. For many nights she and the children slept in derelict farm buildings or tumble-down outhouses, and once or twice out in the open. She was almost

at the end of her tether when her wanderings brought her to the neighbourhood of the Parc aux Daims. The place was not altogether unknown to her, but while she was still at the Guidals she had heard rumours that the house was visited by ghosts. She had no superstitious fears herself, but came readily to the conclusion that it was soldiers of the Republican Guard or of the military police that haunted the place and had on that account never dared to go near it. But hunger and cold drove her thither one evening, when the children were almost perished with cold, and to add to her misery snow began to fall.

The whole property, garden, orchard and a piece of pasture land, was, as Madame de Saint-Lucque knew, enclosed by a low wall surmounted by iron work, which for the most part was broken down and a prey to rust and decay. The iron gate, too, was off its hinges and lying on the ground in a state of complete dilapidation, obstructing the access to the drive which in its turn led up to the perron of the château. Eve started to skirt the containing wall and presently came to a small postern gate, or rather the remnants of one. Her ears keenly on the alert, could detect no sound breaking through the stillness of the night. She lifted first one little girl and then the other over the broken stonework, and then passed through the gap in the wall. The snow fell in large flakes and was already lying thick on the ground. No light showed anywhere from the direction where the château stood out like a solid block of darkness blacker than the night. Without looking to right or left, but trusting to her instinct to guide her, she made her way through a wilderness of weeds to the house.

Presently she found herself at the foot of a short flight of stone steps leading to the perron. These she mounted and came to the front door, which was wide open. Through this she passed. The place was as dark as pitch. All that Eve could do was to grope her way round. She

appeared to be in a square vestibule on which gave several doors, all of which were open. On the left she stumbled against the bottom of a marble staircase with what seemed to the touch like a wrought-iron balustrade.

The little girls, frightened of the dark and shivering with cold, were crying. Eve gathered them to her as a mother-hen does her chicks, and led them through one of the open doors. The room in which she now entered was obviously large and lofty. Vaguely through the gloom she perceived the dim greyish light of three tall windows, the glass of which was broken for the most part. But they were in the lee of the wind and here, at any rate, was shelter against the cold and the snow.

While groping her way about, Eve barked her shins against pieces of furniture that seemed to be lying topsy-turvy about. She set a chair or two up on their legs and lifted her precious children up on these. She had a bit of stale bread and a couple of apples in her pocket which she gave them to munch, and then went on groping. She could have screamed for joy when her hands encountered what was obviously a thick carpet rolled up into a bundle. It is wonderful what the ingenuity of a devoted mother will invent for the well-being of her children. To lay the heavy carpet out on the wooden floor, well away from the night air, to pick up the little girls, lay them down on the carpet and roll it over them, was soon done. The carpet was large and there was warmth in it for Eve also, and though she did not sleep much that night, she had the joy of hearing the even breathing of these two most precious beings on earth.

At daybreak the next morning Eve de Saint-Lucque explored the place where she had found temporary refuge. The room where she and the children had spent the night was one of three in enfilade, with double doors opening one into the other. All three were littered with

furniture mostly broken. All three had tall windows with broken glass, oak floors and an air of complete desolation.

Going out to the vestibule, Eve perceived the marble staircase on her right leading to the story above, and, opposite, facing the bottom of the stairs, another tall double door which gave on a very large room with vaulted ceiling and a monumental mantelpiece, obviously a room used in the olden days of luxury and hospitality as a banqueting-hall. Soon after that the children woke. They were warm, but they were hungry. Eve wandered out into what had once been a beautiful garden, but was nothing now but a wilderness of weeds. Beyond it, not far from the house, was the orchard. A few miserable apples still hung upon the trees. Eve gathered the best ones and gave them to the children to eat. Thank God for the good health and sturdy constitution with which they were endowed, or never could they have outlived the privations of the past two weeks.

Eve then wandered out into the road to beg. And this she did the following day also and the day after that, always like some small defenceless animal scenting an enemy in every flutter of a leaf or the crackle of tiny twigs in the woods. On the whole, passers-by were kind. The carriage-way which branches off the main road and winds along in a series of curves to the gateway of the Parc aux Daims was no longer a frequented one these days. No longer did luxurious equipages wend their way to the hospitable château, or gaily bedight cavaliers on prancing horses come cantering down the lane. Only now and then did a market cart go by, taking produce for delivery to the villages around, or an occasional passer-by—farmer or peasant—come stumping along in sabots. They were indigent most of them, the men and the women; but most of them had a sou to spare for the sad-eyed beggar in ragged black clothes in whom it would have been hard to recognise the proud and beautiful Marquise de Saint-Lucque. And when pockets were void of sous, there would be a bit of

hard cheese or stale bread, a few apples or a drop of milk, and Eve de Saint-Lucque would murmur in gratitude through her tears: "May le bon Dieu reward you."

On the third day when she had taken her stand in the road at some little distance from the park gates, and stretched out her hand to occasional passers-by, she saw a woman come along who had a good-sized bundle slung over her shoulders. She seemed very weary. As this woman drew near, Eve perceived that she was none other than Marianne Guidal, the farmer's wife.

At sight of Madame de Saint-Lucque she threw her arms up in the air and cried excitedly: "At last! At last!" She seized hold of Eve's hands and covered them with kisses.

"Madame la Marquise! Madame la Marquise!" she continued almost sobbing, and would have fallen on her knees had not Eve restrained her.

"Marianne! My goodness Marianne!" the latter admonished, "in Heaven's name, be careful! there may be prying eyes and ears about!"

Marianne quickly put her hand to her mouth.

"I have been hunting for Madame la--for you everywhere," she resumed, sinking her voice to a whisper. "But I have not dared to question people and I've had to be very careful where I went as I am sure Guidal is watching me. Yesterday he went off to Rocroi Fair. It lasts three days. He won't be back till late to-morrow. So I've been able to get about and keep my ears open for any village gossip. And so I heard casually that a poor woman--your pardon Madame la Mar-- ,--had been begging the last day or two in the road near the Parc aux Daims. I guessed it was Madame, so I put a few things together this

morning and came along."

She paused a moment, for she was evidently a prey to such deep emotion that she was hardly able to speak. At last she said, her voice shaking with excitement, her tear-dimmed eyes fixed on Eve de Saint-Lucque:

"I had to come. God guided me hither. I came to tell you that Monsieur le Marquis and Monsieur le Vicomte are now safe somewhere in Belgium or in England, people said, and so is our good Abbé Prud'hon."

Eve gave a gasp as much of astonishment as of intense joy.

"Le bon Dieu be praised," she exclaimed fervently, "but what has happened?"

"Monsieur le Marquis, Monsieur le Vicomte and the good abbé were arrested the very night that Madame left the farm. I had run out to the presbytery to let them know what Guidal had threatened to do. A few hours later I heard about the arrests. The news was all over the villages around. I was heart-broken and still more so when I realised that Madame had gone, I knew not whither. Three or four days later it was known in the entire district that the diligence in which Monsieur le Marquis with the young Vicomte and the abbé were being taken to Paris to be tried and put to death by those murdering devils, that the diligence, I say, was waylaid by highwaymen in the forest of Mézières, at dead of night, and driven away no one has ever known what direction. Anyway, it vanished then and there with M. le Marquis, the Vicomte and the abbé inside it. No one ever found a trace of it or of the highwaymen or of the prisoners. It was as if the earth had swallowed the lot of them. But I have heard it said more than once that le bon Dieu himself sent one of his emissaries to save Monsieur le Marquis, who had never harmed any man or woman in all his life,

our good abbé, who is such a saintly man, and the dear innocent little Vicomte with them. The whole attack was so mysterious that the highwaymen could not have been quite human. People talk of English spies, but we poor country folk know nothing about that. All I know is that I will pray to le bon Dieu on my knees every night for the rest of my life that He may save Madame and the dear little demoiselles, by any means which He thinks best."

Long after Marianne had ceased talking, which she had done very volubly, Eve remained silent and contemplative savouring, as it were, the joy of knowing that her husband and her son were safe, even though she must continue to suffer, to care for her little girls and to avoid compromising their safety by any careless word or act on her part. Subconsciously she watched Marianne untying the knots which held her bundle together. It fell apart displaying its contents: a bottle of milk, a large piece of cheese, two loaves of bread, half a dozen apples. Also a couple of horse blankets, thick and warm. It was these that had made the bundle so bulky and heavy.

"I've boiled the milk," Marianne said; "it will keep for a day or two, till I can come back."

With innate delicacy she had refrained from intruding by word or look on Madame de Saint-Lucque's absorption, and now she asked with old-world deference:

"Would Madame deign to accept?"

She busied herself with doing up the bundle of provisions again. Eve could only murmur:

"Marianne, my dear, good Marianne!" She put her arms round the old woman's shoulders and kissed her on both cheeks. "How can I ever thank you?" she said, and took the precious bundle from her.

"But you must not come again," she went on firmly, "for our sakes as well as your own, you must not come again. It is too dangerous, and much too far for you to walk. If people have already noticed me, I shall have to try and find shelter elsewhere, at any rate for a few days, and then perhaps come back here. But you must not come, Marianne dear. Promise you won't come."

Again she kissed the old woman's wrinkled cheeks and Marianne gave a reluctant promise which obviously she did not mean to keep. After which Eve, carrying the bundle of provisions which meant food for the two children for several days to come, turned back towards the Parc aux Daims, while Marianne, who by now was in a flood of tears, went away in the opposite direction.

There followed three days of comparative relief from hardship, of happiness at the news brought by Marianne, as well as the joy of having sufficient food for the two little girls. Eve only ate what kept body and soul together, but the children ate heartily and were luckily in quite good health.

She saw nothing of Marianne during those three days, but this was not because of the promise the good woman had made, but because the farmer had returned from Rocroi Fair a day earlier than was expected. He said very little to his wife, and appeared sullen and irritable. On the third day following Marianne's first visit to the Parc aux Daims, he pleaded important business in the neighbourhood which, he said, would take up the best part of the morning. Marianne, thinking herself free, made her way with a few more provisions to the park gates, hoping to see Madame de Saint-Lucque again. Her husband suspecting her intention waylaid her: saw her turn into the side-road which leads to the Park aux Daims. He went straight to Mézières and that same afternoon gave information to the Commissary of Police that the ci-devant Saint-Lucque woman with

her two children were hiding in the derelict château.

Chapter XV: WHATEVER HAPPENS

Eve de Saint-Lucque knew, of course, nothing during those few days of the terrible danger which threatened her and her children through the rancour of Guidal. The fact that her husband and her son had been rescued in such a mysterious way through an unexplicable agency, had not only given her a great measure of happiness, but also a wonderful feeling of hope. She could not account for that hope, but she certainly felt it. Deep down in her heart she felt it, and for the first time for many weeks and months she went about singing to herself for very joy. Sitting with one little girl on her knee, and the other squatting on the ground at her feet she would recall for them little childish songs of long ago, or tales of three little bears or of the seven dwarfs which enchanted them and caused them to break into the full-throated laughter which she loved to hear.

Only the nights were still terribly trying. They were so long and so cold, and the consequent inactivity so very hard to endure.

Marianne had put tinder and a couple of candles in that first bundle which she brought, but the danger of revealing her presence by allowing a light to filtrate through the windows was far too great to allow of such a luxury. Nor would Eve take the children out with her, even into the garden; their shrill young voices or their laughter might, she feared, attract the attention of a casual passer-by. And any passer-by might be an enemy these days.

Before Marianne's welcome visit she had gone out by day into the road to beg for food, and wandered out at night because of the feeling of peace the deserted garden gave her. Whatever ghosts had been wont to haunt the place had evidently found more congenial headquarters. With ears on the qui vive for the slightest sound that might betoken danger, Eve would then stroll as far as the orchard

where a few winter apples still hung half withered on the trees. She never heard as much as a faint rustle among the leaves or the crackling of dry twigs in the undergrowth. Never, until that evening, the third since Marianne's visit. The moon was nearly at its full then, and though she hid her face behind a bank of clouds, the night itself was not very dark. A grey light hovered over the park as far as the surrounding wall, and the air was damp and quite still. Eve wandered as far as the postern gate. Resting her elbows on the broken piece of the wall she glanced up and down the road. It was completely deserted. Not a soul in sight. Not a cat on the prowl.

And chancing to look down on the edge of the road the other side of the wall, she saw something white lying there. Something white which looked like a piece of paper weighted down by a stone. Had it not been for the stone Eve would have thought no more about it. A piece of paper fallen out of the hand of a passer-by probably. But the stone? Someone must have weighted the paper down with a stone. Why? Curiosity impelled Eve first to lean out further over the wall, and then to slip out by the postern, to kneel down by the roadside and timorously to move the stone and extricate that piece of paper. Who put it there? Who put the stone over it, and did it contain a message intended for her? At first she thought it might be a message from Marianne. Dear, kind, thoughtless Marianne! Any passer-by might have picked it up and God only knew what mischief this might cause.

With the paper in her hand Eve quickly slipped back through the broken-down postern and made her way quickly to the château. Groping about in the dark she found one of the candles and the tinder. She had before now explored the house sufficiently to know that there was a large wall-cupboard in one of the rooms in which she could safely venture to light the candle and let it burn for a few minutes, at any rate, while she crouched in its deepest recess just long enough to peruse the contents of the mysterious missive.

She had to read it through two or three times before she took in its full significance. This is what it said:

"Your husband, your son and Abbé Prud'hon are safe in England. You and your little ones will soon join them. Whatever happens do not lose your faith or your trust in those who have pledged their honour to save you and who have never failed to keep their word. Destroy this as soon as read. And remember . . . whatever happens do not lose your faith."

This message was so wonderful, so stupendous that no wonder Eve's poor aching head could not take it all at once.

It was impossible these days to live in France either openly or in hiding, without knowing something about a mysterious agency known as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel and its activities. In most places throughout the country, villages and small townships situated at some distance from the large cities, the leader of this gang of English spies, as they were called, was believed to be a kind of supernatural being, either an evil or a good spirit, according to taste or political views. To the Terrorists who ruled France, he was the devil incarnate. To the unfortunates whom fear of death compelled to remain in hiding, he was a messenger of God sent to bring into their hearts hope of deliverance and of life.

To Eve de Saint-Lucque he was that and more. She had heard before now of mysterious messages and this was obviously one, for in the right-hand corner, by way of signature, there was a rough drawing in red chalk of a small five-petalled flower. Marianne had already told her that rumour had it that Monsieur le Marquis, the little Vicomte and the good abbé had been rescued by an unknown agency when they were being taken to Paris for trial which could only have one dire issue. And now this wonderful message! This promise!

This pledge! This word of honour given! She and her children were soon to join those dear ones in England, in that hospitable land of the free. A promise! A pledge! How could she fail to believe and to trust?

"Whatever happens do not lose your faith." It was so clear, so categorical! such a message of hope and of comfort. No! No! a thousand times No. She would never lose her faith. This she now swore before God, as she knelt by the side of her sleeping children. She buried her face in her hands and sobbed out her heart in an ecstasy of joy and gratitude.

Chapter XVI: A MASTER SLEUTH

It was on this same day that Citizen André Renaud, the master sleuth, arrived direct from Paris. He presented his credentials as special envoy of the Committee of Public Safety, first to the Chief Commissary of Police of Mézières, and then asked to be received by Citizeness Damiens, at whose special request he had been sent down from headquarters.

He was ushered into the presence of Mam'zelle Guillotine. She was in a towering rage, turned on the newcomer like a wild cat, showered a volley of abuse and vituperation on the unfortunate man who stood in the doorway mute and obviously flabbergasted at this stormy reception, his credentials, with large seals dangling therefrom, held in his trembling hand, towards the irate harpy. She was marching up and down the long room still muttering curses and generally behaving more like an animal in a rage than a human being.

At last she snatched the paper out of the man's hand. Without as much as glancing down on them, she tore them across and threw them into his face.

"So much for you," she cried hoarsely, and gave him a resounding smack on the cheek, "and so much for your Paris and your Committee. You are nothing but traitors and cowards--traitors, I tell you, and--cowards. But I'll teach you what it costs to fool and cheat Gabrielle Damiens. Mam'zelle Guillotine, they call me. Did you know that? I'll give you and your d---Committee a taste of my guillotine."

And so she went on yelling and screaming, letting herself go to the full extent of her stupendous rage, while the sleuth, still mute and obviously thrown out of countenance, was picking up the torn pieces of paper, smoothing them out and thrusting them into the pocket of

his coat. It was only when the rabid fury paused at last, exhausted and breathless, and, pouring out a mugful of eau de vie drained it at a draught, that he ventured at last to put in a word.

"But what have I done?" he murmured meekly.

Gabrielle put down the empty mug and turned to glance at the sleuth who was ruefully nursing his smarting cheek. She looked him up and down once or twice and gave a contemptuous shrug. Not that she did not like the look of the man. She did. She liked his large face, especially now that one cheek was flaming red, his blonde, tousled hair, his big coarse hands and powerful legs, and after that one shrug of contempt, a tigerish grin spread over her face. This the sleuth was quick to note and all at once he broke into a loud guffaw. And this also appeared to please Mam'zelle Guillotine. He came further into the room, towards her. He had a funny rolling gait, like that of a seaman, and now came to a halt with those big legs of his wide apart, his arms outspread, and coarse hands displaying the hard-skinned palms all disfigured with callosities and warts.

Like to like. Gabrielle Damiens's look, which she gave him now, became quite appreciative. She remained contemplative and silent for a moment or two, and he reiterated with a self-confident smirk this time: "What have I done to anger you, citizeness?"

"You have arrived exactly twenty-four hours too late, my friend," she replied dryly, "and those twenty-four hours will cost you dear, that's all."

"Twenty-four hours too late. What do you mean?" he queried.

"Just what I said."

He said nothing more for the moment, pulled a chair towards him,

straddled it, rested his great arms across its back and looked her square in the face.

"What exactly did you say, my pigeon?" he then asked.

"I said that you have come to Mézières twenty-four hours too late."

"How so?"

"The ci-devant Saint-Lucque woman is in hiding with her two brats in a deserted house close by here. We are proceeding with her arrest this very night."

Citizen André Renaud broke into another loud guffaw.

"Oh!" he said, "is that it? I do the work and someone else gets the credit, while I get my face slapped and a torrent of abuse. You are really impayable, my pigeon."

"You do the work?" Gabrielle retorted; "it was Citizen Guidal, the farmer. . . ."

"Of course, it was Citizen Guidal, the farmer, my subordinate, who has been under my orders for the past three days," the sleuth broke in, and brought his large palm with a resounding slap on his thigh. "And he has been clever enough to fool you, my cabbage, into believing that a fool like that could track an aristo to her hiding-place. Why, farmer Guidal has about as much brains as one of his own calves. And what did you give him by way of payment for this information, citizeness? Public money--or a kiss? What?"

And he was roaring with laughter all the time, with that full-throated laughter that Gabrielle loved to hear. But she was feeling completely bewildered now.

"Do you mean to tell me . . ." she began.

And once again he broke in:

"I mean to tell you, my cabbage, that you have been fooled. Do you suppose," he went on with an attempt at seriousness, "that the Committee of Public Safety--not a provincial one, remember, but the Head Committee up in Paris--would have sent me down here to assist you in running to earth the Saint-Lucque women, if any local groundling could do the work for you?"

To this she made no reply, and he drew the torn credentials from his pocket and held them out to Gabrielle.

"Don't tear them up again," he admonished her; "now that my work here is done, I am going back to Paris and I shall want them."

Gabrielle didn't look at the papers again. She felt bewildered and distinctly humiliated.

"I'll send for farmer Guidal," she said.

"Yes, do!" he assented. "I'll comb his hair for him. The master sleuth, eh, what? Why didn't he find the aristos for you before? Why did you have to send to Paris for me? I was here two days ago. It took me twenty-four hours, exactly, to trace the Saint-Lucque aristos to that place--what is it called?"

"The Parc aux Daims."

"And another twenty-four to make sure that the woman and the brats were the traitors you wanted. The Committee in Paris put me on the track of your friend the farmer. He was useful. I have a second subordinate working for me also. He, too, will be coming presently to

denounce the ci-devants and to take credit like your friend Guidal, for having tracked them. You have been fooled, my pigeon, fooled. We'll say nothing more about it. But be careful that you do not get fooled again, and give away public money—it was not just a kiss, was it?—to liars and traitors. There might be trouble, you know."

His final outburst of laughter was so hearty that it rang out from attic to cellar of the episcopal mansion. He rubbed his large hands together, banged Gabrielle with easy familiarity on the shoulder, and gave a chuckle of complete self-confidence.

Indeed it was his self-confidence, his self-assurance that had finally subjugated Mam'zelle Guillotine. Like to like. They became the best of friends after this. She allowed him to sit down very close to her, laid her head against his shoulder, and soon was in ecstasy over the wonderful stories he told her of his exploits as a tracker of aristos. He stretched out his spatulate fingers and moved them up and down to demonstrate their vice-like grip round the necks of traitors.

"If you want more work of that sort done," he added complacently, "before I go back to Paris, just command me. I will do it for you, my beauty."

He took hold of her hand and rubbed its palm against the thick stubble of his three-days' beard on his chin and upper lip. He had a way of purring like a wheezy old tom-cat. After which he pinched her ear and said in conclusion:

"Yes! I will do that work for you, citizeness, and for France, and leave you to do the rest, Mam'zelle Guillotine."

Yes! Gabrielle Damiens did like Citizen André Renaud, the master sleuth from Paris, very much.

Chapter XVII: THUNDER CRASH

Eve de Saint-Lucque had not known for months and years so much happiness as she did the whole of this day. With the knowledge that her husband and son were safe, and the certainty that she and the little girls would soon be with them and that they would all be re-united over in England with no daily tales of horror to poison the pure air of heaven, or danger of death hovering over their heads, she went about all day singing softly to herself and kissed her children over and over again for very joy of living. The flames of trust and love were burning brightly in her heart.

And then the blow fell like a thunder crash.

It was six o'clock in the afternoon: a wan, grey light still hovered over the open country. The last two days had been comparatively mild, but when the shades of evening began to draw in, a heavy bank of lead-coloured clouds gathered in the east and gradually spread over the sky. It soon got very cold. There was snow coming, Eve felt sure, shivering in her worn-out black dress. It would soon be bed-time for the children, she thought, and was thankful, because then she could make them snug and warm, rolled up in the old drawing-room carpet. Vaguely she wondered if anything was going to happen and when? She marvelled and tried to conjecture how the mysterious agency, the wonderful Scarlet Pimpernel, would work for her salvation. Would she presently hear the tramp of horses' hoofs and hear the hoarde of heroic rescuers come riding down the drive? Would she see these emissaries from heaven come dashing into the château and hear their rallying calls as one by one they would seize the children and finally herself and carry them off in their arms, away, away from terror and from death, away to happy England.

And suddenly she heard footsteps on the road beyond the gates.

Not the tramp of horses' hoofs or the rallying call of heroic rescuers, but heavy, measured steps which came up the drive, approached the perron and then mounted the outside steps to the front door. In a moment Eve de Saint-Lucque's happy exultation was changed to sudden fear, stark agonizing fear. She strained her ears to listen. Two men had just crossed the threshold of the front door. Two men or perhaps a man and a woman. Eve couldn't quite tell but already instinct had told her that here was danger, deadly danger for herself and for her children. She struggled to her feet and tiptoed to the folding doors, which were the sole barriers between her and that enemy, who had come through the darkness as the messenger of death. But there was neither latch nor bolt on the doors. They were rickety and hung loosely on their hinges.

Eve went back to the improvised beds where the little girls were lying. They had been asleep but now they woke and Mariette, the little one, began to cry: "Maman! what is it?"

"Hush, my pigeon," the distraught mother murmured, "say your prayers and ask the good God to protect us."

The footsteps had now got as far as the vestibule. They came to a halt and a man's voice called loudly:

"Open that door!"

Eve could not have moved for very life. She remained crouching by the side of her children, with her protecting arms round them. Her limbs were paralysed and her eyes were fixed on the door, through the chinks of which she perceived the dim light of a lantern.

The next moment the doors were roughly thrown open, and in the framework a man and a woman appeared. He was wrapped in a dark cloak from his neck down to his knees, and wore a felt hat which

completely hid the upper part of his face. But it was not on him that Eve de Saint-Lucque fixed her horrified gaze. She was looking on the woman on whose face the light from the lantern drew deep and grotesque shadows. The features coarsened with age, brought back memories of the past, and involuntarily Eve's lips gave a murmur:

"Gabrielle Damiens!"

The woman laughed. It was a harsh and a cruel laugh. Her dark eyes glowed, with a kind of savage triumph. She chuckled and took a step or two into the room.

"Aye, Eve de Nesle!" she said harshly. "It is Gabrielle Damiens right enough. You did not expect to see me again in this world, did you, after your precious mother and your cowardly husband consigned me to a living tomb?"

She stood there in the darkness, her tall gaunt frame silhouetted against the dim light of the lantern. To Eve de Saint-Lucque she appeared as the very incarnation of the spirit of evil, of the power of darkness come to dash her fondest hopes and drag her down into the abyss of despair. The woman went on speaking slowly, as if she had weighed every word before she uttered them.

"For sixteen years did I linger in a dungeon in the Bastille, while you, Eve de Saint-Lucque, lived your life of happiness and luxury with the dastard who had betrayed me and cast me off like a worn-out shoe. Sixteen years! during which my life was at a standstill, and one hope alone compelled death to pass me by. The hope that I should live to see what I see now."

Slowly Eve rose to her feet. The depth of her misery was so immense that in spite of her shorter stature she seemed to tower over the other woman through the very sublimity of her despair. Her

slender body appeared as a protective shield between this creature of evil and her innocent children.

"May God forgive you," she murmured. "You tried to do a great wrong sixteen years ago, but I had nothing to do with your punishment."

"That is as it may be," Gabrielle retorted with a shrug, "but let me assure you that I shall have everything to do with your punishment. Your miserable husband has escaped but I'll guarantee that he will be wishing himself dead before I have done with you and your brats."

After which she turned to her companion.

"You can go now, Citizen Renaud," she said curtly. "You have done your work well and I'll do the rest."

"You are satisfied," the man responded, "that these aristos are the women you want?"

"Yes. I am satisfied."

"Sergeant Meridol is just outside with half a dozen troopers. I'll send them along to you." He looked Eve de Saint-Lucque up and down seeming to appraise her weakness; then pointing at her over his shoulder with a grimy thumb he went on with a sneer: "I don't think you need fear trouble from her until they come."

He turned on his heel and strode out of the room and across the vestibule. Eve's sensitive ears caught the sound of his footsteps going down the perron steps and treading the garden path, and after a few minutes she heard his voice calling out: "Citizen sergeant." And another voice answering from a distance: "Present, citizen."

Gabrielle Damiens had remained in the room leaning against the door-jamb, her arms crossed over her sunken bosom. Eve de Saint-Lucque could perceive the vague outline of her silhouetted against the light behind. She closed her eyes trying to shut out this vision of cruelty and of impending doom. Gabrielle never said another word. She seemed just to be gloating in silence at sight of the hopelessness of this woman whom she hated with such brutal intensity.

The measured tread of the sergeant and the guard were heard coming up the path, mounting the perron and presently coming to a halt in the vestibule. The sergeant took one more step forward. Gabrielle, turning to him, demanded gruffly:

"Everything ready, citizen sergeant?"

"Everything, citizeness," the man replied. "I have a couple of good horses harnessed to a covered cart, and as you see the commandant has given me a half a dozen men."

Gabrielle threw one last malevolent look on Eve de Saint-Lucque and the two children, after which she turned and strode out of the room and across the vestibule to the front door without uttering another word. Her footsteps not unlike those of a man resounded down the perron steps and on the frozen ground outside. Then only did Eve open her eyes, and fixed them on the soldiers who had lined up behind their sergeant and were standing at attention the other side of the folding doors. Two of them carried stable lanterns. All were armed with bayonets. They wore the promiscuous shabby uniforms affected by the Republican army: they had red caps on their heads adorned with tricolour cockades. The sergeant now stalked further into the room. He gave a word of command to the men and they followed him in, making straight for Eve and the place where the children lay.

"What do you want?" Eve demanded.

"You and the two brats," the sergeant gave curt reply. "Come quietly," he added sternly, "or there will be trouble."

Two of the men seized hold of her while the others pulled away the old carpet that covered the children.

Eve de Saint-Lucque fought like a lioness, while the two men tried to drag her to the door.

"Leave me alone," she cried while she struggled. "We'll come quietly if you leave us alone."

The men let her go and the sergeant ordered her to put some clothes on the children. The soldiers stood about while Eve collected what warm clothing she had for the little girls and with trembling hands managed to get them dressed. She took the two horse blankets which Marianne had brought her and wrapped these round the children's shoulders. The sergeant said roughly:

"That's enough now. We can't stay here all night." And turning to the men he commanded:

"Pick up these brats and take them outside."

Then, of course, prudence went to the wind. Eve de Saint-Lucque felt her senses going. She became a mad woman, seized hold of a chair, swung it over her head threatening to hurl it at the first man who approached her children, would have done it too the next moment had not one of the soldiers at a word from the sergeant dealt her a blow on the head with the butt-end of his bayonet. She fell in a pathetic heap to the ground, not seriously hurt, only stunned, for the

blow had not been a heavy one. To soldiers of the Republic detailed to apprehend fugitive aristos, the general orders were to bring in their prisoners alive.

"Pick up the woman and the brats," the sergeant said reiterating his former order. Eve de Saint-Lucque was unconscious. Mercifully she was spared the sight of seeing her children in the arms of men who were followers of regicides and wholesale murderers. Soon the jolting and creaking of wheels grinding on the axles brought her back to her senses. She and her two little girls had been bundled into a hooded cart, and were lying side by side on its hard wooden flooring. Both the children were crying and calling pitiably for "Maman!" Madame de Saint-Lucque feeling ill and sick from the blow contrived nevertheless to gather the little ones closer to her. Fortunately they were well wrapped up in the thick horse blankets, and their tiny hands felt quite warm. One of these blankets had also been thrown over her, and she did not feel the cold.

The cart went slowly jolting along over the rough roads. Through the canvas hood Eve perceived vague forms stumping along the ground, keeping pace with the cart, and heard the measured footsteps of the troopers each side of her. The children had cried themselves to sleep and both were now cuddled up against their mother. Eve was wide awake. Satisfied that the children were asleep and fairly comfortable, she tried to gather her wits together. As her mind gradually cleared, she became aware of the two words that seemed to stand before her mental vision in letters of fire: "Whatever happens!"

Was it comprehensible? Was it possible that this mysterious behest could apply to the terrible event that had just taken place? "Whatever happens!" the behest had gone on to say, "do not lose your faith or your trust in those who have pledged their honour to save you, and who have never failed to keep their word."

Eve had obeyed the command to destroy the missive as soon as read. But she had committed every word to memory. Until a few hours ago these words had been to her like a profession of faith and of hope. She had sworn before God that she would never lose her faith. But now that faith began to waver, and hope to recede into clouds of despair, she recited them sotto voce over and over again forcing hope to return to her, and faith to revive.

"Whatever happens" was comprehensive, she kept on reiterating to herself, forcing herself with all the will-power she possessed to trust and to believe. Whatever happens! the words at the close of the missive had been underlined. Whatever happens, her arrest and that of her children, the terror, the humiliation, the terrible predicament in which she now was, being driven along, whither she knew not, guarded by a posse of soldiers who of a surety would never allow her to escape—were all these horrors hinted at in the magic word: "Whatever"?

"Oh my God!" she murmured, and hugged her children closer to her, "grant me faith, make me trust those brave men who have sworn to protect me and my innocent little ones."

Chapter XVIII: AT THE COMMISSARIAT

OF POLICE

The Commissariat of Police, Section City of Mézières, stood, an isolated building, at a corner of the Market Square. It was being guarded day and night by a detachment of the local police which, to make assurance doubly sure, had been reinforced by half a company of troopers with a sergeant and two corporals, all of them trained and experienced men. It had gradually leaked out, though still kept in the deepest secrecy, that an expedition was being set on foot which had for its object nothing less than the apprehension of that gang of English spies and their audacious chief who had set the revolutionary government by the ears for the past three years, by aiding aristos and traitors to escape justice. The reward for the apprehension of the master spy was a matter of ten thousand livres, of which every man who aided in the capture would receive his share, in consequence of which there was no lack of keenness on the part of police and troopers, keenness which amounted to enthusiasm.

On the morning following the arrest of Madame de Saint-Lucque and her children, two men and a woman sat in conference on the upper floor of the Commissariat. The men were the Chief Commissary, Citizen Henri Lescar, and the Citizen André Renaud, the reputed master sleuth, the stranger sent down from Paris to assist the authorities of the province in the difficult task of apprehending the Saint-Lucque family of traitors. The woman was Gabrielle Damiens.

Though the conference was being held at a round table it was pretty evident that the dominating personality among these three officials was the woman.

The Chief Commissary of Police, Citizen Henri Lescar, had a paper covered with writing in his hands and had just completed the reading

of it out loud. He then laid the paper down on the table in front of him and said firmly:

"These are my orders. Citizen Chauvelin sent them down to me himself from Paris by special courier. They were drafted by the Head Section of the Committee of Public Safety who sat in special session for the purpose. And these orders," he concluded decisively, "I must obey."

Gabrielle Damiens on the other hand was making no secret of her determination to disobey those orders, wherever they came from. The Saint-Lucque woman and her children were now under arrest, and she had made up her mind as to what she wanted done with the prisoners. Nothing would do but she must have her way, and let the Committee of Public Safety mind its own affairs. In the Province of Artois the will of Mam'zelle Guillotine, in her own estimation at any rate, was law. She spoke in a loud voice and with forceful gestures, bringing her fist down now and again on the table with such a crash that everything on it shook and rattled: the ink spluttered out of the ink-pot, and the grease from the tallow candles flew in all directions.

The men listened to her, dominated by the power of this woman's personality. But at first they had protested.

"I think," Renaud the sleuth had put in tentatively, "that we ought to obey the orders from Paris."

And the Chief Commissary reiterated with a dubious shake of the head:

"They were transmitted to us through Citizen Chauvelin at the bidding of the Committee of Public Safety, who sat in special session in order to discuss the whole question."

This was one of the occasions on which Citizeness Damiens brought her fist down with a bang on the table and the Chief Commissary's immaculate waistcoat was sprinkled with ink and with tallow.

"What do I care," she queried defiantly, "about any Committee of Public Safety and their orders? As for Chauvelin, he is only a fool with one fixed idea—the capture of the English spy. But things here in this province are going to be done my way, let me tell you. If they are not—"

She shrugged, a shrug which implied a threat that neither of the two men dared apparently to disregard. Renaud did put in a feeble: "But . . ."

"There is no but about it," Gabrielle retorted forcibly. "Chauvelin has already used every argument to try and persuade me that the capture of that cursed English spy is of more importance to the government than bringing aristos and traitors to justice. That may be. I dare say he is right, but he has blundered so often that I do not trust his much-vaunted acumen. The capture of that Scarlet Pimpernel may be all very well, but I won't allow the Saint-Lucque brood to slip through my fingers. Let me tell you that. And if you two idiots," she went on with a chuckle and a coarse oath, "go against my will, I can assure you that you will no longer have need of your cravats."

She looked so resolute and so fierce that instinctively the hands of the two men went up to their necks. Chief Commissary Lescar's cheeks had turned a greenish colour, the glance with which he met the woman's savage glare was furtive and terror-stricken. But the sleuth did not allow himself to be intimidated for long. He edged his chair closer to Gabrielle's, put on an amorous air whilst his arm stole round her shoulders.

"You know, my cabbage," he murmured, "that you can always reckon on your little André to do what you want."

Gabrielle coolly shook herself free from his embrace.

"My little André," she retorted dryly, "had better do what I want or . . ."

"Don't let's quarrel, my pigeon," the man went on with fulsome adulation; "give me a kiss. You are my queen, you know, the only love of my life, my beautiful adorable goddess."

And as she turned, half willing to respond to this maudlin flattery, he broke into one of those loud guffaws which experience had taught him always got the better of her irascible moods.

"Did my little cabbage really think," he queried between bursts of immoderate laughter, "that her André would want to thwart her in anything?"

Thus was peace restored between the lovers. What could the unfortunate Commissary do after that but agree to everything that Mam'zelle Guillotine desired? It was, anyway, the safer attitude to take up, for Gabrielle Damiens could be a relentless enemy, and she had power too to enforce her will. So he waited patiently and in silence while a kind of rough bill-ing and coo-ing went on at the other end of the table, whispered endearments, pinching of cheeks and ears, all intermingled with prolonged outbursts of laughter. At last he ventured to interrupt:

"Then what is it you wish to do, Citizeness Damiens?" he asked abruptly.

Gabrielle thrust her ardent lover away from her and turned in her

usual resolute way to the Chief Commissary.

"How does the whole affair stand at the present moment?" she countered.

"The women were arrested last evening, as you know, citizeness . . ."

"I know all that," Gabrielle broke in dryly; "that is not what I was asking. Where are the aristos now?"

"In the cells down below," the Commissary replied.

Gabrielle was silent for a moment or two. A deep frown appeared between her brows, giving an almost sinister expression to her face. Her thoughts were concentrated on the one thing that her very soul desired, the death of Eve de Saint-Lucque and the two children. Let that elusive Scarlet Pimpernel do his worst; all that she, Gabrielle Damiens, lived for these days was to see the heads of these three women fall under the knife of the guillotin--her guillotine, hers, wielded by her own hand, and to hear the death-rattle in their throats.

The two men had waited in silence while she appeared buried in thought. At last she spoke.

"The diligence from Rocroi was due in on Wednesday. It does not go back until Monday. Now I want it brought round here to the back door. I want the Saint-Lucque woman--not the children, mind--to be taken in it to Paris to-morrow, along with a half a dozen fully armed men, who will travel inside the coach with her. And I imagine," she added with a harsh laugh, "that she will not have a very agreeable journey. I propose that we make a start soon after daybreak. I will drive the diligence myself and come to a halt on the crest of the hill in the forest where we shall expect to get in touch with the English

spies. The escort shall dismount, we'll eat and drink and pretend to go to sleep."

"Though I am not proposing to obey every command of Citizen Chauvelin," she continued after a slight pause, "I consider him a shrewd man, even though he is in disgrace. He is quite convinced and I am sure he is right that the Scarlet Pimpernel will be at his tricks again and risk everything in an attempt to drag the Saint-Lucque women out of our clutches. Anyway, I shall be ready for him. The trap is set for the English vermin to fall into, and when we have got him and his followers we'll truss them like so many calves, throw them into the diligence and, as I said, I will drive them myself for immediate slaughter to Paris. The men from inside the coach will then march back to Mézières and wait there for further orders. I'll warrant," she concluded with a complacent chuckle, "that no man or superman, spirit of evil or mere audacious spy, will snatch the reins out of these hands."

She spread out her large, coarse hands--hands that had dealt death to many innocent men, women and children. Renaud captured one of them and raised it to his lips.

He broke into the loud guffaw which Gabrielle loved to hear: but it was only a wry smile that curled round the Chief Commissary's lips.

"You are willing, citizeness," he ventured to ask, "to take full responsibility for this direct disobedience to orders?"

"What orders?" Gabrielle questioned with a shrug.

"That the three aristos shall remain here in the cells until after the capture of the English spies has been effected."

Another shrug from Gabrielle and a contemptuous "Pshaw!" After

which she said decisively, weighing every word and emphasising it by a tap of her finger on the table-top:

"Did you not hear me say, Citizen Commissary, that I want the Saint-Lucque woman to be taken to Paris in the diligence to-morrow, along with half a dozen fully armed men? I spoke pretty clearly, it seems to me."

"Quite clearly, my sweet dove," André Renaud put in with a smirk.

The Commissary ventured on a final protest, a very weak one this time.

"Orders state categorically that there should be no prisoners in the diligence. Only half a dozen picked men fully armed and . . ."

Gabrielle looked him up and down for a moment or two before she broke in dryly:

"That cravat of yours does not become you, Citizen Lescar. Are you tired of wearing it?"

The threat was obvious. The Commissary swallowed hard. His throat was dry and his cheeks were the colour of ashes.

André Renaud burst into a loud guffaw.

"No use for cravats, Citizen Commissary," he chortled, "if one runs counter to my turtle-dove here."

He then turned to Gabrielle and put his arm round her shoulder, trying to draw her nearer to him.

"And what does my lovely one wish her little André to do in all this?" he asked with an affected simper.

She shook herself roughly free from him.

"You, André," she replied curtly, "will take charge of the cart into which the two Saint-Lucque brats must be thrown sometime during the night, when there are no prying eyes about. The woman, on the other hand, must be taken in the same way from the cells to the diligence, as secretly as possible, and given in charge of the picked men in there. The brats must be securely bound in the cart against possible escape. It will be the Citizen Commissary's business to see that all this is properly done: the diligence brought round here to the back door, half a dozen picked men armed to the teeth settled inside, and the woman thrust in quietly sometime during the night. Everything done, in fact, according to my orders," Gabrielle said finally, and cast an imperious glance on the unfortunate Lescar, now reduced to abject silence.

She waited a moment or two before turning to Renaud.

"Weather permitting, I shall make an early start with the diligence to-morrow," she said to him, "and take what escort I may require. How many men has the citizen captain promised you?"

"Two dozen, my pigeon," he replied.

"Including the six picked men?"

"Yes!"

"Then I'll have twelve troopers with me, and you can have the rest. I shall drive the diligence myself, as I said before, and the picked men will be inside ready for the attack. As soon as we have got the English spies we'll have them bound and gagged and thrown into the coach. We'll drive post-haste to Grécourt and wait for you there."

"For me, my cabbage?"

"You will have made a start half an hour after I have gone. You will drive the cart yourself and go round by Parny and Labat. Make a halt at Grécourt. If I am not there wait for me. If I am there first I'll wait for you. Anyway, it must be at Grécourt that we join forces, and all drive happily to Paris together: the English spies in the diligence, the three women in the cart, two dozen men to escort us and see that the devil himself does not interfere. After that, hey, presto! the tribunal and the guillotine for that lot of vermin, what?"

"And promotion for us all," Renaud put in jovially, turning to the Chief Commissary, "not forgetting the reward of ten thousand livres of which you and I will pocket the largest share, eh, my friend?"

He brought his huge hand down with such force on Lescar's shoulder that the poor little man nearly fell off his chair. A fit of coughing took his breath away. Renaud cast adoring glances on his "little cabbage."

"Isn't she wonderful?" he ejaculated fulsomely, and once more tried to draw her closer to him. But she shook him off as roughly as before.

"Leave off behaving like a maudlin fool," she said harshly.

She turned to the Chief Commissary and queried:

"Have I made everything clear? Are you going to follow my instructions? That is what I want to know." Citizen Lescar was making violent efforts to recover his dignity. Difficult under the circumstances. He had been dominated by this woman, been made to feel abject through sheer terror for his life. He, the chief magistrate in this district, who ought to have it in his power to order her arrest for contempt of the law, for flouting the commands of the Committee of Public Safety;

but he couldn't do it. He dared not. He felt humiliated and abject, yet writhing within himself for what he knew was sheer cowardice. That ever-present fear held him down in craven bondage--the fear of the guillotine, of the Committee of Public Safety, of Gabrielle Damiens. He knew not which he feared the most.

At last he said, putting on as pompous an air as he could:

"Since you are taking the lead in this affair, citizeness, everything will be done in accordance with your wishes."

Gabrielle drew a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"I think that is a wise decision, Citizen Commissary," she said dryly. A contemptuous smile curled round her full lips. She had got her way, and knew well enough what had brought this man to heel: but like most dominating women she despised the men who surrendered their will to hers.

While this brief passage of arms went on inside the Commissariat, a tumult in the street below which had been slight at first was growing in volume. A number of people had congregated at the corner of the Market Square, and something, apparently, had annoyed them. A very usual thing these days. Crowds collected in desultory fashion with no known purpose. The women would start grumbling about something or other. There was so much to grumble at. The price of flour, the scarcity of milk, just anything and everything that was very obviously the fault of the government up in Paris. Then the men would take the matter up. Growling and threatening. Drowning the women's shrill voices with their vituperations.

The government? Bah! What are they doing save talking and promising. Promising! always promising! The capture of the English spies, the punishment of all the aristos! The execution of the

oppressors of the people! But what came of those promises. Nothing at all. Flour and lard were as dear as ever, and milk more and more unobtainable every day. And what about the English spies? They had been at their tricks again and put the whole of the province to shame. And those aristos, the women whom Mam'zelle Guillotine has sworn to execute with her own hands, what about them? Promises, promises, sacré name of a dog! Why was nothing done?

"Where are the aristos?" came in a strident call from the women.

And the men shouted: "Have the English spies got at them again?"

Loud and ribald laughter greeted this suggestion. Citizen Lescar whose nerves had not yet recovered from repeated shocks, looked at Gabrielle with the eyes of a dog that has been whipped and fears further punishment. Pathetic eyes they were in their avowal of helplessness and reliance on moral support from this strong-willed woman. But all he got from her was another contemptuous shrug and a sneer.

"Hadn't you better reassure them, Citizen Commissary," she said, "before they throw stones at these windows?"

She watched him with that withering glance of hers while he was obviously trying to gain time by collecting papers together, blowing his nose, smoothing his hair, all of it with hands that shook visibly.

"Try not to be such a craven," Gabrielle snapped out at last. "Go out to them like a successful general about to proclaim a smashing victory. You have the aristos under arrest, haven't you? And a trap set for the English spies from which they cannot escape? Tell them so, like a man, and don't look like a whipped cur if you can help it. The revolutionary government has no use for curs, remember."

Thus placed between the devil and the deep sea, the fear of the Committee in Paris and terror of this vitriolic woman, the unfortunate Lescar had no alternative but to obey. He rose in grim silence and tinkled a hand-bell. A subordinate entered to whom he gave orders for the front door of the Commissariat to be thrown open.

"And don't forget to have the diligence sent round to the back door, Citizen Commissary. I expect the driver can still be found at the Ecu d'Or," were Gabrielle's final commands to her victim as, without casting another glance at his tormentor, he followed his subordinate down the stairs.

A few cheers and an equal number of cat-calls greeted him as he stepped out on the perron.

Somehow, now that he no longer felt the eyes of Mam'zelle Guillotine looking down on him with contempt or with fury, he felt more of a man. He looked down on the crowd below, almost unafraid. The cheers had heartened him: the cat-calls he did not hear, or else mistook them for cheers also. Gabrielle's final words had given him his clue. Now that she wasn't there to prod him with her irony he felt proud and sure of himself, and knew just what he meant to say. He would speak like a successful general, and proclaim victory. There he stood now on the top of the perron this winter's morning casting vague and grotesque shadows on his lean face, his long thin nose and pointed chin. He raised his hand demanding silence.

"Citizens," he began in a firm tone of voice, and loudly enough for all to hear, "this is a great day for us all, for we have wiped out the blot from the escutcheon of our beloved province. The impudent English spies got the better of us once, but we have turned the tables on them this time. The three aristos, whom you all know to have been oppressors of the poor, and traitors to the Republic, are under arrest. Citizen Renaud, a stranger to us all, but as great a patriot as ever

served his country, came all the way from Paris to track these vermin, these snakes to their lair. Now we have got them safely under lock and key here in the Commissariat and to-morrow we will convey them, under sufficient escort this time, to Paris, where they will be tried on a charge of high treason, judged and condemned to death. Our esteemed citizeness Gabrielle Damiens will have the privilege of presiding over their execution here in Mézières. Long live the Republic!"

All this and more did Citizen Lescar say to the assembled townsfolk, who cheered him to the echoes. And having done this he was conscious of a great sense of relief. He had been given his orders by that irascible and dangerous harpy, whose dictates under the present conditions prevailing in France, no man would ever dare to disobey: these orders ran counter in some respects to those which he had received from Paris, but she didn't care; she had made her own plans for the conveyance of the aristos and for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel, and had shouldered full responsibility for her disobedience. In case of failure she must also shoulder the blame and suffer the punishment.

Chapter XIX: THE INTERLOPER

The news of the arrest of Madame de Saint-Lucque and her daughters created a great stir not only in Mézières itself but throughout the neighbourhood. Madame de Saint-Lucque belonged as it were to the district. Her mother was the daughter of a local estate agent, became for a time King's favourite, was created Comtesse de Nesle and played for some six or eight years a great role in the court life of Paris and Versailles. Her daughter Eve was generally believed to be the daughter of Louis XV, who engineered her marriage with the Vicomte--afterwards Marquis--de Saint-Lucque. The marriage was a very happy one: there were three children--a boy and two girls--and all seemed couleur de rose until the outbreak of the revolution, when persecution followed, flight from the ancestral home, separation, arrest and constant danger of death.

The Marquis de Saint-Lucque and his son had been rescued from the clutches of the Terrorists through the agency of the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel. This fact had rankled in the midst of all patriotic Artesians, who looked upon this successful feat of the English spies as a disgrace and a direct insult to the whole of their province and their local revolutionary guard. The news that the ci-devant Marquise and her children had at last been run to earth and were now under arrest soothed their wounded pride to a certain extent. Not that the Saint-Lucques were any of them disliked in the district. Monsieur le Marquis--as he was termed in those pre-revolution days--often came to Tourteron, where Madame had inherited the château and demense of that name from her grandfather, the estate agent. He had made himself very popular with the working people round about the neighbourhood. He was good-looking--the women liked him for that--he was genial, open-handed and not proud. Madame was also very much liked. She was a good mother and devoted wife, virtues very much appreciated in provincial France in those olden days, when the

King and Court gave a sad example of immorality and loose living, and she took a real and personal interest in the families of the poor, and the hard-working housewives whom she often visited.

But, of course, these things were all of the past. There were no such persons as Monsieur le Marquis and Madame la Marquise now, when all men and all women were equal in the sight of the government of France and an era of Liberty and Fraternity had set in throughout the country. The fact that Fraternity seemed to mean that every man's hand was raised against every other who did not agree with his views did not strike the poor ignorant farmer or charcoal-burner as peculiar. The government had declared that aristos were traitors and avowed enemies of wage-earners whom they had reduced to slavery. They plotted with foreigners for the destruction of France and must be exterminated as vermin, root and crop. And that was that.

Men with stentorian voices and wearing tricolour scarves round their waists toured the country in luxurious chaises and harangued the populace of towns and villages from improvised rostrums set up outside estaminets or public buildings. With impassioned words and gestures they pilloried those who had dared to own land which rightfully belonged to tillers of the soil or houses which were obviously the property of those who had built them with their own hands. The fact that some of those houses, like the château of Labat, had been built two or three hundred years ago, had nothing to do with the principle enunciated by these wine-shop orators and the impecunious Artesians were ready enough to swallow the bait cast to them by these mischief-makers intent on fishing in troubled waters.

Everything then was made ready for the start on the morrow. The ci-devant Marquise was hustled in the small hours of the morning into the diligence which stood outside the back door of the Commissariat

of Police.

She was not allowed to bid good-bye to her children who had been incarcerated in a separate cell from hers. The poor woman had been gagged and trussed with cords, and been rendered half unconscious by blows before the men detailed for this abominable work succeeded in getting her locked up in the diligence. Only an hour later was the gag removed from her mouth, and her arms and legs freed from the cords. When she opened her eyes, she found herself propped up in a corner of the vehicle and all around her there were a number of men who stood or sat there in stony silence, filling all the available space inside the coach. It remained at a standstill, and the only light by which Eve was able to take stock of her surroundings came from a small lantern outside. After a time she tried to speak, asked a timid question or two but she received no answer. It would be impossible even to attempt to describe what that poor woman suffered in mind and body during the whole of that awful night. To call her experience a nightmare would be to understate what she went through. For it was no dream. Rather was it hell upon earth. The parting from her children had been the worst of the many ordeals she had had to undergo in these past four years of anxiety and sorrow; and now, when she sat huddled in a corner of the diligence not knowing what had become of them and with those grim and silent men keeping guard over her, she thought that she had at last reached the abysmal depths of misery. In vain did she try and infuse hope into her stricken soul. In vain did she make brave efforts to keep two magic words before her mind: "Whatever happens . . ." She kept on reiterating them, forcing herself to trust and believe but alas! no longer succeeding. Surely when those brave Englishmen planned her rescue they had not anticipated this.

The dawn broke, grey and dim, and very cold. It had snowed all night. The diligence was driven round to the open Market Square in

front of the main door of the Commissariat, where a score of troopers from the 61st Regiment of Cavalry were already lined up. Citizeness Damiens was early on the scene, giving orders, seeing to it that every man had his arms and accoutrements in perfect condition, encouraging, admonishing, full of excitement and energy. Once she opened the door of the diligence and peeped in to have a look at the men inside, and also to gloat over her victim. She called out with a strident laugh:

"This is what it felt like, Eve de Nesle, inside a dungeon of the Bastille with nothing to dream of for sixteen years except revenge. I thought you would like to know."

She slammed the door and turned to find herself in the embrace of André Renaud.

"That's right, my cabbage," he said and imprinted a smacking kiss on her neck; "don't spare that vermin. Give it them hot and strong."

He had arrived on the scene with another score of troopers for use as escort if required. A hooded cart into which the two young daughters of Madame de Saint-Lucque had been hustled, as their mother had been, under cover of the grey dawn was drawn up in the narrow street at the side door of the Commissariat.

The military pageant thus formed on the market place was quite imposing. Two score of troopers, the huge diligence and in the forefront an orderly holding the handsome white charger of Citizen André Renaud. The latter was in close conversation with the Chief Commissary. His massive arm was round Gabrielle's neck, and every few moments his loud guffaws would ring out through the frosty air right across the market place.

A huge crowd had assembled by now and cheered the soldiers, the

Chief Commissary and Mam'zelle Guillotine with lusty energy. The morning was raw and frosty and it was still snowing. The troopers--ill-clad and ill-shod as were most of the regiments of the Republic--were inclined to grumble. The old clock on the municipal building had just struck seven and there was talk of making a start. The Chief Commissary was bidding the travellers farewell and wishing them luck: Gabrielle was preparing to climb up to the box-seat of the diligence when there appeared to be some commotion at the further end of the market place. Shrill voices were heard asking hurried questions.

"Where?"

"Art sure they were the English spies?"

"In the Parc aux Daims?"

The crowd round the diligence thinned out a little as several quidnuncs turned to find out what was causing the tumult over there. A young labourer was, it seems, the centre of attraction in a small knot of excited townsfolk. He was being thrust forward by them across the square in the direction of the Commissariat.

"Go and tell the Citizen Commissary."

And above the hubbub three words twice repeated rang out clearly: "The Scarlet Pimpernel!"

It struck Citizen Lescar like a blow on the side of the head.

"What is that?" he thundered. And: "Who is this lad? What does he want?"

"He has news for you, Citizen Commissary," shouted a man from

out the crowd.

"Go on, boy," urged one of the women, "tell the Citizen Commissary. Don't be afraid."

The boy was now quite close to the Commissary, but he stood there, looking scared, mute as a carp and scratching his head.

"What is it?" thundered Lescar. "Who is this lad?"

"Jean Bernays," somebody said, "the shepherd."

"What does he want? Name of a dog! Won't anyone speak?"

"He says that there is a gang of foreigners, English he thinks, in hiding in the Parc aux Daims."

"Name of a name!" the Commissary swore hoarsely, and seizing the boy by the shoulder he gave him a vigorous shake. The lad immediately began to cry.

Here Gabrielle intervened. She knew the village lads in the district and that there was nothing ever to be gained by trying to bully them. They at once became scared and dumb.

"Tell me, boy," she said and thrust her tall form between Lescar and the shepherd. "Didst see the foreigners last night or only this morning?"

The boy sniffed and wiped his nose with the back of his hand before he replied:

"I only saw them this morning. I was looking after the farmer's sheep. It was maybe four o'clock. Very dark it was. They weren't there yesterday."

"What were they doing?"

The boy shrugged. "Just moving about," he said.

"How didst know they were foreigners?"

"Well! I didn't understand what they said. And then one man caught sight of me. I was watching them from the gate. He offered me money to run away and to hold my tongue. He spoke like a foreigner."

"Then what didst thou do?"

"I took the money and ran to farmer Matthieu and told him what I had seen."

"What did farmer Matthieu say?"

"Told me to get up behind him on his horse. He was just going off to Charleville market. From Charleville I ran all the way to here."

"Where is the money the foreigners gave thee?" the Commissary demanded.

The boy did not like that, would have run away had he dared. Gabrielle thrust a hand summarily into his breeches' pocket, encountered a screw of paper which she drew out and unfolded. It was crumpled and dirty: inside it there were a few silver coins.

"Something is written here," she said and handed the paper over to Renaud. "Can you read it, citizen? I can't."

Nor could the clever sleuth from Paris. He gazed on the dirty scrap of paper and so did Gabrielle. In the end it was Chief Commissary Lescar who looked over Renaud's shoulder and then pointed with a

triumphant finger to the last word of the mysterious writing: and whether you could read the rest or not made no matter, for that one word did stand out clearly and unmistakably and it was scribbled in red chalk: P I M P E R N E L.

The Chief Commissary, the sleuth and Gabrielle Damiens gazed at one another for a moment, open-mouthed, dumbfounded—just long enough for the shepherd to seize his opportunity, snatch his money out of the woman's hand and run away across the square. The Chief commissary was the first to speak.

"I am going after him," he said resolutely.

"After whom?" Gabrielle demanded.

"After that accursed English spy. Citizen sergeant," he commanded, "you and twenty of your men come with me. I am for the Parc aux Daims."

He called to one of the troopers to dismount and bring his horse round to him. In vain did Renaud protest.

"You can't take all these troopers away like that," he said; "Citizeness Damiens and I cannot be left to make a start without sufficient escort."

"You will not need to make a start," Lescar retorted gruffly, "until I come back with my prisoner, that impudent Scarlet Pimpernel."

"But the prisoners . . ." Renaud went on expostulating.

"If you are afraid," the Commissary broke in, "send round to the barracks for reinforcements. I am going to the Parc aux Daims with Sergeant Méridol and twenty men to capture my quarry while I know

where I can get it."

A horse was brought round to him and he prepared to mount when Gabrielle's harsh voice once again intervened.

"You are making a fool of yourself, Citizen Lescar," she said roughly. "The purpose of the Scarlet Pimpernel is to get at the aristos. If we get him or when we get him, it will be when he is at one of his tricks either here or in the forest, or in fact anywhere on the road. To run after him when we have set such a fine trap for him is just folly."

But the Chief Commissary had been too long under the domination of this tyrant in petticoats. He refused to listen to her now.

"My duty," he said resolutely, "is to capture the Scarlet Pimpernel. I have had orders to that effect over and over again for the past three years. If I allow this opportunity to slip by I should be a traitor to the Republic. Already I have wasted too much time in talk and recriminations."

He swung himself into the saddle and called again to the sergeant.

"Citizen sergeant," he commanded, "you will accompany me with twenty of these men. The others remain here with Citizeness Damiens, and Citizen Renaud will send to the barracks for as many more as he wants."

In vain did Renaud swear and protest: in vain did Gabrielle growl like an angry tiger: they were both of them powerless in face of the Chief Commissary's superior authority over the soldiers.

"En avant!" he cried, and set off across the square followed by sergeant and troopers.

"En avant!" and the cavalcade rode away with much jingling of harness and clatter of hoofs on the stone pavement and to the accompaniment of loud cheers from the crowd. Young and old, men and women, yelled themselves hoarse with enthusiasm. Admittedly the worthy townsfolk cared nothing about Citizen Renaud who remained standing there looking somewhat sheepish. He was a stranger to them. Nobody knew him. He had certainly been credited with having tracked the female aristos to their hiding-place, but there the matter ended. Many there were who had listened with indignation to the altercation between him and Citizen Lescar. What right, they thought, had this Parisian interloper to interfere with their Chief Commissary in the exercise of his duty. The Chief Commissary was entirely within his rights when he decided to go at once and capture that abominable English spy, who had led the entire province by the nose with his devilish tricks of helping traitors to escape from justice, and it was past any worthy Artesian's comprehension that Citizeness Damiens--herself a god patriot if ever there was one--should have backed up a stranger against one of their own townsfolk. But there! What can one expect from a woman in love? And Mam'zelle Guillotine's infatuation for the Parisian was no longer a mere rumour but a fact known to all who had their wits about them.

Thus had the crowd watched the proceedings with mixed feelings of approbation for their Chief Commissary and a certain measure of hostility towards Renaud, and after the cheering for Lescar and his cavalcade had subsided there was some booing and hissing directed at the stranger.

Two soldiers were standing together on the fringe of the crowd at the junction of the market place with the narrow street on which gave the side door of the Commissariat. They were ill-shod and ill-clothed in the same haphazard uniforms as their comrades of the 61st regiment. Now and then they both looked over their shoulder down

the narrow street where the hooded cart was drawn up.

Presently they were joined by a third man, who was dressed as they were, whereupon all three drew back a few steps from the edge of the crowd.

"You have the orders?" one of them asked.

"Yes!"

They spoke in French. Only a keen ear would have detected the foreign accent in their speech, which was scarcely audible through the hubbub and chattering of the crowd.

The newcomer now said:

"When the hubbub is at its height, and the attention of the entire crowd is concentrated on what goes on in the market place, we must work our way unobserved down this narrow street to the cart, garrotte the troopers in charge of it—driver and two troopers—throw them into the cart and drive away like hell, take first turning on the right and drive straight on after that. The chief will meet us soon after on the road."

"Is that all?" one of the others asked.

"Yes! The chief warns us to pay no heed to what goes on in the market place, however startling it may be."

"I wonder what he is thinking of?"

"Something desperate, I take it."

"God protect him!" sighed one of the men.

"To-day and always," the others echoed simultaneously.

Renaud, evidently both furious with things in general and perplexed as to what he had better do in view of the hostility of the crowd, turned for advice to Gabrielle Damiens.

"What shall I do now, my pigeon?" he asked dolefully.

She was standing by the near front wheel of the diligence giving orders to the corporal left in command of her escort.

"Take the reins yourself," she was saying to the soldier, "and drive as far as Grécourt and wait for me there. I will take the reins after that."

Then only did she condescend to notice the somewhat foolish-looking swain.

"What does my little cabbage wish me to do?" he reiterated meekly.

"Stay here," she replied dryly, "and see that the two brats in the cart are not spirited away from under your nose. With half the population of Mézières standing round gaping at you, you would be a fool and worse to let that happen. In the meanwhile send round to the barracks for a score more soldiers. When you have them here you can make a start just as if nothing had happened."

"But you, my love . . ." Renaud ventured to say.

"I shall stay here till that fool Lescar returns either with that English devil in which case I should like to get a squint at the impudent rascal before Paris claims him, or without him which I imagine will be the case. I shall then ride to Grécourt and pick up the diligence there. And everything," she concluded, "will go on just as I have planned."

The corporal had already obeyed orders, climbed to the box-seat of the diligence and taken up the reins. Gabrielle gave the order: "En avant," and the old vehicle giving a great shake like a frowsy dog wakened from sleep, started on its way with much creaking of wheels and grinding of axles. The escort thundered to right and left of it, their horses; hoofs drawing sparks from the stony ground. The crowd forgetting for the moment to boo at the stranger broke into a cheer and the young ones among them ran across the square in the wake of the cavalcade, until it turned into the main road and was lost to view.

The master sleuth remained standing where he was, looking the picture of indecision and bewilderment. He tried to recapture Gabrielle's attention by amorous glances, but she only gave him a contemptuous shrug, and without another word turned on her heel and went up the perron steps into the Commissariat.

Chapter XX: THE COURIER

Chief Commissary Lescar was in the meantime riding hell for leather at the head of his troop of stalwarts on the hard road which winds its tortuous way between Mézières and Rocroi. The Parc aux Daims lay about midway between the two cities, to the right of this main artery; a narrow way, little more than a lane, led up to its front gate. Lescar communicated itself to the soldiers who saw in this expedition the foundation of their future fortune.

"On! On citizens!" the Chief Commissary had cried out lustily at the start; "we'll have that abominable English spy under lock and key, and out share of ten thousand livres in our pockets before the day is out."

So on the rode, twenty of them, a sufficient number surely of well-equipped soldiers of the Republic to put to rout that elusive and dangerous adventurer the Scarlet Pimpernel. On they rode heedless of their empty stomachs and of the inclemency of the weather. An hour or so went by. The weather had turned bright and frosty and the men were hard put to it to prevent their horses from slipping. At a word of command from Lescar they drew rein to give the wearied beasts a breather.

"We'll be at the Parc long before midday," the Commissary said, wishing to put heart into the men. "There will be at least a hundred livres for each of you if we bring back that Scarlet Pimpernel alive."

A quarter of an hour later they turned into the secondary road which led to the Parc aux Daims. Presently they drew rein once more. The château and the park were in sight.

"Now citizen soldiers," Lescar enjoined the men, "attention! Keep your eyes open! Let nothing escape you. The English spies will be on

the alert."

He paused a moment, rose in his stirrups and gazed out in the direction of the Parc.

"They have taken shelter inside the château," he said. "I don't see anything moving in the garden."

"En avant!" he commanded.

The narrow road was bordered with grass. Covered with frozen snow it deadened the clatter of horses' hoofs. Absolute silence reigned around. Lescar proceeded cautiously. He knew the ground well and avoiding what had been the drive and the main gate he made straight for the broken-down postern in the encircling wall. The men passed through behind him, at foot pace, one by one. The château lay at a distance of some two hundred metres to the left. The Commissary gave the order to dismount and to tether the horses to some tall pine trees which formed a spinney close by. While the men obeyed, he stepped out into the open and took a quick survey of the stretch of parkland before him. The quietude all around disconcerted him. Surely those devilish English spies had not slipped through his fingers after all. He was beginning to wish he had listened to Mam'zelle Guillotine's advice and remained with these good troopers on guard round the aristos. As she rightly said the purpose of the Scarlet Pimpernel was the rescue of the aristos. It always was. Perhaps it was foolish to try and run him to earth. The challenge should come from him.

The silence which reigned in park and château was certainly strange. Alone the breeze which had sprung up in the last few moments made a weird sound as it moaned through the leafless twigs of the old trees and the lifeless foliage of evergreen shrubs. Calling to Sergeant Méridol to accompany him Lescar went down on

hands and knees and holding his pistol in his right hand, he crept forward cautiously in the direction of the château, closely followed by the sergeant. The broken unshuttered windows seemed to stare at him like giant eyes. Lifeless yet alert. Had the English spies decamped or were they behind those windows, watching him as he moved soundlessly through the tall grass and tangled undergrowth.

Far be it from me to suggest that Chief Commissary Lescar was in any way afraid; rather was he conscious of a feeling of excitement, as if something stupendous was about to happen, something that would prove to be the turning-point of his whole career. Now he came to a halt and beckoned to the sergeant to do the same. They were within a hundred metres of the château. The perron and wide-open front door were clearly visible. Still not a sound from there.

"Go back and tell the men to come along," Lescar murmured under his breath. "I have a feeling that the English spies are in there and are waiting for us."

He didn't wait for the men but crept along under cover of the shrubbery right up to the perron. Pistol in hand, ready for anything he mounted the short flight of steps and peeped through the front door into the vestibule. Not a sound. No sign of any living soul. He passed through the front door taking stock of his surroundings. He had been inside the château before. Long ago when it was inhabited, and before it had fallen into decay. He was familiar with the two smaller rooms in front of him, with the staircase on the left and, on the right, the door which gave on the largest room in the house where receptions and big dinners were wont to be held.

But all the doors were closed now and Lescar did not feel like pushing any of them open while he was alone in case those English devils were on the other side ready to pounce on any intruder. The next moment, however, his straining ears caught the sound of the

troopers approaching. Sergeant Méridol was the first to mount the perron and to step over the threshold. The men soon followed. Cocked pistols in hand they filed in through the front door into the vestibule.

The Chief Commissary indicated the door on the right. The soldiers visibly impressed by the silence and by the aspect of this derelict building seemed none too eager to obey, whereupon Lescar, closely followed by the sergeant, strode to the door and kicked it open. It flew back with a loud cracking and banging, disclosing a sight which caused every man there to gasp with astonishment. The room was large and lofty and must at one time have looked imposing, before the paper on the walls had peeled off in strips and the windows were broken. But it was not the aspect of the room itself that roused the men first to surprise and then to excitement, it was the long table which stretched along it from end to end, a table laden with all sorts of good things, most of them unknown to these poor half-starved soldiers of the Republic: meat, bread, cheese, and what's more, three dozen or more bottles of wine, with corks drawn, all ready for a score of hungry, thirsty men who had been in the saddle for three hours and were half perished with cold and fatigue. In vain did Sergeant Méridol attempt to intervene, in vain did Lescar command, threaten, entreat in the name of the Republic; discipline, never very easily enforced in these days of liberty and equality, was thrown to the winter wind that came in gusts through the broken windows. The men, uttering a portentous cheer, pushing and jostling, tumbling over one another, made helter-skelter for the festive board, seized on slabs of meat and hunks of bread and grabbed the thrice-welcome bottles of wine, which in most cases were emptied almost at a draught. The sergeant, of course, was caught in the vortex. In face of such a marvellous spread, he would have been more than human had he allowed duty to interfere with his enjoyment of it.

As for the Chief Commissary, after he had raged and stormed, after he had threatened sergeant and troopers with exemplary punishment, he realised that he was wasting his breath. The scene before him was like the realisation of a human torrent which nothing on earth had the power to stay. He himself remained dumbfounded, unconscious of hunger, thirst or fatigue, conscious only of a weird sensation of something stupendous and fateful to come. No, no! Things were not as they should be. This mysterious repast laid out by unseen hands in a derelict house savoured of witchcraft or the machinations of a devil. The question was: what devil had engineered and brought about this amazing situation and lured twenty good patriots to such a flagrant dereliction of duty. Lescar turned his head away so as not to gaze any longer on this guzzling, already half-besotted, crowd of men whom he had brought hither to help him come to grips with the most audacious adventurer known. In spite of the cold outside, the large room had become hot and stuffy, the atmosphere reeked of the smell of meat, of hot breaths and the fumes of wine: the weird silence which a while ago had reigned in the empty house had given place to sounds of smacking lips and of working jaws.

Disgusted with sight and sound he made his way to the window and stood gazing out on the wintry landscape, the snow-covered ground, the leafless trees. The whole aspect of this deserted parkland seemed like an emblem of the despondency of his soul. He felt lonely and misunderstood, and suddenly gazing out across the park his eyes became aware of something moving over by the broken-down postern gate. The next moment he was able to distinguish that "something" to be a horse picking its way across the overgrown lawn and through the tangled shrubbery. There were two men in the saddle: one of them a soldier in uniform, the other riding behind him had his arm round his companion's waist. His head drooped over the other's shoulder. He appeared half fainting with exhaustion.

Lescar was out on the perron in a trice. The rider had already drawn rein at the foot of the steps.

"Where are you from?" Lescar called out to him.

"From Mézières, citizen," the soldier replied.

"What news?"

"Citizen Renaud sent me to tell you that all was well. The diligence is well on the way and he himself was thinking of making a start with the other aristos. He doesn't want to wait much longer as he wants to make Grécourt before nightfall. He sent to the barracks for more men. They only could spare half a dozen, but citizen Renaud says that these are quite sufficient."

Lescar made no comment on the news. He was wondering in his mind where his own interests lay in this tangled affair. Should he return to his post in Mézières and let the matter of the Scarlet Pimpernel drift? He certainly didn't feel that he would have much chance against the English spies should they return in numbers, and with most of his troop in a state of intoxication. Or should he stand his ground and with the few men who had remained sober, like this newcomer and Sergeant Méridol, effect the wonderful capture which would mean a fortune and his name inscribed on the golden roll of patriots who had rendered signal service to the Republic? It was a difficult problem to solve. The Chief Commissary remained silently brooding for a minute or two and then bethought himself of the man who had ridden behind the soldier.

"Who are you?" he demanded abruptly.

The man appeared almost exhausted, and at Lescar's peremptory question he gave a start and almost rolled out of the saddle. He

would have measured his length on the ground had not Lescar run down the perron steps and caught him ere he fell. He was a youngish man decently dressed, save that his clothes were stained with the dirt and mud of the road.

"Your pardon, citizen," he murmured, "but I have ridden all the way from Paris without drawing rein."

"Who are you?" Lescar reiterated, "and what do you want?"

The man drew a sealed letter from the inner pocket of his coat.

"I am courier in the service of the Committee of Public Safety," he said; "I have orders to deliver this to no one but the Chief Commissary of the Mézières Section himself. My credentials are inside," he added and handed the letter to Lescar who at once broke the seal and quickly unfolded the missive.

"I met the courier outside Mézières," the soldier put in. "He was asking for the Chief Commissary. I thought I had best bring him along with me. And as he--"

But he got no further for he was suddenly interrupted by a cry of horror twice repeated from Citizen Lescar, who in his turn appeared as if he was about to measure his length on the ground. "A horse!" the Chief Commissary exclaimed hoarsely. "I must to Mézières at once."

Without waiting to see if the courier or the soldier followed him he ran across the park as fast as the undergrowth and the weedy grass would allow him in the direction of the spinney where his troopers' horses were tethered.

"Follow me," he cried over his shoulder to the soldier, "and let the

courier come too."

The two men were inclined to grumble, but Lescar gave them no time to protest.

"It is a matter of life and death," he shouted as he ran, "and all those louts over in the château are either drugged or drunk."

After a moment's hesitation the soldier thought it best to obey, whilst the courier appeared unwilling to be left alone in this derelict spot. At any rate he climbed slowly and rather painfully back into the saddle, and the wearied mount with its double burden picked its way to the spinney where the Chief Commissary was just getting to horse, looking so scared and so death-like pale that the soldier called out instinctively:

"What has happened, citizen? You look scared to death."

But Lescar who had run on the rough ground nearly all the way from the château was hardly able to speak.

"Get fresh horses both of you . . ." he gasped, "and follow me."

Chapter XXI: AN OUTRAGE

To gather one's thoughts together, to think at all, was quite out of the question. Lescar's brain was at a standstill, all he could do was to ride, ride on, with hope and despair warring in his mind, despair for the most part gaining the upper hand. He had thrust the letter in the inner pocket of his coat and his hand remained there clutching that fateful missive which, undoubtedly, did mean life or death to him.

The wintry sun was past the meridian now and had begun its downward course to the west. Soon the shades of evening would be drawing in and the market cart with the two female aristos would be driven, Satan alone knew whither. And the unfortunate Commissary rode on at breakneck speed, with just enough sense to avoid the frozen puddles on the road, and to take advantage of any patches of mud where a feeble thaw had set in under the midday sun. The two men followed more leisurely. They were, in fact, some little way behind when the town of Mézières at last came in sight.

Ten minutes later Lescar on ahead had reached the first isolated house of the city; another five and his horse's hoofs were drawing sparks from the stones of the main street. The Market Square could already be perceived through the mist-laden atmosphere. Lescar strained his eyes to see what was going on. There was quite a good crowd there still apparently, hanging about in a desultory fashion. And there was a sprinkling of uniforms to be seen among the throng. In the midst of it all there was Citizen Renaud, who held his white charger by the bridle. Gabrielle Damiens ran down the steps of the Commissariat just then and flung herself into his arms.

Lescar gave a cry of jubilation. All was well.

Renaud had just called out:

"One more kiss, my pigeon, and I go."

Gabrielle threw her arms round his neck. The crowd closed in round them, and forgetting its hostility to the stranger, gave the lovers a loud cheer as they exchanged kiss after kiss.

Another minute and Lescar was across the square. He drew rein so abruptly that his horse reared and snorted and the crowd in dismay scattered in all directions. Gabrielle dragged herself out of her lover's embrace.

"What's all this?" she demanded harshly.

"If it is not the Citizen Commissary," ejaculated a woman in the crowd.

Whereupon Renaud, in the act of mounting his white charger, exclaimed with an oath:

"That cursed fool again!"

"What do you want?" Gabrielle demanded as Lescar dismounted in double-quick time and nearly knocked Mam'zelle over, so close to her did he land.

"Have you got the spy? Where is he?" she went on peremptorily, and the men and women in the crowd questioned him eagerly. "Where is the English spy?"

With a dramatic gesture worthy of the finest classical traditions, Lescar pointed to the man on the white charger and spoke the one word at the top of his voice so that all might hear:

"There!"

Gabrielle shrugged and muttered: "The man is drunk." The whole crowd turned to look on Citizen Renaud, who was evidently of the same opinion as Mam'zelle, for he only shrugged and with a click of the tongue urged his horse to start. With a yell that would have shamed a wild beast in a rage, Lescar threw up his arms and with a vigorous working of his elbows forged his way through the crowd to the very side of Renaud and seized the bridle of the prancing white charger.

"I tell you all," he screamed, in a voice hoarse with excitement, "that if you let this man out of your sight you will be the blackest traitors that ever betrayed your country."

Renaud raised his whip and with it struck the Chief Commissary on the head. An outrage against the chief authority of the town. The population resented it. It had appeared dumbfounded for the moment, but now it rose in its wrath and with many murmurings gathered round their Commissary and the man on the white charger, effectually impeding the latter's movements. It was once again a case of animosity against the stranger and loyalty to one of their own kin. Renaud struck out right and left with his whip.

"Let me pass, you dolts," he cried, while Lescar, who had yelled himself hoarse, tried to recover his breath before starting to yell again.

"En avant!" Renaud shouted to the escort of troopers, who had much ado to keep their horses quiet in the midst of all this turmoil. "This man is mad or drunk."

Gabrielle in the meanwhile had also forged her way to the side of her lover. She came to a halt, facing Lescar with flaming eyes.

"What's all this?" she demanded. "Speak, man, ere I denounce you

as the traitor you so freely talk about."

"Don't let this man go," Lescar countered, "and I'll tell you."

"Citizen Renaud stays here," Gabrielle responded firmly. And the sleuth accustomed to obey this masterful woman turned to her, holding his horse in check.

"All right, my pigeon," he murmured, "but it's getting late and I can't waste my time with this fool."

"Never mind about your time, citizen," she retorted dryly. "You stay here, understand? I want to hear what the Chief Commissary has to say, and that's enough. Now then, citizen, speak up."

The crowd gathered more closely round the principal actors in this rather puzzling drama, pressing near to one another in an endeavour to get some warmth into their blood, for it was very cold. The women drew their shawls—if they happened to have any—tightly round their shoulders. The men's noses and hands were blue. Their bare feet in their wooden sabots were nearly frozen. But the situation as it now appeared provided excitement enough to make their discomfort seem unimportant. The Chief Commissary looked to be in a fever of agitation. Mam'zelle Guillotine was obviously puzzled, whilst the stranger was in a towering rage. The young corporal in command of the troopers who formed the escort round the cart tried to push his way through the throng, but it had become so dense and the hostility of the people so marked that he ordered three of the men to join him, whilst the others were told to remain with the cart on the fringe of the crowd, one to hold the reins and the others on guard.

"Speak up, Citizen Commissary," the woman shouted to Lescar, and the men echoed the cry. "Speak up!"

Lescar dived into the pocket of his coat. He drew out the papers which the courier from Paris had brought him. He put on a pompous air and forced himself to speak slowly and steadily.

"The Committee of Public Safety sitting in Paris," he began, "sent me a courier this morning with a letter which was to be delivered into no other hands but mine. Here are his credentials."

He unfolded one of the papers and with a grandiose gesture held it out to Gabrielle, who snatched it out of his hand. She had become, as it were, the spokesman of the assembly. The paper bore the signature of two of the principal members of the Committee of Public Safety and also its official seal. It stated that the bearer was an accredited courier to the Committee and had been entrusted with a private letter addressed to the Chief Commissary of the district of Mézières; the letter to be delivered into his own hands.

"Yes, that's in order," Gabrielle declared. "Where's the courier?"

"Not far behind," the Commissary replied. "I rode along full tilt, he followed more slowly. He'll be here in a few minutes."

While he spoke he unfolded the second communication, and, with a flourish more dramatic than before, handed it to Gabrielle. Now there was no one to equal Gabrielle Damiens for shouting, raging and storming when she was roused, and both Citizen Renaud and the rest of the crowd quite expected one of those violent outbursts from Mam'zelle Guillotine while she ran her eyes down the paper which the Citizen Commissary had given her. But the only sound that came through her lips was a growl like that of a wild cat before it starts to spit and to scratch. The crowd remained breathless. Waiting. Wondering. And suddenly the enraged woman's arms shot out, she threw the paper back into the Commissary's face and then with both hands she seized the man on the white charger by the leg, and had

dragged him off his horse before he realized what was happening. Thus taken unawares and entirely helpless, he rolled over and over on the ground. The horse reared, plunged, scattering the bystanders, and the unfortunate man had the greatest difficulty in warding off the more dangerous kicks from its hoofs, until the corporal was able to seize the mettlesome beast by the bridle and to bring it to comparative quiescence. But this didn't prove to be the end of the wretched stranger's troubles, for Gabrielle had got hold of his whip and with it was belabouring him on the head, the back, the shoulders with such fury and such strength that he cried and cried again for mercy. Nor did she desist till the whip broke. She threw it from her and stood with arms akimbo, looking down on her half-conscious victim. The man on whom she had lavished her kisses a few short minutes ago. Her face looked positively evil.

True, the good Artesians were not altogether sorry to see the arrogant stranger thus brought to pain and humiliation, for these were days when the sight of physical and mental suffering was an all too familiar one; the tumbrils and the guillotine made it an almost daily spectacle for young and old, and even for children. They looked on it as a part of this life's routine, as a distraction from the monotony of weary, idle hours. But in this case the expression on Mam'zelle's face was almost terrifying. There was contempt as well as rage in her eyes and the strong vein of cruelty never wholly absent from her mien. They were all of them dumbfounded, even the Chief Commissary had lost his pompous air, and his excitement appeared to have calmed down. He and Gabrielle, the stranger on the ground, the corporal on horseback holding the white charger by the bridle and the three troopers, formed a compact group, round which the throng now stood in a wide circle, eager, expectant, awed into silence. But the silence did not last long. Presently there rose a murmur. It began with the women whispering to one another:

"What has he done?"

"Is he really the English spy?"

"The Scarlet Pimpernel?"

"No, impossible!"

"The Commissary said so."

"He denounced him."

"But how did he know?"

And the murmur was taken up by the men, until there was a hum like a swarm of hornets which filled the market.

"Is he the English spy?"

"How do they know?"

For somehow the stranger, much as they mistrusted him, did not answer to their conception of what the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel was like. He was tall, but should have been taller still, of Titanic proportions, like the legendary giants: he should have looked less human, more like the supernatural being of the nether world.

"He is not the Scarlet Pimpernel," some of the women asserted boldly.

"I don't believe it," the men said.

Gabrielle turned her glowering eyes on the Chief Commissary.

"Tell them," she commanded, "what is written in that letter."

Lescar smoothed out the crumpled paper which Gabrielle had thrown in his face.

"Attention!" he cried loudly, and then went on:

"This letter comes to me from Citizen Renaud . . ."

"Citizen Renaud?" they exclaimed. "But the letter came by courier from Paris, then how--?"

He then began to read:

"Citizen Chief Commissary of the Section of Mézières in the Province of Artois.

"This is to warn you that there is an English spy known to his followers as the Scarlet Pimpernel, who has been impersonating me these few days past. I have reasons to believe that his latest activities have been directed in your province. So, be on the look-out. I have been detained in Paris, but will be in Mézières within the next twenty-four hours. The Committee of Public Safety here in Paris is sending its special courier to you for me, to bring you this urgent letter.

"And," the Chief Commissary added, "the letter is signed André Renaud, and bears the seal and stamp, as well as two signatures of members of the Committee of Public Safety in Paris."

The unfortunate man, still lying in his semi-unconsciousness on the ground, had made desperate efforts to regain his senses. He struggled and wriggled his bruised body about until he was able to prop himself up on his elbow. Looking up at his tormentor with an expression of hatred at least as intense as her own: "You'll pay for this, Mam'zelle Guillotine," he contrived to murmur between his teeth and then turned his glance on the Chief Commissary, who was in the

act of folding up the momentous papers and thrusting them back into his pocket. The expression of hatred in the stricken man's eyes lingered there also for a few seconds, but soon changed to contempt as he broke into a forced, immoderate laughter. But this hilarity was short-lived. The next moment the crowd had suddenly, if somewhat tardily, realised the full significance of the one horrible fact, namely that this man, this intruding, arrogant stranger, was none other than the far-famed Scarlet Pimpernel, the most dangerous enemy of France, who had devised the abominable trick of impersonating a servant of the Republic in order to save a batch of female traitors from the punishment their crimes deserved. The fact that it was this same man who had brought about the arrest of the ci-devant Marquise de Saint-Lucque was lost sight of for the moment. What was remembered was the dramatic gesture of the Chief Commissary pointing to this man when he was asked: "Where is the English spy?" and his voice answering loudly so that all might hear: "There!"

The angry murmurings of the crowd turned to threats of violence.

"The Scarlet Pimpernel! That abominable English spy! That's what this man was all the time, and we never guessed."

"Mam'zelle Guillotine!" one of the women shouted, "you'll know what to do."

The man on the ground realised the danger he was in. Three or four violent kicks had already been dealt to him.

The corporal ordered the troopers to close in round him to protect him from further assaults from the crowd. This audacious English spy was food for the guillotine, not for the mere sadistic entertainment of a lot of provincial louts. They did their best to ward off the kicks and blows that were freely aimed at the prostrate form of the stranger.

Whether it was a sudden inspiration or merely the powerful instinct of self-preservation, who can tell? Certain it is that when matters appeared at their blackest, when the troopers seemed unable to cope any longer with the crowd which had become very violent, the stranger, whoever he was, succeeded in regaining his feet. He looked to right and left of him and over the heads of the multitude and uttered a long-sustained cry of horror and affright.

"The cart," he exclaimed, "where is it?"

Where, indeed? The crowd parted, gazed in direction of the street corner to which the stranger pointed with quaking hand.

"The cart!" the latter reiterated, choking with emotion, whilst men and women vainly tried to switch off their minds from one horrible fact to another, from the personality of one man, his duplicity, his shameless impersonation, their own wrath and desire to punish, to the outrageous trick played upon them by one whose identity could not be in doubt for one moment. For the cart had gone. Vanished with the troopers and their horses. While the attention of the crowd had been drawn to the stranger and his presumed misdeeds, the female aristos had been spirited away from under their nose. The cart had been driven away under cover of the uproar and the gathering mist which enveloped the narrow street. A couple of troopers had been left in charge of it when the others with their corporal were called to protect the stranger from further assaults from the irate and unruly crowd. Their horses had vanished with them, whilst a third trooper who had been holding the reins had also disappeared. When did this outrage happen? Whither had all those men gone? Who could tell? And what in Satan's name had become of the cart and horses?

Both Gabrielle and the Commissary had remained tongue-tied at first, rigid as granite statues; the expression on the Commissary's face was at first one of incredulity, then of bewilderment and finally of

horror. But Gabrielle's face remained expressionless, her face became the colour of ashes, it looked like the face of the dead. She never moved, not even when the Commissary gave a loud command to the troopers.

"After them, citizens, they cannot have gone far."

The corporal and the troopers jerked their horses' heads round and set spurs to their flanks, scattering the crowd in all directions. Men and women took up the cry: "They cannot have gone far," and swarmed all over the market place, rushing blindly, aimlessly, hither and thither, shouting confused suggestions to the bewildered soldiers.

"This way, citizen!"

"No, that!"

"This is the short cut to Grécourt."

"They'd avoid that."

"Try the road to Labat."

The way into the side street and that street itself were soon nothing but scenes of the wildest confusion in which men and women effectively obstructed all possibility of pursuit.

"This way, citizen!"

"No, that!"

And so on, while confusion was made more confounded at every moment. There were at least half a dozen ways which led from the centre of the town to anywhere. It was getting late in the afternoon.

Evening began to draw in. Soon a misty sleet mixed with snow began to fall and it was difficult to distinguish anything beyond a fraction of a league ahead, past the city lights.

It was all very well to keep on shouting and urging: "They cannot have gone far." That might be true enough but the question was: "In which direction?"

There were only three troopers, besides their corporal, and the Chief Commissary who were mounted, and they might possibly have overtaken the cart even though it was being driven at breakneck speed. The corporal and one of the troopers went in one direction, the others followed the Commissary while the young men in the crowd ran down the various narrow streets which gave all round the Market Square. And with it all there was rush and uproar and enough shouting, clatter of horses' hoofs and of wooden shoes on the pavement stones, as to give any fugitive all the warning required for a good get-away.

Chapter XXII: NIGHTMARE

Gabrielle, after those few minutes of stone-like stupefaction, had pulled herself forcefully together. Hers was not a nature to allow herself to be cowed by any man or any event. In spite of the humiliation which she had endured and the many ups and downs of exultation and of horror through which she had passed during this fateful day, she was still Mam'zelle Guillotine, whose commands were law in the Province of Artois, and at whose words the fiercest Terrorists up in Paris were wont to tremble. Renaud, the sleuth, the arrogant stranger on whom she had lavished her kisses a short hour ago, and to whom she had administered such degrading punishment, was standing there, by the white charger, with one hand on the bridle, and was making serious efforts to shake off the feeling of giddiness caused by the heavy blows on his head. They stood isolated now, these two, in front of the Commissariat, the whole crowd having melted away, scattered like leaves before the wind. Gabrielle turned a glance of withering contempt on her former suitor and when she saw that he was preparing to mount, she just seized him by the arm with a grip that was like a vice and thrust him out of her way with such violence that he nearly came down again on his knees. Another contemptuous glance, a shrug, and it was she who had mounted the white charger.

"You stay where you are!" she commanded, "While I try to undo the mischief you have done."

With a click of the tongue she set the horse to walk across the square.

Renaud shouted after her, his voice choked with hatred unspeakable.

"The mischief I have done? You devil incarnate, you shall pay for this. Mark my words."

Whether she heard him or not is difficult to say. Certain it is that she put her horse to the trot without once turning to him. Straight ahead she rode across the square until she turned into the Grécourt road.

It was still snowing, but overhead the clouds were thin and from behind them the wan light of the moon shed a faint, greyish aura over the frozen landscape. Gabrielle knew every inch of the road and with unerring hand and eyes guided her mount. At first she overtook one or two detachments of voluntary search-parties who with much shouting and any amount of voluble talk were still patrolling the road, hopeful of coming up with the cart, which "could not have gone far." They cheered Gabrielle as she went by.

Once past the foremost of these enthusiasts she put her horse to a walk. Her eyes keen as those of a hawk pierced the darkness to right and left of her. She had the feeling that it would be on this road that she would come across some trace of that audacious Scarlet Pimpernel. All around her the stillness could almost be felt. The snow fell in large soft flakes. Not a breath of air stirred the leafless branches of the tall poplars that bordered the road, and Gabrielle's keen ears could not detect the slightest sound of distant wheels or horse's trot. It was only half an hour later that the white charger suddenly shied at a black, shapeless mass which lay by the roadside.

Gabrielle dismounted and holding the horse by the bridle went up to the black mass which had frightened it. Two men, wearing the uniforms of the 61st regiment, were lying half in and half out of the ditch. They were tied to one another with cord, and a woolen scarf was wound round the lower part of their faces. The snow lay over them like a thin, white blanket. As Gabrielle approached them, they

made a combined vigorous effort to utter a cry of distress, but it was only a faint gurgle that reached her ears. She threw the reins over her arm and with strong capable hands she released the men of their bonds, and unwound the scarf from round their mouths. Their teeth were chattering and their arms and legs were trembling with the cold. She pulled one man up by his coat collar and then the other, but never uttered a word till she had them both in a sitting posture.

Once this was accomplished her peremptory questions came out sharp and clear.

"What happened?"

"It was while you were hitting out at the English spy," one of the men contrived to reply.

"The English spy?"

"Yes! We thought he was the man sent down here to track the aristos. And he turned out to be that abominable Scarlet Pimpernel."

"Then what happened?"

"We could not help watching," and even through his chattering teeth the soldier gave a chuckle. "It was such a fine sight seeing you belabouring that spy."

"I stood on the front board," added the trooper who had been holding the reins. "The better to see you. Name of a dog, I wouldn't have been in his shoes for a pension."

"And the kisses you had been giving him . . ."

But Gabrielle was not in a mood to listen to any bantering. "Didn't

you hear me ask what happened?" she demanded harshly.

"Just this, citizeness," one of the troopers gave reply, the one who was best able to speak; "when the whole crowd in the square was yelling itself hoarse with laughter and when excitement was at its height, my comrade and I were suddenly seized by the leg, dragged off our horses, struck on the head, and rolled over on the ground. We were gagged and bound and thrown into the cart before we could utter a sound."

"The same thing happened to me," said the other. "I held the reins, and I was standing on the front board watching you flourishing that whip, when I was seized by the legs and dragged down from the board. I too was gagged and bound and thrown into the cart, and as I had struck my head heavily against the wheel, I was too dizzy to offer any resistance."

"You were driven away in the cart?"

"Then and there, citizeness."

"Where is the cart now?"

"I don't know, citizeness. But it must be somewhere near here. I just heard it come to a halt and the horses gallop away before I half lost consciousness."

"The horses?"

"Yes! They were taken out of the shafts. I could hear that. It was not far from here."

"Where is your other comrade?"

"I don't know, citizeness. He was with us in the cart. Perhaps he is

still there now."

"Anyone else but you three dolts in the cart?"

"Yes! Two brats. And there were others, I think, but I could not see," the soldier gave answer.

"Nor I," echoed the other.

"How many English spies were there?" Gabrielle asked again.

"I couldn't tell exactly, citizeness. There must have been at least a dozen. They fell on us like a swarm of hornets."

"And that's a lie," Gabrielle asserted dryly. "A dozen? I don't believe there were more than two or three---And perhaps only one," she added slowly.

"I give you my word, citizeness--"

"Hold your tongue. You were nothing but a set of traitors and cowards."

"And that is unfair, citizeness. What could we do? When the cart stopped we were dragged out and thrown down in this ditch and left to perish of cold for all those devils knew. Wasn't that so, comrade?"

There was a grunt of assent, and Gabrielle queried again:

"Where is the cart now?"

"I don't know, citizeness."

To Gabrielle Damiens the whole of this story told jerkily by men whose lips were shaking with cold, was like a nightmare from which

she would presently wake and find that nothing of it was real, that all of it was only a hideous phantasmagoria brought before her mind by mischievous emissaries of Satan and sent by him to worry and exasperate her. That she, the strong-minded Amazon, the lion-hearted wielder of the sword of justice, the indomitable scorner of men should thus have been cozened, baffled, bamboozled like any groundling or village dolt was inconceivable. It was maddening and for a time she felt as if her wits had deserted her and she remained crouching there in the ditch beside those two soldiers, with an expression in her face which, but for the darkness, would have been terrifying.

The men never moved. They were sore in limb and their bodies were almost inert. After a time Gabrielle appeared to gather her wits together again. She struggled to her feet, paid no heed to the soldiers, never spoke another word to them. She stood there with the horse's reins swung over her arm, she, more solidly dark than the surrounding darkness, and the white charger beside her like a ghost. Her eyes tried to pierce the veil of snow, searching the gloom for an outline of the cart. The men watched her when presently she mounted and threw herself astride into the saddle. They went on watching as she turned her horse's head back towards Mézières, put him to the trot and was soon engulfed in the night. After which they in their turn struggled to their feet and walked slowly back in the direction of the city.

They walked on in silence at first, stamping their feet and swinging their arms across their chest striving to get the blood back into their frozen limbs. At first and until the sound of the white charger's hoofs died away in the distance down the road.

Had Gabrielle Damiens been endowed with super-human senses, she would have been lost in wonderment, for as soon as the stillness

of the night became so absolute that it seemed almost palpable, it was broken by a sound which, in this lonely bit of country, roused the barn-door owl from its nightly contemplation and disturbed the prowling cat in its chase after little birds.

"By George!" a voice suddenly broke forth through the gloom in a language Mam'zelle Guillotine would not have understood, had she heard; "I'm positively frozen stiff."

And another voice then echoed: "I've never been so cold in all my life."

"Got your flask handy, Glynde?"

The other fumbled into his inside pocket and handed a flask to his friend.

"No, you go first," the latter said.

Both had a good pull at the flask.

"I hope we get horses at the Ecu d'Or."

"The chief said we were certain to. It is a posting-inn, you know. Stage-coaches get their relay there."

"Yes, I know. And with all this turmoil going on . . ."

The other man shrugged.

"Well! If we can't get horses we'll have to walk. It is not far and I know the way."

"The walk will do us good," his friend commented with easy philosophy.

"When I think what the chief has put up with . . ."

One of the men who spoke was Sir Philip Glynde, the owner of Glynde Towers, one of the show places in East Anglia, with its famous racing stables, its show gardens and hot-houses. The other was Viscount St. Dennys, one of the richest men in England, who had been equerry to the Prince of Wales till he gave up that position and all the pleasures attached to it, in order to follow his chief in the path of obedience and self-sacrifice. Accustomed to every luxury that the possession of a large fortune can procure, sybarites both, they talked quite gaily of a tramp in the night across country with an icy wind driving snow and sleet into their faces, just as they had endured with equal gaiety and as a matter of course, lying flat on hard frozen ground for over an hour with teeth chattering and limbs growing stiff with cold and the pressure of ropes around their body.

On ahead a bright light glinted through the gloom.

"There's the Ecu d'Or," Glynde remarked.

"Now for a mug of mulled wine," the other rejoined.

"If we get it the Lord be praised."

"If we don't may the devil take the landlord and his ugly wife."

On they tramped after that in silence till they came to the posting-inn into which they turned and made straight for the coffee-room.

There was mulled wine made hot for the asking and the payment thereof, and there were a couple of horses to be had also, old nags but serviceable, anyway. Glynde gave a deep sigh when the obsequious landlord closed his grasping hand over the pieces of gold which St. Dennys had pressed into it.

"I almost wish the brute had not got us everything we wanted," he said ruefully. "The thought of Blakeney at this moment sickens me."

St. Dennys agreed with him, but said more lightly:

"We've obeyed orders. Thank God we were able to do that. I was dreadfully sorry for those kids."

"And there's the poor mother still knocking about somewhere."

"How in Heaven's name will the chief get her away?"

They drank the hot wine while the two nags, which they had been forced to purchase at a preposterous price, were being saddled. Soon they got to horse and rode away, into the night.

"What did they give thee?" the woman asked her husband, while he busied himself putting up the shutters in the house and barring the door.

"Five louis," he replied curtly.

"They are either mad," the wife retorted, "or else English spies; else they wouldn't have parted with all that money."

"It matters not what they are," the man rejoined with a shrug. "Their money is good anyway."

Book Four

Chapter XXIII: A MESSAGE

Chapter XXIV: THE COSY CORNER

Chapter XXIII: A MESSAGE

All these exciting events just described are put on record in the archives of the city of Mézières: the arrival of the master sleuth from Paris, the arrest of the ci-devant Marquise de Saint-Lucque and her two children, and the preposterous accusation brought against the envoy of the Committee of Public Safety by Citizen Chief Commissary Lescar and the turmoil that ensued in consequence.

It is also on record that three days before this last event the stage-coach which plies fortnightly between Barlemont in Belgium and Paris, came to its habitual halt at the Ecu d'Or, the posting-inn on the outskirts of Mézières. On this occasion it brought its usual complement of travellers who were made to alight in order to have their passports examined and their identity scrutinised. There were not many strangers among the small crowd that tumbled helter-skelter out of the lumbering vehicle which had brought them jogging along the hard frozen road from the other side of the Franco-Belgian frontier, and nearly shaken their souls out of their bodies during four hours of this very trying journey. Half a dozen passengers were allowed to pass immediately through the barrier where the examination took place, and filed into what was still called the coffee-room, though no coffee was ever dispensed there these days. Only mugs of sour wine which was made hot if it was specially paid for, and if the landlord and his wife happened to be in an amiable mood. This privileged half-dozen hungry and thirsty travellers were French citizens, farmers or shopkeepers who traded regularly with Belgium, crossing the frontier backwards and forwards, and personally known to the police. The others, they were Belgians or Dutch for the most part, were kept waiting, standing out in the cold where innumerable questions were put to them, their papers taken away from them and brought back again, and countless other vexations put upon them till one of them, a woman, collapsed, fainting with hunger and cold and

had to be carried indoors by her fellow sufferers. These were two men and another woman, all obviously foreigners. One of the men, a stocky little fellow, was described on his passport as of Dutch nationality, native of Batavia, and skipper of the cargo ship Van Tromp of the Netherlands line. He had landed in Antwerp with a load of coffee, part of which was destined for a wholesale house in Paris. His papers were all in order. They had been signed by the Dutch governor of Batavia and countersigned in Antwerp by Citizen Duvernay, representing the revolutionary government of France in the port of Antwerp. Nothing could be more clear or above board, but the police inspector in charge of the revision of foreign passports in the district was inexperienced and officious. He gave himself airs of authority which annoyed the Dutch skipper who became very truculent, heaped curses and abuse on the young officer and was with difficulty restrained from coming to blows with him.

His fellow travellers, a man and a woman, did their best to soothe the ruffled feelings of the irate Dutchman.

"Do, I pray you, intervene," the woman said to her companion, "we shall never get away while this row is going on."

They had each their passports and other papers in one hand, and each carried a small valise. The man thrust the papers without more ado under the young officer's nose.

"If you could get us through quickly, citizen," he said ingratiatingly, "we would be greatly beholden to you. My friend is cold and hungry. We would like to get food and drink and beds for a night or two before we proceed on our way. We are American citizens," he went on, "and our papers are entirely in order."

With this he insinuated a handful of silver coins into the officer's hand, whose manner at once underwent a change: his hand closed

over the money and thrust inside his tunic, after which he took the American's papers and made a show of scrutinising them carefully.

Passports and papers were undoubtedly in order. They were signed by Mr. John Adams, the first United States ambassador accredited to England. Possibly, the officer of Mézières knew nothing at all of Mr. John Adams, and very little of the United States of America, but he knew all about Citizen Jean Lambert Tallien and Citizen Barras, two of the most prominent members of the Convention, who had countersigned the passports. The woman was described thereon as Madeleine St. Just and the man as Honoré St. Just her brother, both citizens of the United States, come to Europe in order to visit their cousin Louis St. Just, the friend and intimate of Maximilien Robespierre himself, names indeed to conjure with.

The police officer's manner became almost abject. Completely ignoring the truculent Dutchman and his imperious demands, he stamped passports and papers without further demur, did not order the valises to be opened for examination, and even went to the length of escorting these highly-connected foreigners as far as the inn and recommended them to the special care and attention of the landlord and his ill-favoured wife, with a whispered hint of the financial benefit that would be derived from such attention. The landlord took the hint and forgetting his status of free citizen of the Republic of France, and its laws of Equality for all, became almost servile in his desire to provide his guests with everything they desired.

However, they did not want much seemingly, only a couple of rooms with a clean bed for two or three nights, and for the moment just a quiet corner where they could sit and eat in peace. There was a lot of "This way, citizeness," from the landlord, and: "The coffee-room is crowded, you will be better here," as he ushered the travellers into a small parlour adjoining the larger room and summoned his wife to lay

the table and bring along the best food the Ecu d'Or could muster.

Marguerite Blakeney sank on to the hard horse-hair sofa, and drew a long sigh of relief. She gathered her cape closely round her and gave a little shiver.

"You are cold, Lady Blakeney," her companion said with obvious concern.

There was an iron stove in a corner of the room. A fire of logs was roaring up the chimney. Marguerite held her hands to the blaze.

"And very tired, I am afraid," the man continued; "it has been such a long journey."

"It was not so bad at first," she commented softly, "while Percy was with us."

And her eyes seemed to search the flames as if seeking in them a picture of the face and form she loved. They had only just parted. And no journey, however trying, could be hard to bear while Percy was there with her.

After a moment or two she spoke: "Sir Andrew!"

"Yes?"

"Do you think we shall see Percy again to-day?"

"I don't know, Lady Blakeney . . ." Ffoulkes replied, paused a moment or two and then added: "I am afraid not."

"He only left you the one message, didn't he?"

"That's all. He slipped the note into my hand when he got off the

coach at Bouillon and whispered the two words: 'For her.'

Sir Andrew took a crumpled paper from his pocket, gave it to Marguerite. Her hand closed on it.

"You have seen yours?" she asked.

"Yes!"

"What does it say?"

"Only one word: Wait."

"Not much, is it?" Marguerite commented with a fleeting little smile.

"I suppose Tony has gone by now," she added.

"I'll go and see, shall I?"

"Please do."

"You'll be all right here, won't you?" Sir Andrew asked anxiously.

"Of course I will. Don't worry about me. Our friend the landlord and his grim-faced wife have scented a bribe and are as amiable as you could wish."

He picked up his hat and went out of the room.

After he had gone Marguerite sat for a while with that crumpled paper in her hand. It was early afternoon, but the narrow room with its dingy rep curtains and windows veiled in dust was already wrapped in gloom. Only the red glow from the iron stove shed a warm light on Marguerite's hand and the paper which she held. A confused murmur of voices came from the crowded coffee-room next door. Presently a

woman came in carrying a lighted lamp which she set upon the table. She certainly was grim-faced and surly, and looked askance at Marguerite who paid no attention to her.

"I have some soup," she said curtly; "it is hot. Would you like some?"

Marguerite said "Yes!" thinking more of Sir Andrew than of herself.

"There are also potatoes cooked in lard," the woman went on, "and a small piece of pork. You had better have that too as there's nothing else."

She did not wait for a reply, and stumped out of the room.

As soon as she had gone, Marguerite smoothed out the paper which contained Percy's last message to her. She swallowed the tears which dimmed her eyes and pressed her lips against the paper whereon his dear hand had rested.

And this is what she read:

"On my knees do I beg your forgiveness, my beloved, for the discomfort and suffering you are enduring now. Would I had had the heart not to listen when you said to me: 'If you go, I go with you.' Your eyes, your lips, your lovely arms held me in bonds that no man living should have dared to sever. 'If you love me, do not go,' you entreated, and your exquisite voice broke in an agony of tears. Yet I, like a madman, thought only of two little children who would need a woman's care, and thought more of them and their helpless mother, thought more of an ideal, of my duty and mine honour and of my solemn pledge to Saint-Lucque, more of all that than I did of you. 'If you love me,' you begged, 'do not go.' If I loved you! I love you with my whole soul, with every fibre of my being, more than life and eternity,

but I could not love you, dear, so much, loved I not honour more. With the help of my faithful lieutenants I will bring those defenceless women safely to England according to my pledged word, then my arms will close again around you and you will feel my whole soul in a kiss."

His whole soul! his wonderful, self-denying, high-minded soul. That last day in London, how vividly did she recall it now, the rout at the Duchesse de Roncevaux's mansion. The Abbé Prud'hon's tribute to the heroism of her beloved, the intimate talk with the Prince of Wales, and those few brief moments in the library when she made her last desperate appeal to him in the name of love, and felt that appeal was useless and that love stood vanquished before the inner instinct of the sportsman-adventurer, the selfless humanitarian, the knight-errant who had heard the call of the innocent and the weak.

This occurred three days ago. Since then Marguerite Blakeney and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had obeyed Percy's laconic instructions and waited. Whether they were in danger or not, they neither knew nor cared. Certainly not, declared Marguerite, for Percy was of a surety watching over them. They were objects of special care from the landlord and his wife, who took the money so lavishly poured into their hands and in exchange did their best to secure the privacy of these American guests, and to give them clean beds and as good food as the state of the country allowed. Citizens of the great American Republic for whom the great patriot General Lafayette had fought, were popular in France, and the name of St. Just was also one to conjure with. And they still waited in patience and in fortitude on this third day after their arrival, while the most exciting incidents the city of Mézières had ever known were occurring in the market place, while Mam'zelle Guillotine belaboured her unfortunate swain with his riding-whip, while the hooded cart with the Saint-Lucque children was spirited away and their mother endured soul-racking

agony inside the diligence that was taking her off to Paris. Marguerite and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes heard vague rumours that something unusual was going on in the city. Sound of many voices raised in shrill staccato reached their ears, while they were sitting in the parlour waiting for their meagre supper. People seemed to be passing in and out of the front door all the time and the door of the coffee-room kept on banging constantly.

When the woman brought in the supper she appeared less surly than usual. Seemed actually inclined to talk. Her eyes were quite bright and her cheeks flushed. Marguerite ventured to question her.

"Has anything special happened, citizeness? There seems to be such excitement about."

The woman grunted and shrugged.

"Excitement!" she exclaimed. "I should think there was excitement and to spare. They say that the English spy has been captured. The man they have been hunting for for years."

Marguerite's self-control at this moment was super-human. She did not gasp or catch her breath. She never moved. It was Sir Andrew who spoke.

"Oh! I have heard about him. Even in the United States of America people talk about a mystic personage who goes by the name of the Scarlet Pimpernel. I don't know what he is supposed to do. And have they really got him?"

The woman gave another shrug and a short, harsh laugh.

"Not they," she said. "Our people are fools. It seems they collared the wrong man."

"The wrong man?"

"Well, some people said he was the right man and some that he was the wrong one. But what everyone in Mézières knows by now is that the two aristos who should have been taken to Paris to be guillotined--two little traitors, what?--were spirited away under the very nose of Citizeness Damiens, the public executioner. It seems she is mad with rage and the whole town is in a state of terror, wondering on whom she will vent her fury."

Marguerite really was wonderful. How she kept motionless and outwardly calm while she heard the woman actually stating the fact that Percy had been captured is one of the secrets of her intrepid nature. Sir Andrew remained standing close beside her, with one hand on her shoulder. She put up hers and their two hands met in a pressure of reassurance and of comfort.

As soon as the woman had gone Sir Andrew said:

"I don't believe for a moment that anything has happened to Percy. You don't either, do you, Lady Blakeney?"

"No," she replied simply, "I do not."

"But with your permission I'll go and ascertain just what did occur to give rise to the rumour. I might hear something. Shall I go?"

"Do."

"Promise me you won't fret," he urged.

She looked up at him with a wan little smile.

"I promise," she said.

"I won't be long," were his final words before he went out.

He was back half an hour later.

"I've seen Tony," were the first words he spoke as soon as he had closed the door behind him.

"Tony!" Marguerite exclaimed.

She was still sitting by the fire which now was burning low. Ffoulkes put some logs on while he continued.

"I met him a few moments ago. He was coming this way and will meet us on the Grécourt road. He gave me a scribbled note from Percy."

He took the note from his waistcoat pocket and read out its contents by the light of the lamp.

"The Saint-Lucque children are quite safe. I am taking them to a place I know of called Saint Félix. It is a derelict village this side of Grécourt, slightly off the road on the right. You can't miss it. I want you to meet me there. Your landlord at the Ecu d'Or has a cabriolet and a good horse, which you can either hire or purchase outright. Steal it if you must, bring plenty of provisions and drive hell-for-leather."

Ffoulkes thrust the paper into the stove. Marguerite watched it burn.

"Thank God!" she said, "he is safe. And there is at last something for us to do."

"We had better pretend to eat some of this supper," Sir Andrew rejoined, "and then talk about the cabriolet."

They sat down and tried to swallow a morsel. Marguerite asked:

"Did Tony say anything about the Saint-Lucque children?"

"Yes ye did. He was in it all. But he couldn't say much as it would have been dangerous with so many people about."

"But what about Sir Philip Glynde and my Lord St. Dennys?"

Sir Andrew gave a short laugh. Quite a merry one.

"They are having a very hard time, poor devils," he said lightly.

"What do you mean?"

"Tony had been busy trussing them up like a pair of capons and left them lying in a near-by field, getting frozen and cramped like the very devil."

"Great heavens!"

"Oh, they are quite happy, Lady Blakeney. Do not fret about them. The chief's orders, you know. We'd all go to hell for him, if he ordered us to go."

Marguerite made no reply to this. How could she? Ffoulkes, the loyal lieutenant, had spoken and voiced the feelings of eighteen others as true and brave as himself. She could only wonder within the depths of her soul at the marvellous magnetism exercised by the one man who had made her so infinitely proud and happy in his love.

They sat at the table a few minutes longer. The white-faced clock up on the wall struck five. The shades of evening were rapidly drawing it. Ffoulkes rose and went in search of the landlord. The question of hiring a vehicle of some sort was then broached.

"We want to get to Grécourt before nightfall," Ffoulkes explained to the man. "My aunt, the citizeness St. Just, the mother of the great patriot my cousin, has been expecting us the last two days. We had not intended to stay here so long, but my sister was tired after the journey and we were very comfortable in your house."

A preposterous price was, of course, asked for the purchase, not the hire, of an old-fashioned cabriolet, an equally aged horse and a basket of provisions, such as could be got. The landlord made pretence of being suspicious, talked of police and of taking risks by aiding strangers to wander about the country without special permits. Such risks and suspicions were naturally to be paid for along with the horse and the cabriolet.

In the end the sight of half a dozen louis set all patriotic scruples at rest. The cabriolet was brought round. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes took the reins whilst Marguerite, wrapped in shawl and mantle, snuggled in the corner of the carriage under the hood.

On the road to Saint Félix, they met Lord Anthony Dewhurst, one of the most elegant fops known in the society of London and Bath. He was clothed in the promiscuous bits of uniform, tattered tunic and shoes down at heels, his nose was blue and his fingers stiff. Sir Andrew drew rein and Tony scrambled into the cabriolet by the side of Marguerite.

"What is Percy going to do about Madame de Saint-Lucque," she murmured enquiringly, more to herself than to him.

"God and he alone know," Tony replied, then he added: "It is the devil, the children being separated from their mother. It means two tasks instead of one."

"But he'll do it," murmured Ffoulkes fervently.

"No doubt about that," Tony echoed under his breath.

Chapter XXIV: THE COSY CORNER

The Parc aux Daims is not by any means the only derelict homestead in Artois. The province, owing to its proximity to the capital, had already suffered much even in the early days of the revolution when inflammatory speeches delivered outside and inside of every cabaret by agents of the government had provoked a half-starved peasantry into acts of brigandage and loot. And not only were these acts directed against landlords and so-called aristos, but more often than not well-to-do farmers and peasant proprietors even in a small way, were faced with the fury of an enraged populace and saw their homesteads invaded and destroyed, even though some of their most virulent attackers had been their equals and friends in the past.

Thus it was with the once prosperous village of Saint Félix, distant a couple of leagues from Mézières and less than half a league off the Grécourt main road. In this year of grace and fraternity--that is 1794--it was nothing but a conglomeration of derelict cottages and a jumble of stones, broken-down walls and charred remains of roofs, doors and window-frames. The tower of the little church had partially collapsed. It was leaning over at an acute angle with great fissures in its sides, its pointed roof with great gaps open to rain and snow, showed glimpses of its cracked bell, now for ever mute. What had been the presbytery beside it had been burnt down to the ground.

Close to the presbytery there had once stood a substantially built wayside inn with stables and outhouses. Its sign was Le bon petit Coin (The Cosy Corner), and had been the property of a worthy Artesian who had drawn home-brewed ale, tapped casks of local wine and led a God-fearing life with his wife and family until a rabble led by paid agitators from Paris had raided his house, set fire to it and destroyed all his belongings till nothing but the crumbling walls remained of what had been a prosperous business place and a

happy homestead. The innkeeper and his family drifted away, no one knew or cared whither they went, or what became of them, nor is it the purpose of this chronicle to follow up their traces. Enough that crumbling walls and broken roof of the house withstood the ravages of autumn gales, of winter snow and hail-storms better than the rest of the village had done, and that as a freakish chance would have it, the sign *Le bon petit Coin* still dangled engagingly on its posts. But no one ever went there. No traveller ever entered its inhospitable doors.

"The Cosy Corner"? It was anything but cosy on this bleak February evening when a hooded cart drawn by a couple of horses came to a halt beneath its creaking signpost. The man who had been driving it threw down the reins and jumped down from the cart. At the back, under the hood, there were two bundles wrapped in thick blankets. Live bundles, through the thick folds of which came the sound of whimpering and little human cries: "Maman?" The man went round to the back of the cart. With infinite precaution he took up the bundles and carried them into the derelict house. Through one room, which had obviously been the public bar once, he carried the two bundles one by one, and thence into an inner room, wherein, as there was no furniture whatever, he deposited them with tender care on the wooden floor. He saw to it that the blankets covered the small human forms efficiently against the cold, and listened for a moment or two to the pathetic cries of "Maman." He then took a bottle out of the pocket of his big coat. It contained milk. Perhaps there was even a tiny, very tiny drop of brandy in the milk.

"That will comfort you, you poor kids," he murmured to himself, and insinuated the bottle into the small human mouths. There was some spluttering, but swallowing also. The man gave a quaint little chuckle. "I ought to have been a nursemaid!" he went on murmuring to himself. He waited for a few moments longer, until gradually the cries of "Maman" became more rare, and the two bundles of blankets no

longer betrayed any movement through their folds. He went out of the room and gave himself a good stretch. "Sink me!" he muttered, "but I'm stiff. I never thought a woman could hit so hard."

He went back to the cart and peeped down under the hood. It was still snowing, but the evening had not yet fully drawn in, and he could perceive the forms of three men lying on their sides across the floor of the cart. They were trussed up with cords, and their knees were drawn up to the middle of their chests. Their coats were wrapped round their legs and shoulders, and scarves were wound round their mouths and chins.

"Well," the man muttered again, "you can't come to much harm like that, my friends, and cannot do much mischief either." He tied up the horses to the ring in the wall, picked up an untidy bundle of something soft from the driving-seat of the cart and finally turned into the tap-room of the Cosy Corner.

This was none other than Sir Percy Blakeney, Bart., the prince of dandies, the enfant gâté of London and Bath society, the brilliant sportsman, and always the smartest and gayest man in town. He was anything but that just now when he staggered into the tap-room and let himself go down on the floor. Now that there was nothing imperative left to do, reaction set in, and in spite of indomitable will-power, he was feeling giddy and sick. He ached in every limb. Felt himself all over to see if there were any broken bones to deplore.

"Curse that virago! How she did hit!"

But he was light-hearted for all that. Physical discomfort--that's all this was--had no hold on his spirits. Except for that feeling of giddiness, caused by the blows on his head, he would have burst into song or laughter.

"By George!" he thought, and chucked inwardly. "How she must have cursed when she learned that the kids had gone. And how she will swear, and threaten and fulminate when--"

He paused abruptly in his reflection, for his keen ear had suddenly detected the sound of wheels in the remote distance. He pulled himself together, struggled to his feet, stretched out his arms, and there he was now, a magnificent specimen of manhood, tall, broad, vigorous, as if he had never known an ache or pain in his life.

Marguerite was nigh! Marguerite was coming! In five minutes she would be here--in his arms. O God! grant a weak man strength to bear up under the fullness of this joy!

A quarter of an hour later the tap-room of the Cosy Corner was giving shelter to the three men who had watched the well-nigh tragic drama enacted by Mam'zelle Guillotine and Chief Commissary Lescar, a drama in which their beloved chief had been the all-too-willing victim.

They crouched on the creviced floor, closely huddled together, for it was very cold. A stable lantern placed in front of them threw a circle of dim light on the floor and on the primitive repast which they were consuming at the moment; they were digging their young teeth into hunks of stale bread and dry cheese and alternately taking pulls at their respective flasks of brandy. They were dressed in the promiscuous clothes that were served out to infantry regiments not required for service in the more important towns. This meant that their breeches were ragged, that they had no tunics or stockings, and that their shoes were down at heels. And here they were, these sybarites, accustomed to silks and satins, perfumes and Mechlin lace, to drinking old Burgundy and feeding on turkeys and Strasburg patties, here they were munching rye bread and drinking raw brandy and enjoying life to the full as they had never done before.

With them at this hour was Sir Andrew Ffoulkes just come over with Lady Blakeney from the neighbourhood of Mézières in a ramshackle cabriolet purchased at a fabulous price from the landlord of the Ecu d'Or. Poor Sir Andrew! He had gone through a bad moment when he entered the tap-room of the Cosy Corner and there was greeted by Sir Philip Glynde and my Lord St. Dennys with a stern demand for something fit to eat.

"Something fit to eat?" Sir Andrew mimicked with biting irony. "You gluttons! Haven't I given you luscious cheese and---"

"Luscious cheese?" Sir Philip broke in with mock indignation. "St. Dennys, did you hear that? And luscious bread I suppose he would call this jaw-breaking crust."

"Now, listen to me, Ffoulkes," St. Dennys continued sternly. "Either you delve once more into that basket which I saw reposing in the vehicle which brought you here, and bring us along something fit for an English gentleman to eat---"

"Together with enough good wine to tickle his fastidious palate," the other put in.

Sir Andrew laughed and gave a shrug.

"Well, what is the alternative?" he asked gaily.

"Or you give us a good reason for not doing as we command"

"I'll give you the best of reasons," Ffoulkes retorted. "The provisions were not intended for a set of gluttons like you. They will be kept for the journey which lies ahead of us all. And let me tell you that I will defend them against your predatory fingers to the last drop of my

blood."

"You inhuman monster," St. Dennys cried, and with this he flung a lump of cheese at the head of Sir Andrew, who, still laughing, dodged this first missile only to be pelted by others. He was forced ultimately to cry for mercy. A free fight ensued such as all British schoolboys revel in. And they were just schoolboys for the time being, these brave followers of the Scarlet Pimpernel, full of high animal spirits and the very joy of living.

When peace was at last restored, all four of them settled down once more to their repast of dry bread and cheese.

Between the courses of this sumptuous repast they tried to give Ffoulkes some account of what had gone on in Mézières this afternoon.

"Never in all my life," my Lord Tony was saying, "did I see anything so appalling as the chief under the hand of that vixen, and Glynde, St. Dennys and I being obliged to stand by, under strict orders not to interfere and commit a murder. I tell you," he concluded emphatically, "it was hell!"

A hearty, careless laugh broke in on the moodiness which had suddenly fallen on the small company at recollection of the horror they witnessed a few short hours ago. The laughter came from the inner room, where Marguerite at this moment was held closely in her husband's arms, while he whispered in her ear:

"You understand, don't you, my beloved?"

"No, Percy," she said resolutely, and threw her head back so as to look him straight in the eyes. "I do not. What you wish me to do is impossible. Impossible," she reiterated firmly.

A stable lantern was set on a projection in the wall, and by its dim light Marguerite could just see her husband's face. His eyes were looking down into hers and she could see that there was a merry twinkle in them and that the lines round his mouth were set in a gently ironical smile.

It was then that this merry, careless laugh came to the ears of his friend.

"What?" he enquired lightly. "Insubordination?"

"Percy!" she protested.

"I am not wishing you to do anything, my beloved," he said. "You are a member of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. The most adored. The most revered amongst all. But you are a member, and I am your chief whom you have sworn to obey in all things. And I am giving you a command."

That was all he said, speaking very softly; his voice was hardly audible it was so low, just a trifle husky, but perfectly firm. Marguerite buried her face against his shoulder. He went on with infinite tenderness:

"Look at me, my beloved. Are we not one, you and I? Have we not gone through endless joy and often bitter sorrow together? This is one of the moments in our life when we must work together--and suffer together---"

"Why Percy? Why?" she broke in pitiably through her sobs.

"Because somewhere near here, within a stone's throw of this spot which your dear presence has hallowed, there is a helpless, innocent woman who is faced with death, a horrible death which she would

have to endure in loneliness and sorrow surpassing in intensity anything you and I have ever known. Also because there are two little children in this very room who will be motherless unless we come to their aid, you and I, and because an English gentleman would stand for ever dishonoured before you and his own conscience if he so shamefully broke his word."

"But if I stayed with you Percy . . ." came as a final entreaty from Marguerite's aching heart. The hood had fallen back from her head. Through the gloom Percy's hand sought the waves of her soft golden hair which rippled gently round her face and neck. With his handkerchief he brushed gently, very gently the tears that were coursing down her cheeks.

"I might fail, my adored one," was his calm reply. "Do you know what that would mean to them and to me?"

She could no longer speak, her heart was so full of sorrow that she thought it must surely break. And suddenly his mood changed. The tender sentiment of a moment ago flew away into the unknown and the adventurous spirit, the spirit of the sportsman, once more gained the mastery over his strange personality.

"You do understand, don't you, my adored, my loyal helpmate," he asked with his habitual light-hearted eagerness, "just what I want you to do?"

Marguerite unable to speak nodded in reply.

"You will take these two innocents with you in the cart. Glynde, St. Dennys and Tony, who are still in their haphazard uniforms, will accompany you. All three will sit on the driving-seat and will look very imposing and official up there in their tattered uniforms. Ffoulkes, of course, will have to remain under the hood with you. Tony will drive

you to Perignon, which is on the other side of the French frontier not far from the city of Luxembourg. He knows the way quite well as he has been along there with me more than once. It is one of the loneliest corners in Eastern France. There is no proper road, only a rather wide bridle-path through ploughed fields which skirts a few isolated villages and avoids the approach to any city. Anyway, the news of what has been going on in Mézières has not had time to spread itself in that direction. There are no patrols along the paths and no garrisons anywhere near. If, after the break of dawn, a few labourers going to their work should gape at you, they will be over-awed at sight of three soldiers of the Republic on the driving-seat of a market cart."

He broke off for the sole purpose of gazing anxiously into her tear-filled eyes and to murmur with a short sigh: "How lovely you are, my beloved!" and then went on in the same matter-of-fact tone of voice, giving his direction clearly, succinctly, like a general issuing commands, certain that they would be obeyed. "I have given Tony all the necessary papers in case they are required. They are in perfect order, signed by Tallien, Barras and our faithful friend, Armand Chauvelin. These signatures are the most perfect specimens of forgery I have ever seen in all my life, and I have had some experience in forged safe-conducts, have I not? I need not tell you who did them, nor what I paid for them. The fellow runs great risks every time he serves me, but he must have put by a cosy little fortune by now and he knows that in case of trouble he can always count on us---"

Once again he paused, his eyes fixed into vacancy, his mind at work on the great problem which he would confront on the morrow. The children were safe, of that he was sure. So sure, in fact, that something of his almost supernal confidence in himself had communicated itself to Marguerite. She had contrived to swallow her

tears and it was in a steady voice that she put the all-important question to him:

"What about you, Percy?"

He gave a little chuckle.

"What about me?" he echoed with inimitable merriment. "Why, sweetheart, I will be kissing your lovely hands--let me see--in a sen'night from to-day at the Fisherman's Rest in Dover, while that nice little baggage, Suzan Jellyband, will be seeing to the creature comforts of poor Madame de Saint-Lucque. . . . Hush! my adored one," he added quickly, and placed a finger over her mouth, for she had been on the point of speaking. "If you say one word more I shall be tempted to silence you with a kiss, and then . . . then God help me! for it would be so difficult, so very difficult to slip away. Now you must try and get a couple of hours' rest if not of sleep."

He stooped and picked up the bundle which he had brought with him in the cart. Out of it he took a couple of cushions. One of these he disposed upon the floor in a corner of the room, the other he propped up against the wall. She watched him smiling.

"Promise me you will try and rest," he urged. "The children are asleep and you must not worry about them any more, promise."

She contrived to say firmly "I promise," and did her best to appear comfortably installed on one cushion with her head resting on the other.

He did not look at her again, turned the lantern so as to shade its light from her eyes.

Before he left the room he said earnestly:

"You don't know what your presence here this time has meant to me. God bless you."

In the meanwhile, in the tap-room after that one moment of subdued emotion when their chief's laughter rang so merrily in their ears, Sir Philip Glynde, his eyes fixed on the communicating door, murmured with a quick sigh:

"Poor old Percy!"

"Don't say that!" Sir Andrew Ffoulkes protested earnestly, knowing what was passing in the minds of the three friend. "Percy adores his wife. We all know that. And she worships him. But those two wonderful people would be the first to resent the idea of any of us being sorry for them. They are prepared to sacrifice everything for the cause they have at heart. Their lives, their entire fortune . . ."

"Their love?" put in one of the others.

"Their love, yes," Ffoulkes assented; and then added after a second's hesitation: "He, at any rate. He has proved it more than once. But, of course, with a glamorous woman like Lady Blakeney it is difficult to guess just what she feels."

"What about you, Ffoulkes," St. Dennys put in with a smile. "You ought to know what all that sort of thing feels like. The long separations, the constant 'farewells.'"

None of the others passed a remark on this. They all knew Ffoulkes's love for his young wife and that he, too, like all the others, was ready to follow his chief wherever and whenever he was called. He, too, like Blakeney, was ready for any sacrifice in the cause of suffering humanity. As indeed they all were. But he and Blakeney were the only married men in their ranks, and many a time had some

of them like Glynde or Tony or St. Dennys probed their hearts wondering whether if they in their turn would be ready to sacrifice love for the sake of an ideal.

Sir Andrew gave a slight shrug.

"That's quite right, my dear fellow," he said lightly in answer to St. Dennys, and with that reticence in matters of sentiment peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon race. "But you see, Percy means so much to me, and I have such an admiration for him as a man and as our chief, that when I am working with him I seem to become different somehow . . . I feel differently, I mean . . . about everything. . . . I dare say this sounds queer, and I expect you all think me a bounder for saying it . . . but there it is. . . ."

There was no answer to this, for obviously there was nothing that could be said, and silence fell for a few moments on the congenial little company.

But all of a sudden the communicating door was opened and Blakeney came in.

"Well," he queried airily, "you four chatterers, have you had enough of this sumptuous repast, and have you got a last drop of something to drink for a thirsty man?"

Four flasks of brandy were immediately held up to him. He took two and drained them both.

"I know what your were talking about. Your chief under the whip of a virago, what?"

"Don't, Percy," Tony exclaimed, "it was hellish."

Blakeney could not help laughing: the earnestness and the towering rage of his friend filled him with boyish delight.

"I am sure it was," he admitted, "but how else were we going to engage the attention of that huge crowd long enough to give you three fellows time to deal with those poor kids, with the three troopers and with the cart? And you did it splendidly. And that awful time you had lying in the open field, trussed like a brace of chickens, frozen nearly to death. My God! but you were wonderful! weren't they, Ffoulkes? There are no finer men in the whole wide world than you fellows who honour me by your friendship. God bless and reward you! You have been wonderful to-day."

He appeared to be in the highest spirits though to the keen ears of his devoted followers the voice of their valiant leader sounded perhaps a trifle husky, a little less vibrant than usual.

"Thank Heaven!" he added with a short, quick sigh, "Lady Blakeney will know nothing of what happened in Mézières."

"And she never will," Lord Tony declared fervently.

There was a short moment of silence until Blakeney exclaimed:

"Sink me! I never thought a woman could hit quite so hard. I had a good wacking from my friend Chauvelin once. Not himself, but a pair of lusty bullies. It would have made his heart glad to see me this afternoon. Mam'zelle Guillotine hit twice as hard as his myrmidons did that time in Calais. By George!" he concluded, with something approaching admiration, "what a woman!"

"What are you going to do with her, Blakeney," Glynde asked, "when you've got her?"

There arose an animated discussion as to what should be done with the noted fury. Hanging was, of course, too good for her. Lifelong imprisonment to repeat her experiences in the Bastille would be far too merciful. Tony, who felt particularly bloodthirsty, had read something about lynching in America. He would have liked to have seen the harpy who had laid hands on his chief either burned at the stake or beaten to death, something peculiarly painful and lingering, he urged.

Blakeney said nothing while the matter was being discussed. When the arguments were finally silenced he rejoined:

"You sadistic young ruffians! But you won't get your way with Mam'zelle Guillotine, you know."

"Why not?"

As Blakeney made no immediate reply to this, Tony queried anxiously:

"You are not going to let her get away, Percy, are you?"

"No!" Blakeney answered. "I won't do that, I promise you."

The last sight Marguerite had of her husband was when she peeped out under the hood at the back of the cart. His tall form was still vaguely distinguishable through the fast gathering gloom. He stood, a solitary figure, under the portico of the Cosy Corner. Bare-headed. The falling snow made white patches on each of his shoulders. His face she could no longer see. Tony clicked his tongue. The horse's hoofs grated against the frozen road. The cart gave a lurch and moved slowly away into the night. And darkness swallowed the solitary figure of the great leader, who after a moment or two turned and went within.

Book Five

Chapter XXV: THE MAN IN BLACK

Chapter XXVI: FORTUNE IN SIGHT

Chapter XXVII: AT THE CROSS ROADS

Chapter XXVIII: THE FIGHT

Chapter XXIX: HELL-FOR-LEATHER

Chapter XXX: THE SILENT POOL

Chapter XXXI: AN INTERLUDE

Chapter XXV: THE MAN IN BLACK

Saint Félix is situated half a league, not more, from Grécourt. The latter in itself is not much of a town, all it does is to serve as a stopping-place for one or two diligences that did not halt in Mézières. It also was noted for its fortnightly horse and cattle market which used to be the scene of great activity in the olden days, and of festive gatherings during the spring and summer months when music and dancing went on all day and half the night, on the grass plots of the cabarets around the market place, and copious drinking and jollity in their respective rooms.

But all this merry-making was now a thing of the past. Farmers and cattle-breeders did stroll into the city once a fortnight with their live stock such as it was: poor half-starved animals they were for the most part, because food was dear and scarce now that the brains of the country concentrated on the quickest way to get rid of all landowners who before this era of equality and fraternity had helped nature to produce the necessities of life for man and beast.

It was the eve before market day when Gabrielle Damiens mounted on her whilom swain's white charger rode into Grécourt. She was in an anxious and moody frame of mind. The disappearance of the two Saint-Lucque children, coming on the top of her disappointment over the rescue of the Marquis and the young Vicomte, had dealt a smashing blow not only to her pride, but chiefly to her burning passion of hatred and revenge.

After she had left the three soldiers on the road, she wandered on horseback first into Mézières, then feeling unconquerable restlessness, she prowled about in the fast-gathering darkness along the country roads oblivious of time and place; like an unquiet spirit seeking repose. At one time she almost lost her way. She hardly

knew where she was when she came on a deserted village, or rather what had been a village once and was now only a mass of ruins. She gave the charger his head and let him roam around the tumble-down cottages and what had once been the village street.

"This must be Saint Félix," she thought. "And Grécourt must be over that way."

She turned her horse's head in the direction in which she thought the little township lay. The short interlude had caused her to gather her roving thoughts together. But only momentarily. As soon as she found herself on the right road once again, off they went at a tangent. The image of that great, hulking creature, André Renaud, rose out of the darkness confronting her mental vision. The problem of the man's personality, his tempestuous wooing, his exuberant temperament puzzled and harassed her brain, taunted her with its unfathomable mystery. If the man whom she had kissed and trusted and subsequently chastised was not the master sleuth sent to her from Paris, who and what was he? And what had become of him while the crowd dispersed and she herself rode away? She had no recollection of him after she had snatched the reins of the white charger out of his hands and left him lying on the ground muttering threats and imprecations.

She reached Grécourt in this confused state of mind. Even the sight of the diligence which stood in the yard of the Bon Camarade where she intended to spend the night did not rouse her out of her moodiness. She drew rein. The ostler ran along to aid her to dismount. Scorning his help she jumped down from the saddle. The landlord came along quickly. His manner, when in the new arrival he recognised Mam'zelle Guillotine, became almost servile.

"What did the citizeness require?"

"Supper and a room. I leave again early to-morrow." After which she demanded:

"When did the diligence come in?"

"About two hours ago, citizeness."

"Where is the corporal?"

"In the tap-room having supper."

"Many people in the tap-room?"

"A good number. It's market day to-morrow."

"I know that. I want my supper in a quiet corner. By the way, what is your name?"

"Magnol Fernand. At your service, citizeness."

"Get me something hot then, Citizen Magnol, and be quick about it."

She made her way to the tap-room. It was of the usual pattern to be found in varying sizes in every inn and cabaret of eastern France. Drab-coloured walls that had once been white. An iron stove with inside chimney rising to the blackened, rafted ceiling. A long, trestle table in the middle of the room. Benches each side of it, and the inevitable odour of boiled cabbage, garlic, damp clothes and humanity. A score or more of men were sitting at the centre table consuming platefuls of soup with much sound of gustation and smacking of lips. Their steaming contents gave forth the insistent odour of garlic and cabbage.

A girl with tousled hair and dressed in a promiscuous conglomeration of rags, went round the table bearing hunks of bread

on a platter. Her name was apparently Philomène. There was hardly any talking in the room, except for occasional calls for Philomène and for bread.

When the door was opened and Gabrielle came in a few heads were turned in her direction. Not by any means all. Most of the men knew her by sight as a matter of course, but these were not the days of cheery, friendly greetings, and after a moment or two the smacking of lips and plying of metal spoons went on as before. She strode across the room. The landlord hovered round her and piloted her to a corner of the room where two small tables were seemingly disposed for the reception of privileged guests. One of these tables was occupied by a solitary guest, a man dressed in sober black. Gabrielle bestowed on him a quick appraising glance. She sat down at the other table. Philomène brought plates, fork, spoon and knife and set a candle on the table.

"What will the citizeness take?" the landlord asked.

"What is there?"

"Cabbage soup . . ."

"I can smell it. What else?"

"A piece of pork with beans."

"What else?"

"Potatoes . . ."

"Good. Bring me potatoes, beans and pork, and see that they are hot."

"Any wine?"

"Yes! Red. From the cask."

The landlord shuffled out of the room. Gabrielle sat on, waiting. She tried hard not to appear to be scrutinising her fellow guest too closely. Nevertheless, she took stock of him every time his head was turned away. She could not see him very well because of the flickering candlelight between her and her vision of him. She put him down as an official of some sort. Police probably. His hair was very dark and lanky. He wore it rather long at the back and tied at the nape of the neck with a black ribbon. It was plastered down his forehead in a rigid, straight line, which made it look like a black band just above his bushy eyebrows. He looked well groomed, although his cheeks showed dark blue against his sallow skin and the starched linen stock round his throat. In her present mood Gabrielle felt intrigued. A Marseillais, she thought, and wanted to hear him speak. Anyway, from the South.

She called to Philomène for salt.

Forestalling the girl, the stranger took the salt box from his own table and placed it in front of Gabrielle. She gave him a curt "Thank you," to which he responded: "At your service, citizeness," stressing the last syllable of *citoyen-ne* as is the manner of those in the South.

"You are a stranger here, citizen?" Gabrielle asked.

"I am a stranger everywhere, citizeness," he replied, "even in Paris from whence I came yesterday."

"Yes," thought Gabrielle, "you are distinctly of the South, my friend. Your accent is slight but unmistakable."

"So you are from Paris, citizen?" she went on. "Are you making a

long stay in our province?

"That depends."

"On what?"

"How soon I can lay hands on a reputed criminal."

"How so?"

"I am of the secret police, Citizeness Damiens," the man replied quietly, and with his left hand he turned back the lapel of his coat, displaying a metal badge surmounted by a tricolour ribbon. It was then that Gabrielle noticed that his right sleeve was pinned empty to his coat.

"You know who I am?" was all she could think of saying at the moment.

"If I did not would I have revealed my mission to you?" he countered dryly.

He spoke all the time in an even, monotonous tone of voice, without the slightest inflexion or emphasis, like one reciting a lesson learned by heart.

"What is that mission, citizen?" Gabrielle queried, this time in her wonted peremptory way.

"As I have told you, citizeness, to hunt after a reputed criminal."

"If he is reputed I must know about him. I know every criminal in the Province of Artois. Who is he?" she demanded, paused for a second or two, and suddenly gave a gasp, exclaiming: "Do you mean the English spy?"

The stranger nodded.

"Do you know him, citizeness?"

"No," she faltered.

"Nevertheless, if rumour does not lie, you had him under your hand a few hours ago. Why did you let him go?"

His voice was still quite even and only just audible, but there was something stern now and rasping in its tone. He did not look at the woman while he spoke, but over her shoulder on the drab-coloured wall on which to the words "Liberté, Fraternité, Egalité," traced thereon in black chalk, had been added the words: "ou la Mort." He looked that way so insistently that Gabrielle, fascinated, turned round to look. But she was not the woman ever to be intimidated by the suggestion of a threat, wherever it came from. She gave a shrug and a harsh, ironic laugh.

"If you have those sort of ideas in your head, citizen," she said dryly, "You won't go far in your career."

"What do you mean?"

"That you are altogether on the wrong track. The man whom I horsewhipped this afternoon is not the celebrated Scarlet Pimpernel."

"What makes you say that?"

"It was he who first called our attention to the disappearance of the cart."

"A clever trick, since he took you in."

"What do you mean by a clever trick?"

"He had to get out of your clutches, citizeness, or you would have killed him."

"I certainly would--" she began, paused a moment or two, then went on: "Do you dare to assert that the man who has been spending the last two days in Mézières, who effected the arrest of the traitor aristos the ci-devant Saint-Lucque and her brats, and who was sent out specially from Paris by Armand Chauvelin to aid me in the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel, do you dare to tell me that he was . . ."

"The Scarlet Pimpernel himself," the man broke in firmly. "He was not sent out from Paris, citizeness. He only said he was."

"He was André Renaud--I saw his papers. They were signed by Maximilien Robespierre and two other members of the Committee of Public Safety; André Renaud . . ."

"He was not André Renaud," the other broke in again with increased emphasis.

"How do you know?"

"Because I happen to be André Renaud, citizeness." Gabrielle Damiens gave such a start that the table on which she had leaned her elbows gave a lurch, and the beer bottle which did duty for a candlestick rolled down on the floor. The candle broke, the light went out and the corner where these two sat in close conversation was in greater obscurity than before.

Gabrielle's glowering eyes searched the face of the stranger through this gloom.

"You!" she burst out, gasping for breath.

"Even I," the man responded coolly.

"I don't believe it . . . I don't believe it," she reiterated over and over again, trying to steady her voice, and to stop her teeth from chattering.

"Why shouldn't you believe it, citizeness?" he retorted. "Who do you suppose I am?"

"I don't know," she murmured gruffly.

He gave a short laugh.

"Well, I am not the Scarlet Pimpernel, am I, or I shouldn't be here talking to you?"

That was true enough. Gabrielle passed the back of her hand across her moist forehead. He went on:

"You have been believing and disbelieving so many things here to-day, citizeness, no wonder you are bewildered, and," he added, with, for the first time, the hint of a threat in what he said, "are like now to commit the greatest blunder of your career. And let me tell you, citizeness, that you are not quite so indispensable in the estimation of the government that you can afford to commit blunder after blunder as you have done in the past few days."

She pulled herself together, straightening out her massive shoulders, and retorted defiantly:

"Blunders? I? You forget to whom you are talking, Citizen--"

"André Renaud," he put in with a thin smile.

Whereupon she gave a shrug.

"I don't believe it," she again persisted.

"It makes no matter," he countered coolly, "whether you believe in me or not. I can do my duty without any help from you. I know all the plans that have been made for the capture of the English spy, and I also know that you, Citizeness Gabrielle Damiens, Mam'zelle Guillotine, have run counter to the orders sent to you direct by the Committee of Public Safety . . ."

"How do you know that?" she broke in roughly. "Who was . . ." She paused abruptly, afraid that she was giving herself away.

"It was Citizen Armand Chauvelin who told me what the orders were," he put in quietly.

"I don't believe it," she reiterated with parrot-like insistence.

"Shall I tell you what they were . . . and how you contravened them?"

No reply to that from Gabrielle. She sat there a veritable statue of obstinacy and sullenness, her elbows resting on the table, her chin cupped in her hands. Her mind had got back to that awful state of puzzlement and confusion of a while ago. The very name André Renaud, seemed to be burning inside her brain with letters of fire. She tried to recapture every phase of her association with the man. His arrival at the episcopal palace, her rage against him because he had come when the ci-devant Saint-Lucque woman was already under arrest, on a denunciation from the farmer Guidal. Guidal! She had flung the name in the man's face at the time, whereupon and with consummate self-possession he had erased Guidal's very name from the tablets of her memory. It came back to her now. What a fool

she had been not to confront the farmer with the man who called himself André Renaud and claimed to be the master sleuth sent to her from Paris.

Then there was the man's personality, which now obtruded itself with exasperating persistence before her troubled mind. The more she thought of him the more did her brain reject the thought that that huge, hulking male creature with his coarse ways and brutal love-making could possibly be André Renaud the noted sleuth-hound, the tracker of criminals and traitors, a calling requiring suavity of manner, tact, effacement, every quality, in fact, which that rowdy, hoydenish lout did not possess. English—that's what he was. He spoke French, but he was English. He couldn't be anything but English—not with those huge legs and immense shoulders. Frenchmen occasionally were broad and powerful-looking, like this man opposite to her now. Though tall, a Frenchman was graceful and soft of speech, unless he was the spokesman of the government and was obliged to talk forcefully to a crowd of waverers.

Thoughts! Thoughts! Conjectures! There they were going round and round in the whirlpool of Gabrielle's brain. Her dark, glowering eyes remained fixed on the man who had set all this effervescence foaming and boiling inside her, making her temples throb and sending her blood rushing like a fiery torrent through her veins. He was almost sinister-looking in his funereal clothes and that black hair which looked like a mourning band round his forehead, with his measured speech, his sallow skin and that empty sleeve. What a contrast to the burly, noisy boor who had made love to her, to his showy clothes and clumsy boots, his tousled yellow hair and florid skin.

Gabrielle Damiens visualising all this, remembering the other man's fulsome adulation, and his resounding kisses, cursed herself for a

fool. Fortune and fame were in her grasp and she let everything go, even the chance of realising a part of her revenge.

The ci-devant Marquis and the boy were gone, the two brats also, probably. And all of this the work of a man who had bamboozled her. Led her by the nose until she became like a despicable noodle, mistrusting her own powers of which she had always been so justly proud.

"If I only could trust you," she burst out, staring like a wild cat at the sober, placid figure of the man before her. "Whom else could you trust, citizeness, if not the man who was sent down for the express purpose of aiding you in the capture of the greatest prize that ever fell to the lot of a patriot like yourself?"

He paused a moment. Looking her full in the face. Returning stare for stare. His eyes looked more sinister than ever overshadowed by those bushy eyebrows and surmounted by that band of straight black hair which seemed to cut off the upper part of his face. It appeared to begin at the eyes and to end just above the chin, where the stock of snow-white linen presented such a crude contrast to his blue-black cheeks and chin. He did look sinister, devilish, for there had crept a look into his eyes that was both malefic and menacing.

"And that prize," he resumed after that short ominous pause, "you actually allowed to slip out of your hands. You held him at your mercy and you let him go."

"I horsewhipped him," she murmured, through clenched teeth.

"Do you think he cared? What you did was to give his followers time to spirit away the two aristos. After that he disappeared. Or am I wrong?" he concluded with biting sarcasm.

Slowly, gradually, step by step, Gabrielle saw her spirit breaking and her will-power crumbling under the vague terror engendered in her by this man's malignant personality. He dominated her. She was half afraid of him, in a way that she had never been afraid of anyone in her life before. She tried to think of him as a minor official, with far less influence with the powers up in Paris than she had. She thought of her own friends, of Robespierre, the virtual dictator of France, and of others in commanding positions who knew and appreciated her patriotic worth. They would stand by her, even if she had committed a blunder or two or contravened a casual order.

Something that went on in her mind at this comforting thought must have shown in her face, for the man broke in on her meditations:

"This is not the time to think of influential friends, citizeness. The dogs of the revolution are at one another's throats. Robespierre is at grips with Danton. Terror is the order of the day. The chase after traitors is swift and hot. Nothing but a spectacular coup can save you from death after the blunder you have committed, Mam'zelle Guillotine."

Having said this he rose.

"This place is insufferably hot," he said dryly. "I shall be at your service in the courtyard, in close proximity to your diligence and in close conversation with your troopers. I must feel assured that they are worthy of the trust which you have placed in them."

He stalked out of the room, leaving Gabrielle Damiens sitting in the gloom with her elbows on the table, her chin resting against her clenched fists, her eyes glowering. Glowering like those of a wild cat. Burning with hatred and with fear. She watched the man walk through the room with a long, rather laboured stride. He was tall, but distinctly round-shouldered, and stooped as he walked. How different, through

Gabrielle, to the rolling gait, the straight square shoulders, the heavy tread of her whilom courtier.

Something had to be done about the whole thing. Gabrielle Damiens was no fool. She knew even before this man began to threaten her that if she allowed the English spy to slip through her fingers again it would go ill--very ill--with her. And she would die un-avenged. The hated Saint-Lucque, and the whole brood of them would be spirited away if she blundered again. Well then, what had best be done? This man here with his airs of incorruptible officialdom--imitator of Robespierre what?--in his sober, well-cut clothes, might, after all, be of service. Might have ideas worth considering. He was a blood-hound, a tracker, he might have ideas. Time was getting short. There was the journey to Paris on the morrow, and the certainty that the English spies would work their coup in the forest of Mézières. Everyone thought that. Everyone believed it. Chauvelin had expounded his theory before the Committee of Public Safety, had submitted his plans for the capture of the arch-enemy. The Committee had approved of the theory and agreed to the plan. This man, this Marseillais with the stooping shoulders and blue chin, had knowledge of all that. He seemed to know everything, in fact, like one associated with the high powers in Paris. He knew all about the orders transmitted to her by Chauvelin. He had heard of her defiance and contravention of the orders.

There were calls for the landlord just then. They came from outside. Sharp and peremptory they were, coming from one who was not used to being kept waiting. Gabrielle thought she recognised the voice with its accent from the South. At once there was a commotion. Citizen Magnol ran in and out of the house, backwards and forwards from the tap-room to the kitchen, carrying bottles and tins labelled "cloves" and "nutmeg" or "sugar." After a time he came in carrying a huge bowl of steaming mulled wine. Philomène was hard on his

heels, laden with a number of pewter mugs.

"What's all this?" Gabrielle queried.

"Hot wine, citizeness, for the soldiers," the landlord replied.

"Who ordered it?"

"Citizen Renaud from Paris. He thought the men looked starved with cold. . . . They certainly look it . . . This will do them good."

He took a ladle full of the hot stuff from the bowl, tasted it and smacked his lips. The company at the trestle-table watched the proceedings with covetous eyes. The men laughed. One of them said: "It looks good." Another declared: "I'll have some of that, too, citizen landlord."

"So will I," said a third.

"And I," came lustily all down the length of the table.

"Make haste, citizen landlord," they all shouted at him, as he held up the bowl with both hands and marched with it as with a trophy out of the room. Philomène ran in his wake, carrying a load of pewter mugs. Their exit was accompanied by lusty cheers, which after a moment or two found their echo in the yard outside.

Gabrielle struggled to her feet, feeling unaccountably weary. Her legs felt heavy like lead. She picked up her mantle and, wrapping it round her, stumped slowly out of the room.

André Renaud—was he really André Renaud?—was out there in the yard. Half a dozen troopers were gathered round him, all laughing and bandying jokes. The landlord had just come out carrying the bowl of mulled wine. Philomène was close behind him with the pewter

mugs. They came to a halt, Magnol holding up the bowl in accordance with the custom of the country, for the customer who paid for the drink to pronounce his approval. This the black-coated stranger did, he took the ladle offered him by the landlord, and pronounced the mixture good.

The landlord assisted by Philomène now went the round, distributing the hot drink. The soldiers raised their mugs, cheering the black-coated stranger. Nor were the men in the diligence forgotten. From them, after their long confinement in the narrow space, came huzzas and cheers more lustily than the rest.

"Shall we give the prisoner a hot drink, too?" the stranger suggested. "It will put heart into her."

The corporal in charge was quite willing.

"Why shouldn't she get drunk, poor thing?" he said lightly.

He and the men were having a good time. They felt kindly disposed towards that wretched woman, who was being trundled about in a jolting vehicle with nothing short of trial and death at the end of this awful journey. Once or twice during the day she had been jostled out by order of the corporal in charge of the escort. She had been given food on arrival at the Bon Camarade, when she was thrust in and out of the coach as if she had been a bale of goods. But not once during this long day did a word of complaint escape her lips. She sat in a corner of the vehicle, motionless and silent. The soldiers were not cruel men, not all of them by any means. There were some who felt quite sorry for her, especially when Mam'zelle Guillotine came a while ago and had a look at her. Such torrents of abuse as then poured from the lips of the noted patriot, even the troopers had never heard before. But the woman never moved. She scarcely seemed to hear. Yes, the men had been sorry for her then. But, que voulez vous? Duty

is duty, and disobedience to orders punishable by death.

The corporal in charge was not averse to allowing the prisoner to take a mug of hot wine at the hands of the stranger who was so generously paying for this treat. There was nothing in his orders against that. Two of the men even got out of the coach to make room for him and helped him up the step because of his one arm, when he handed a mug to the wretched woman and stood by while she drank it down.

Gabrielle had been standing all this while outside the door of the inn gazing at the animated scene. Her glowing eyes followed every movement of André Renaud. He had just come out of the diligence when he caught sight of her. The lanthorn which hung from a rafter under the projecting roof was above his head. The new style sugar-loaf hat which he wore threw an irregular shadow over parts of his face. It also caused him to look taller than she had thought him before, in spite of his decided stoop. Below the hat the funereal looking band of black hair encircled his forehead and the top of his long nose, were the only features visible on his face.

Gabrielle strode across the yard, and he came on to meet her.

"What right had you," she demanded roughly, "to interfere with my men?"

He was profuse in his apologies.

"A thousand pardons, citizeness," he pleaded with unwonted humility; "I did it for the best. The men were getting restive as the cold got into their bones. They will fight better now, being warm inside. I was sure you would approve."

The false air of humility did not last long. Already his voice had

become harsh and his tone dictatorial. Gabrielle was up in arms.

"I am not starting before dawn," she declared curtly; "time for them to freeze again before then."

Greatly to her surprise he seemed to acquiesce.

"You must do as you please," he responded dryly, paused a moment, then added with a regretful sigh:

"And so we shall miss that elusive English spy again!"

"Miss him?" she countered. "Why should we, or rather I, miss him?"

"Because, as I said before, the men are already impatient and restive, what with the cold and the delay. If you wait about here all night their enthusiasm will fizzle out before you reach the forest. It is only a fizzle now. You blame me for giving them a warm drink, but they were more tired and dispirited than you think. Make a start soon, citizeness," he urged with great earnestness, "their blood is warm now, don't let it cool down again. You could be in the forest before the dawn and the weather is just perfect for the capture of a gang of marauders like those English spies."

Then, as she remained obstinately silent, he continued with a note in his voice which sounded like a solemn warning:

"Your policy, citizeness, believe me, is to travel by night and to rest by day. The English spies are night birds. They only fly about in the dark."

She was looking straight past him now, across the yard where the bulky diligence with its inside load of picked men loomed out like a huge black mass darker than the darkness around. It held the one

thing that to Gabrielle Damiens was more precious than anything on earth, more precious than life itself--her chance of revenge. It was all very well for this man here and for all the Committees in Paris to think only of the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel; but for her, Gabrielle, who had spent sixteen years in a living tomb to suit the ambitious intrigues of the Saint-Lucque family, the thought of wreaking her revenge on the entire brood outweighed any thought of patriotism or personal advancement. That woman in the diligence meant more to her than a whole army of English spies.

She stood there brooding, unable to make a decision. She felt that in a way this man, André Renaud--was he really André Renaud--was right, whoever he was. The English spies were night birds who flapped their wings only in the night, and they were out to wrest that woman Saint-Lucque out of her clutches. Yes! the man with the maimed arm was probably right, and as for her, Gabrielle, the double capture was the prize to aim for. There had been so much talk, so many intrigues and so much mystery around the personality of the Scarlet Pimpernel, that she herself was caught in the vortex of hatred against the man and in the torrent of this mad longing to see him brought to ruin and to death. The man who had made love to her! The man whom she had kissed! Who had mocked and derided and flouted her! The man whom she had held at her mercy under her whip-lash and whom she had allowed to escape from full retributive justice.

She hated him! By Satan and all his horde, how she did hate him!

"His was not really a clever impersonation," the man in black broke in casually on her thoughts. "I wonder that you, citizeness, who have a great reputation for shrewdness, were so easily taken in. You have met men of the secret police before now, was he at all like any of them? Just think of our mutual friend, Citizen Chauvelin. He is the

master of us all. We try to model ourselves on that pattern. Suave. Soft of speech. Gentle of manner. There you have your successful tracker of spies and criminals. Not a great hulking, blundering lout like the man who courted your favours. Look at me, citizeness, and think of him and then say which of us two is the most likely to trap those audacious English spies?"

She did look at him. Suave. Soft of speech. Gentle of manner, he was the very replica of Armand Chauvelin.

She had, however, remained as was her wont, obstinately silent, nor did he say anything more for the moment. He allowed her gaze to travel over his stooping figure, his lean jaw and empty sleeve; a slight, ironical smile hovered round his lips. But this Gabrielle could not see. Then there was silence between them for a time. A distant clock in the city struck ten. The night was going to be very dark. Only a thin film of snow fell intermixed with rain. It no longer spread a mantle of white over the ground, rather did it turn to slush and mud as it fell. The troopers when they had drunk their fill of the good mulled wine, turned into the coach-house for shelter. The doors and windows of the diligence had once again been hermetically closed on the six picked men and their unfortunate prisoner. And gradually all signs of life were stilled in the yard of the Bon Camarade. And darkness became more dense. Almost palpable. The volets throughout the house had been closed one by one, only the door into the inn had remained open, and through it came filtrating a dim shaft of light.

These two, the man and the woman, remained as it were the sole occupants of this dark and noiseless place. They were looking at one another like two swordsmen about to engage. A few moments went by, and then Gabrielle suddenly turned on her heel and went into the house. The man did not follow her. He remained standing almost motionless under the shelter of the projecting roof. He did not seem

to feel the cold, nor was he impatient. The distant clock struck the quarter after the hour, and a minute later Gabrielle emerged once more out of the house.

She took no notice of the stranger, strode past him and called loudly for the corporal in charge.

To him she gave the order to make an immediate start.

In a moment the Bon Camarade awoke from its torpor. There was running and shouting. Orders and counter orders. Horses pawing in their stables, the clatter of their hoofs on the cobblestones of the yard. Volets and windows thrown open, heads thrust out to see what was going on. Ostlers and grooms busy. The landlord fussy and obsequious. The team was put to. The carriage lanterns lighted and fixed in position. The escort prepared to mount. A few street urchins ventured into the yard and stood round the diligence gaping at its closed doors and windows, watching the soldiers and the horses, passing criticisms and remarks in their shrill childish voices.

And towering in this vortex of sound and movement the massive form of Mam'zelle Guillotine wrapped in a fur-lined mantle, stood out by the side of the tall, stooping figure clad in black, scarce distinguishable from the darkness around. The master sleuth from Paris.

Gabrielle Damiens prepared to mount to the box-seat of the coach.

"I am driving," she announced briefly, speaking to him. "Are you coming with me?"

"Not with you, citizeness," he replied. "I might hamper you. But there will be a horse to spare for me here. I will start as soon as may be and meet you at the cross-roads just before you come to Falize. Will

you wait for me there?"

"Falize itself would be better. We could pull up there."

"As you like, but the cross-roads would suit you best, citizeness. If I am there, and I shall be, we would have command of the two roads and could then decide which would be the safest to take."

"What do you mean by that?" Gabrielle demanded. She had one foot on the axle of the near front wheel, preparing to mount.

"There has been a persistent rumour all day in Grécourt," he said in a whisper, "that the English spies are mustering in this district. They are said to be more numerous than they usually are. Some talk of a dozen, others of two score. Of course, the story may only be a canard. But it is best you should be warned. I shall know more about the rumour when I meet you, and, as I say, we'll take the road that gives the best chance of safety."

"I am not afraid," Gabrielle muttered, and without another word she climbed up to the box-seat and settled herself down, reins in hand, and driving-apron stretched over her massive thighs. The corporal in charge climbed up after her and sat down by her side.

A click of the tongue. A scraping and jolting and lurching. Much pawing and snorting. The iron hoofs drawing sparks from the cobblestones. The damp leather squeaking. The axles grinding. The metal jingling. A shout from Gabrielle:

"The cross-roads then."

A resounding crack of the whip and the lumbering vehicle started on its way.

Chapter XXVI: FORTUNE IN SIGHT

Long after the rumble of wheels had died away in the distance the quidnuncs sat around in the tap-room arguing, talking, discussing they knew not what, and drinking their favourite mulled wine. As a matter of fact nothing very important had happened. Nothing so very unusual. The farmers who had come to Grécourt with their live stock were the first to say that the sight of a coach with closed doors and windows and escorted by a posse of soldiers was not a rare occurrence in the city. A fortnight or so ago-it may have been three weeks, just such a coach had come through Grécourt on its way to Paris. Doors and windows closed. An important detachment of soldiers from one of the local regiments. Great secrecy. Everything, in fact, to arouse the curiosity of patriots who wanted to know what all the mystery was about. In that case it transpired that in the coach were three whilom aristos, one of them none other than the ci-devant Marquis de Saint-Lucque, who was known by all and sundry in the province. With him was his son, a boy who should have been at school. And there was also a caoltin, the abbé Prud'hon. Not at all a bad man, any more than Saint-Lucque and his boy were bad. But it seems that they really were traitors to their country. They wanted to sell the whole of the province of Artois to the Austrians, who were the arch-enemies of France, and who would immediately grind all the Artesians under their iron heel, seize their land, their crops, take their children into bondage and their wives as serving-maids.

And it seems that Saint-Lucque, the abbé Prud'hon and even the boy were all in a huge maleficent plot to do this evil thing. And so they were arrested and were being driven to Paris in the diligence which halted at the Bon Camarade, just as this other one had done this very night. In Paris it seems all three of them were going to be tried for treason. They would be condemned to death and then they were going to be brought back to Mézières where Mam'zelle Guillotine

was going to make short work of them.

Yes, the worthy Artesian farmers nodded sagely, that was what happened to traitors who conspired against the Republic and worked against their own country and for the ruin of all the farmers who toiled for the welfare and prosperity of France.

Unfortunately in that case things did not turn out quite in the way that had been anticipated. For while the diligence conveying the traitors to Paris was passing through the forest of Mézières, it was held up by masked highwaymen who attacked the soldiers, killed and wounded most of them, maimed the horses and finally drove the coach away in the darkness, no one knew whither or in which direction. The highwaymen were never apprehended and the traitors vanished as if they had been spirited away by the devil himself.

That was the story that was told in the tap-room of the Bon Camarade on this February night, the eve of market day, by the farmers and breeders gathered in Grécourt for the occasion. Their spirits were not as high as they usually were. Money was scarce these days, in spite of the fact that money-grabbers and aristos had been put to death in hundreds, and the government up in Paris had solemnly promised that when there were no more aristos in France every labourer, every farmer, every toiler and worker would have the fortunes that those traitors had stolen from the people and then squandered like water. Every man in the country would be prosperous and free to do just what he liked and never need do another stroke of work if he had no mind to do it.

Well, promises were all right enough. But as far as agriculture in the Province of Artois was concerned, there was less money to be made out of it now than in the days when the ci-devant Saint-Lucque, the Belforts and others were there to farm the land and pay good wages to those who worked for them.

As for market day, it certainly was not the merry, profitable day it used to be in the past. What about to-morrow? The weather was so bad. Buyers would certainly be scarce and prices would come down to cut-throat level.

"What we each want is money to drop down into our laps without having to toil and moil for it. That is what the government has promised us and nothing less should satisfy us."

The man who spoke was younger than the majority of the guests around the table. This, no doubt, accounted for his lusty speech and full-throated voice. Most of the others approved of what he said and showed their appreciation by banging their half-empty mugs on the table. "Money to drop down into our laps, without having to toil and moil for it." No wonder the prospect appealed to all these harrassed, over-taxed, hard-working men.

"The government did promise . . ." somebody remarked.

"And nothing less should satisfy us," another echoed forcefully, while mugs were again banged on the table-top.

Right through the hubbub of voices and the noise of metal against the table, a clear, sharp voice suddenly resounded. It came from near the door, through which the one-armed stranger had just entered the room. He closed the door behind him, stood with his back to it, facing the company, every man of whom had suddenly turned astonished, enquiring eyes upon him. There was silence for a moment or two, while the resonant voice appeared to have raised an echo in the low-raftered room. The pewter mugs were slowly emptied. One old farmer gave a doubtful shrug.

"All very well talking," he said.

"Talking won't feed the stock or manure the ground," objected another greybeard.

"How are we going to set about it, citizen?" queried a third, with slashing irony.

"About making money drop into to your laps?" he countered.

There was a chorus of "Yes! yes! yes! how is it going to be done?"

"And when?" the youngster added, he who had first brought the question on the tapis.

"When?" the man in black rejoined. "Not later than to-night."

Well, of course, that was something undreamed of. Something so utterly foolish and impossible that the man who suggested it was either a devil or just a mad-man. Roars of mocking laughter greeted him, when he moved away from the door and took his stand at the head of the table. Mocking laughter, jeers, ironical huzzas were hurled at him, and cries of "How? How? How?"

By way of a reply the stranger called loudly for the landlord.

"Our throats are dry," he said; "we'll talk about this over full mugs of mulled wine."

Magnol came in, looking rather scared. He had been on the point of closing his house for the night, not being used to such late hours.

"Citizen landlord," the stranger commanded, turning to him, "a fresh bowl of spiced wine, the best your cellar can procure. Into it you shall pour a bottle of your best brandy. Make it hot and strong, well spiced and as sweet as love. And now be quick about it. We have important

business to transact."

This all looked more serious than had at first appeared. The man in black was certainly no devil or he never would have ordered a bowlful of that excellent mulled wine, and all the more excellent with a bottle of good brandy poured into it. He had the welfare of farmers and stockbreeders of Artois at heart. No! No! he was no devil. A madman perhaps, but his next words would settle that question. For the moment he remained standing at the head of the table, obstinately silent, paying no heed to the many questions, some sarcastic, others encouraging and even peremptory, that were hurled at him from one end of the table to the other. Until presently the landlord returned with the bowl of hot wine and received a regular ovation, as he went the round ladling the drink into the mugs.

"This man here," one of the drovers said to him, "tells us that he is going to find a way of throwing money into our laps without our having to do a handstir of work for it."

"More power to his elbow," Magnol assented, "but how is he going to do it?"

"Let's drink his health and see," a farmer suggested who, apparently, had a practical turn of mind.

This was done, with much cheering, and a great deal of laughter mostly sarcastic and sceptical.

"I thank you, friends," responded the man at the end of the table. He scarcely touched the edge of his mug with his lips. "And now," he went on, and allowed his resonant voice to reach every ear and so fill every corner of the room. "Enough of this and let us talk seriously. You want to know how you can earn a substantial sum of money without toiling and moiling for it. You can do it by thwarting the

machinations of a grasping harpy who to-morrow will, if you do not put a stop to it, pocket the sum of two thousand louis which by right of justice should be yours."

A gasp went right round the table.

"Two thousand louis!" came bursting out from every mouth.

"Where would two thousand louis be coming from?"

"Can you tell us that?"

"From the government who is paying that sum of money in solid gold to any party of French citizens who between them effect the capture of the noted English spy known as the Scarlet Pimpernel."

It was a loud groan of disappointment that went the round this time when the vibrant voice of the man in black ceased to resound through the room.

"Oh! That!!!" was uttered in tones of withering contempt. Contempt which was expressed in several less salubrious ways. They had all heard of the English spy before, and they had been harangued before now by representatives of the government who came down from Paris and talked, and talked, and made all sorts of promises which where never kept. The English spy! Yes! they knew all about him. A myth, what? An imaginary personage whom no one had ever seen and whose personality was always brought to the fore whenever any aristos who should have been sent to the guillotine managed to evade justice. Whenever that happened there was always a lot of talk. It was at once asserted that the local police officials were not at fault. Of course they were not. The Commissary was invariably spoken of as a man of lofty patriotism and of great acumen. But obviously no man born of woman could grapple with a supernatural

creature, with a Titan of immense stature, fiery eyes, hair that bristled and nostrils that emitted crackling flames.

Oh, yes! the good farmers and hard-working drovers and breeders had all heard these stories before. They were not going to listen to them again to-night. They drained their mugs, and grumbled as they drank.

"I am for bed," one of the men said and rose to go.

"So am I," concluded another.

In a moment most of them were on their feet. Moody and disillusioned, they never thought of saying "Thank you!" for the warm drink.

There was quite a stampede in the direction of the door, until that same resonant voice called out: "Stop!" And the call was so compelling that for the space of a minute of two the drive towards the door came to a halt, and twenty pairs of eyes were once more turned in the direction of the stranger.

"Are you fools or madmen?" he cried forcefully. "Are you really going to throw away the one chance you will ever have of bringing ease and comfort to your wives and children? Do you know what two thousand louis means? They mean one hundred louis to each one of you. One hundred louis to put in your pocket this very night. And for doing what? Wresting the English spy from the clutches of a woman, who already has more louis and is richer than any of you can ever hope to be."

"What woman?" someone shouted.

"Mam'zelle Guillotine, of course."

A few of the men gravely shook their heads, others murmured: "That huzzy!" and muttered under their breath: "I wouldn't care to tackle her."

Be it noted that in spite of these grave misgivings on the part of the older men, the younger ones looked eagerly up at the speaker.

Mam'zelle Guillotine had apparently not many friends among this little crowd of country bumpkins. She had certainly become very prominent and very powerful in the province, but many there were who remembered her when in ragged kirtle and torn shift she wandered from one village to another and from an improvised rostrum outside the local inn spouted denunciation against every aristo, and every man who possessed as much as a square bit of land. And when she had finished spouting, she would drag a cap off the head of the man nearest to her and hand it round begging--yes, begging--for a few sous to pay for a bit of supper. And now she wore a fur-lined mantle and lived in Mézières in a palace.

Bah!!

And with riches had come arrogance. She was dictatorial, tyrannical as any aristo. She was feared, but she also was detested.

"Have you never realised," the stranger went on, not loudly but very quietly, leaning slightly forward, his eyes under those beetling brows searching the faces of his hearers, "have you never guessed that all along the arrest of the ci-devant Saint-Lucque family, one after the other, has been connected with the capture of the English spy? He has been at work in your district for some time. Was it not he who dragged the ci-devant Marquis and his son and the calotin Prud'hon out of the clutches of Mam'zelle Guillotine? And now she means to have her revenge on him. She means to capture the Scarlet

Pimpernel in the very act of trying to effect the escape of the woman Saint-Lucque, and thus earn the full reward of two thousand louis offered to any patriot who would lay that enemy of France by the heels."

"Lucky Mam'zelle Guillotine," he went on, certain now of holding the attention of his audience. "She has the means of earning twenty times as much money as would keep any one of you in affluence for the rest of your lives. Lucky Mam'zelle Guillotine! And I'll tell you something more, my friends, and that is that she already has the Scarlet Pimpernel gagged and bound in that diligence which you saw standing here in the yard for over two hours. How do you suppose I should know anything of this affair, if it was not already accomplished? No, no, Mam'zelle Guillotine is not one to talk till after a thing is done. And I tell you she talked to me about it all in this very room. And she laughed at me and mocked me and threw my helplessness in my face, knowing that I could do nothing.

"She was right there, citizens. I was alone. What could I do? I had not had the chance of talking to you all, of hearing from you that you would join me in the most glorious expedition ever undertaken by twenty patriots like yourselves."

Indeed, the man had no cause to complain of inattention. Never had an orator so engrossed an audience. Young and old hung upon his words. They exchanged glances, murmuring words of commendation. Eager, excited were they all. Impatient. Expectant. Wanting to hear more about this money, this gold, this fortune that could be theirs for the snatching.

"What must we do?" they asked.

"What must we do to be as lucky as Mam'zelle Guillotine?"

"Just do as I tell you," the speaker replied in stentorian accents, "and the fortune is yours."

"Tell us, then."

"Speak up, citizen."

"We'll go to hell with you."

The man threw back his head and laughed. Laughed immoderately. And the laughter came from the intense joyousness of his heart.

"Not to hell, citizens," he cried exultantly. "Only as far as the cross-roads on this side of Falize."

He dropped his voice and once again spoke in that subdued tone which was more impressive than any shouting could be.

"Some of you, if I mistake not," he said, "have brought in horses for the sale of livestock to-morrow. They could not be put to better use than the purpose which we have in view. If any man has a pistol let him take it, or a sabre if he has one, a goodly knife, a garden tool, a scythe, anything he can fight with. For there may be a bit of fighting, let me tell you. Mam'zelle Guillotine and her myrmidons will not give up their prize-capture without putting up a fight. Mounted on good horses, we'll easily overtake the party at the cross-roads on this side of Falize. I know they mean to call a halt there before deciding which road which they will ultimately take. Both lead to Paris, one through the forest, the other by a round-about way. Well! citizens, what do you say? Shall we decide what their fate is to be? Shall we seize the coach and its occupants, one of which is worth one hundred louis to every one of you? Shall we? Shall we, citizens, who see your wives in ragged kirtles and your children cold and hungry, shall we snatch this rich booty from the hands of an overweening terrorist? What do you

say?"

"Yes!" came from a score of sturdy throats, shouting in unison.

"Let's drink to it, then!" And the stranger raised his mug high above his head. He went on once again in his full, vibrant voice. "To the confusion of Mam'zelle Guillotine! To our success in snatching from her the prize that is ours by right! To victory!"

"To victory!"

And the mugs were emptied at one draft.

So compelling was this man's personality, so irresistible his oratory, that these men, some young and eager, others older and sedate, drank and shouted in a way that they never would have dared to do in a more sober mood. To drink to the confusion of Mam'zelle Guillotine would on normal occasions have entailed immediate arrest, prosecution for treason, probably. But this occasion was abnormal. One hundred louis dangling as a golden vision before the eyes of men who had never looked forward to a carefree future, made warriors of these simple country folk. They felt that the blood of heroes was coursing through their veins. Even the grey-beards shouted: "To victory!" as heartily as the youngsters. What would you? Money was so scarce these days! Everyone was so poor. So poor! Starvation was stalking the land. Children cried for bread. Work was grinding and wages small. No wonder that the thought of capturing the mysterious English spy and seeing a hundred louis fall into their laps inflamed the imagination of these ignorant rustics. A hundred louis! And golden louis at that! No dirty scraps of paper, mind you! And with nothing to do for it but an exciting adventure.

So "Hurrah!" for the man who had shown them the way to this marvellous good fortune.

There was only the unfortunate landlord, citizen Magnol, who did not feel as happy as his customers. He had crept back into the tap-room and had been standing in the doorway listening to the harangue of that black-coated, one-armed stranger. He had witnessed the incitement to treason, the appeal to the cupidity of a lot of witless boors, which of a certainty would land the lot of them in gaol. He had heard the shouts and the cheers, and he was terrified. When the cry to "Victory!" echoed from one end of the tap-room to the other, he turned tail and ran helter-skelter up the rickety stairs that led to the loft under the sloping roof, and bolted into the attic where his wife was already in bed. There he joined her, buried his face in the hard pillow and pulled the blanket right over his head so as not to hear anything more of the awful things that were going on down below.

But he was not destined to enjoy tranquillity for long. A few moments during which his wife, roused from her first sleep, tried in vain to get a word out of him. She had just turned over ready to go to sleep again, having made up her mind that her Fernand had had one of his many drinking bouts, when a heavy step came mounting up the rickety stairs. The sound was followed by repeated hard knocks on the door and a peremptory call for the citizen landlord. The door was thrown open and the black-coated stranger who was making all this pother stalked in. He carried a small lantern, which he flashed into the faces of Magnol and his wife, who sat up straight in bed, shivering and shaking with terror.

"Citizen landlord," he said. And he spoke as one in authority. "A grave injustice is being done to the loyal patriots who are at present under your roof. They are determined that the wrong done to them shall be righted this very night. I have told them how this can best be done, and they are going in a perfectly peaceful frame of mind to put their case before one of the highest authorities in the Province of Artois. I will not mention names, but what the patriots propose to do is

in accordance with the laws of the Republic as passed by the National Convention and in strict accordance with the Rights of Man."

He paused a moment, letting his words sink into the feeble minds of these two terrified individuals. Magnol was staring round-eyed not at the stranger, but into the flame of the lantern which appeared to fascinate him and to render him motionless and mute. Only his teeth chattered as if he suffered from ague. The woman had disappeared from view. Her head was buried in the bedclothes.

The stranger continued in the same authoritative voice: "Citizen landlord, two courses are open to you now. Either you side with the patriots in the cause of justice, in which case, if you give them the required help, there will be twenty golden louis for you . . ."

Once more he came to a halt. Magnol's fixed stare seemed suddenly to become galvanised. Cupidity never entirely absent from a peasant's nature gave a spark of vitality to his beady, black eyes. His gaze shifted from the light of the lantern to the hand of the stranger, in whose palm something jingled which sounded uncommonly like precious metal.

"I am a good patriot," he murmured through his chattering teeth.

"I know you are," the stranger rejoined, "that's why I have come to tell you that we count on you to side with us who are fellow patriots and give us what help you can. For," he went on solemnly, emphasising every word, "if you refuse to give us that help, I myself will denounce you as aiding and abetting treason by lending your house to a pack of conspirators and supplying them with food and drink."

Saying this, he turned back the lapel of his coat and allowed the light of the lantern to flash on the metal badge beneath it, which proclaimed him to be a high official of the national police force.

Magnol, scared and bewildered, passed the back of his hand over his humid brow.

"I don't understand," he murmured; "on which side are you, citizen?"

"On your side if you give me the help I need. Dead against you if you refuse."

Once more he allowed the precious metal to jingle in his hand. And Magnol, scared out of his wits, murmured feebly:

"What must I do?"

"Get out of bed," the stranger commanded, "and come with me. You will hand over to the patriots downstairs every gun, every pistol and sabre, every scythe, axe or other tool which you have got stored in your cellars."

"I haven't any stores," Magnol protested.

But he did get out of bed; the jingling metal was a magnet that would have lured him to Gehenna.

"Well, let me see what you have got; and then we will talk."

So far so good. Citizen Magnol, like any landlord of a prosperous country inn, had three or four serviceable guns, a pistol or two and a good number of agricultural implements carefully stored away. He allowed the twenty good patriots to help themselves to what they needed and soon these worthies had laid hands on every available weapon likely to be useful in a fight, if fight there was. And most of them hoped that there would be a good scrap at the very least. Three of them commandeered the guns, two others were quick enough to seize the pistols, while some had to be content with sickles or

scythes. One man had a saw, another took a wood-chopper, and there were two or three who had brought their own guns with them, on the chance of getting a pot-shot at a hare.

After that there was a raid on the stables. Most of the men had come into Grécourt on their own horses, and there were a few nags which had been brought in for the sale, for those who had come on foot. There were two fine, mettlesome young horses that had been brought in by a farmer from Tourteron. These were at once appropriated by the stranger without any protest from the owner.

Thus the little cavalcade was formed. They were lined up in the yard, the horses champing and snorting in the cold night air. A pale watery moon had rent the bank of clouds and peeped down on the amazing scene more suggestive of mediæval times than of a winter's night in revolutionary France. The stranger mounted on one young horse held the other by the bridle. He gave the order to start and the cortège filed past him with many a hearty cheer and loud huzzas.

When the last of them had turned out of the yard into the road, he called to the landlord. Magnol had been standing by, gazing on the men, on the horses, on the primitive arms glinting in the blue light of the moon. He was like a man in a trance. He made sure that he was dreaming and would presently wake up to the sound of snoring emitted by his plethoric wife. He was still conscious of an awful feeling of terror, of speeches round him, of Mam'zelle Guillotine wielding her instrument of death, and of a tall, sable-clad figure spouting threats at him. A menacing "either-or."

"Citizen landlord!"

The voice struck his senses as with a whip-lash. He staggered and nearly measured his length on the ground. He blinked his eyes and shielded his head with his arm, for something had been flung at him,

something that jingled as it fell at his feet.

The sound of the cavalcade galloping away down the road, the cheers and huzzas were gradually getting fainter. But now there was a fresh clang of hoofs on the cobblestones of the yard. Magnol pulled himself together, tried to collect his scattered senses. He looked about him and perceived a solitary rider wrapped from head to foot in a voluminous mantle. The rider held a second horse by the bridle. In a trice he was across the yard and disappeared round the angle of the house. Magnol could hear the young horses prancing and champing and finally settle down to a swift and fiery gallop.

Then only did Magnol stoop and pick up the missile that had been flung at him.

It was a purse and contained twenty golden louis.

Chapter XXVII: AT THE CROSS ROADS

Mam'zelle Guillotine had given the order to halt. It was here, at the cross-roads, that André Renaud had promised to meet her. Falize was distant less than a league away. The road ahead led straight to Paris. There was the secondary road which, as Renaud said, also led by a détour to the capital. Gabrielle was wishing he would soon come. The drive had proved very wearisome, for the roads were heavy and so was the old diligence with its load of armed troopers. And she felt lonely and dispirited. Even the thought of that woman, the last of that family which she hated with such intensity, failed to inflame her blood. The woman was safe enough for the guillotine, but there should have been five of that abominable brood to satisfy Gabrielle Damiens's lust for the blood of the Saint-Lucques.

She gave the order to dismount and the troopers sat by the roadside, or walked up and down the road trying to put warmth into their feet and hands. The moon, peeping through a bank of clouds, made the whole scene appear weird. It did not seem real. Not of this earth. Soon after the start one of the team had gone lame. The corporal in charge was bending over examining the fetlock. Gabrielle, restless and impatient, came down from the box-seat. Wrapped in her warm mantle, with the hood over her head, she looked like a huge furred animal stamping up and down to keep herself warm. Her keen ears were attuned to catch the slightest sound. She felt the tension that kept the men's nerves on edge. They, of course, could do nothing but wait while the time dragged on and there was no sign, as yet, of that mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel whom they were out to capture.

The great lumbering vehicle loomed out of the wan grey light like some grim, spectral monument.

And all at once a sound which caused the men to pause in their

spacing, to stand rigid and on the alert, ready to mount the very second that the order was given. Gabrielle too had paused. Her heart seemed to have stopped its beating. Her hot hands gripped the edge of her fur mantle, and with a sharp twist of the head she threw the hood back, away from her ears. The sound which she had heard was of two horses galloping at tip-top speed from the direction of Grécourt. Two horses? Would that be André Renaud? Or was chance really on her side and was it the English spy with one of his followers who were coming this way? She gave a quick appraising glance on the men and gave the order: "Attention!"

The men saw to the priming of their pistols, thrust them back into their belts and drew their sabres. The corporal went round to the door of the diligence, released the lock and to the men cooped up inside he also spoke the one word: "Attention!"

"If that should be the English spies," Gabrielle said aloud, so that the men might hear, "we are ready for them."

The order as far as the escort was concerned was to feign inattention and wait for the attack. The English spies were wily, and should they scent a trap they might scamper away to safety. And the men stood still and waited, their nerves taut, their senses strained. They were like greyhounds held in leash. And now with the Scarlet Pimpernel almost in sight, they were straining the leash to breaking-point.

It was the corporal who first caught sight of the black-coated stranger riding full tilt, from the direction of Grécourt and putting on greater and greater speed as he neared the crossways.

"The stranger with the one arm, citizeness," he said to Gabrielle. She drew a deep sigh of relief. André Renaud--she was sure of him now--had not played her false. With him to give her the weight of his

personality with the troopers, she felt more sure of success. Here was a man worthy of her trust. Of late she had felt--oh! so vaguely--a certain weakening of her mettle. Once or twice she had felt conscious of the one thing she had never dreamed of before--Fear. Yes! on two occasions she had actually been afraid. Of whom? Of what? She could not say. It was something indecisively connected with the man with one arm and the fiery eyes under beetling brows. She had not actually been afraid of him or of his threats. He was of the secret police, but she did not fear the police. Her record for militant patriotism was unblemished. At the same time she felt reassured that he was no enemy, and was whole-heartedly on her side.

For Gabrielle Damiens was clever enough to know that her hold on the people of Artois was beginning to slacken. Popular she had never been. But she had been held in awe and that was what she liked. So far there had been no outward sign of waning in the fear which she liked to inspire. Fear? Yes! but no longer that kind of rough admiration which her ruthlessness and free speech was wont to call forth. She had not often indulged in tub-thumping oratory lately, but on the rare occasion when she did, the crowd around her was much thinner than it used to be. She was seldom cheered nowadays, and often she would see her audience diminish in number while she talked. Men on the fringe of the crowd would quietly steal away to the nearest cabaret. Women hardly ever came to hear her.

All these things were facts which had gradually forced themselves upon her mind. They were the result of her absorption in the one great object of her life, the destruction of the Saint-Lucque family. Thoughts of her revenge obtruded themselves into her oratory until it became dull through the monotony of its theme. The worthy Artesians got tired of listening to vituperations hurled at this one family of aristos, when they wanted to hear all about the doings of the Committee of Public Safety up in Paris, the execution of the Girondins, the quarrels

between the Moderates and the Terrorists and other more interesting subjects.

Be that as it may, Gabrielle with her thoughts still centered on the Saint-Lucques and her disappointment in connection with their rescue by the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, was inclined after this to allow the man from Paris, whoever he was, to dominate her.

He was out to capture the English spy, she to keep her hold on the prisoner. True he was maimed and, as far as she could judge, past middle-age, in spite of his jet-black hair—which she was sure was dyed with walnut juice—but he had a commanding voice and would keep up the soldiers' morale more easily than she could.

The rider drew rein, arriving at full tilt, and pulled the young horses back on their haunches till they reared and beat the air with their forefeet. In an instant he was out of the saddle and close to Gabrielle. A voluminous dark mantle wrapped him up from head to foot, and the bridle of the two horses were curled round his one arm, leaving the hand free. He took hold of Gabrielle's wrist and drew her to the side of the road out of earshot of the men.

"I don't want to scare them," he said to her in a whisper, "but the rumour has gained ground and what's more it is true."

"What rumour?"

"The English spies have mustered a full force. Some put their numbers down to half a hundred. They were in hiding all day in and about Grécourt. As soon as you had made a start with the diligence they seemed literally to spring out of the ground. So someone told me who saw it all. They were all over the town, swarmed in the market place, in the streets, the cabarets, everywhere. The inhabitants bolted into shelter like rabbits lopping off to their burrows. They were scared

out of their wits. Some of them, however, ran to the police and demanded protection. The police duly turned out. The English attacked them with pistols. They killed and wounded a number of them, and then galloped away, hell-for-leather, in this direction."

He still kept a hold on Gabrielle's wrist; but now, when he paused for a moment in order to draw breath, she shook herself free and made for the diligence.

"What are you going to do?" he demanded, and seized hold of her arm again.

"Make an immediate start," she replied curtly.

"How far will you get," he countered, "with that slow-going vehicle? You cannot vanish into the night before the English rabble overtakes you, and they are more numerous than your escort. They are well mounted, too, let me tell you. Now I have two high-mettled horses here. One for you, the other for myself."

"You are crazy!"

"You would be crazy, citizeness, if you tried to flee with that lumbering vehicle, before a pack of well-mounted brigands."

"I would take the secondary road . . ."

"And risk losing the prisoner? The English spies would sight you before you came to the bend of the road. And what chance would your men have, out-numbered four to one?"

"I will not be parted from the prisoner," Gabrielle declared obstinately.

"Why should you be?" he retorted. "Listen to me, citizeness. Name

of a dog! can't you understand that the only way to keep the prisoner out of the clutches of the English spies is to leave the coach here standing as a decoy, and to take the woman along with us?"

"Take the woman along with us?" she echoed fiercely. "What in the name of Satan do you mean?"

"You take one horse, citizeness, and I the other. The prisoner can ride pillion behind one of us. They are high-mettled three-year-olds, these horses. We'll be well away before the English horde has discovered that there is no one in the diligence, only the troopers. Order your corporal to wait here and stand his ground. To fight to the last man, and when he has captured the Scarlet Pimpernel, to throw him into the coach and start at once for Falize, where we will meet him as soon as we are satisfied that the storm has blown over and that the coast is clear. Come, citizeness," he urged, "there is no time to lose."

He paused a moment, tensely expectant. Then as she still remained silent and obstinate, he spoke the one word:

"Listen!"

The night was so still that from far, very far away, a confusion of sounds seemed to come floating on the midnight air. Only a murmur at first. Nothing more. A buzzing as from a swarm of bees.

"Listen!" the man said again. And now his voice, though hoarse and toneless, was soul—and spirit-stirring. Gabrielle stood motionless as a statue and listened. She heard the distant murmur like a swarm of bees. The buzzing and the droning. And then, through that confused sound, something like a shout. So vague, so distant, it could scarcely be heard.

"The prisoner, citizeness. It is her they are after."

That compelling voice with its commanding note pierced the armour of Gabrielle's obstinacy.

"Come," she commanded.

She strode to the diligence and he followed her with the horses. With her own hands she opened the door of the coach. The atmosphere inside was suffocating. There was a scramble and a scraping of feet, as the troopers were roused from torpor.

"Present, citizeness," they muttered in unison.

"The prisoner," she commanded again.

"Here, citizeness," one of the soldiers responded.

They pushed and they jostled, each striving to snatch a breath of fresh air at the open door. The unfortunate prisoner was pushed about like a bundle of goods. A feeble moan escaped her lips.

"Hold the horses, citizeness," the stranger broke in curtly.

She obeyed mechanically, moving like an automaton. And like an automaton she called the corporal and gave him what orders the stranger had demanded of her: "Fight to the last man. . . . Throw the English prisoner into the coach. . . . We will meet you at Falize." She watched the man put his foot on the step of the vehicle and with his one arm elbow his way to the woman's side, put that one arm round her and drag her to him. He wrapped his voluminous mantle round her and held her close.

"To horse, citizeness," he urged with desperate intensity. Again she obeyed and was already in the saddle, when the confusion of sounds

far away, suddenly became more distinct. A shout arose and then another. Above the buzzing and the humming they arose and seemed to come from many lusty throats. And through the shouting and the buzzing there was a rolling and a drumming and the tramp of many hoofs.

On one high-mettled horse rode Gabrielle Damiens, known throughout the Province of Artois as Mam'zelle Guillotine, on the other a man wrapped in the folds of a black mantle had a woman in his arms.

The moon hid her light behind a bank of clouds.

Darkness fell once more over the land.

The riders galloped on and on into the night.

Chapter XXVIII: THE FIGHT

The troopers round and in the diligence were on the alert. They could hear in the distance the sound of horses' hoofs, the shouts and laughter which proclaimed the approach of the English spy and his followers. The English spy! whose capture would mean a goodly sum of money in the pockets of every soldier here present this night. The order to mount was given by the corporal, and in a trice half a dozen stalwarts were in the saddle while six others inside the diligence sat waiting with cocked pistols on their knees.

A few minutes of tense expectation went by, then suddenly round the bend of the road the forms of a dozen or more horsemen galloping, detached themselves from out of the gloom. At sight of the diligence they gave a wild cry of triumph, and brandishing a collection of miscellaneous weapons they rushed to the attack.

"Attention, citizen soldiers," the corporal commanded. "Shoot low. We must have this English horde alive or we'll forfeit half the prize money."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth than with another outburst of frenzied excitement the band of hot-headed farmers and drovers tumbled helter-skelter out of their saddles and rushed to the attack. There was the diligence in front of them looming out of the night like a huge black mass. A fortress to be stormed as the Bastille, that monument of tyranny, had been stormed and reduced four and a half years ago. While some of the party started a hand-to-hand fight with the mounted troopers, others made for the diligence. But before they had come anywhere near it the corporal gave the word of command in a stentorian voice. The carriage door was suddenly thrown open and out came the half-dozen picked men, pistol in hand, eager and ready for the fight. The result of this move was nothing short of

disastrous for the unfortunate soldiers.

They were not in the best of trim, after being cooped up in an airless box with only a few short periods of relaxation, for close on twenty-four hours. But apart from that they were from the first at a disadvantage. The attacking party rushed on them as they scrambled out of the coach. Not only were they outnumbered, but as they were forced to come out one by one through the narrow doors, they were fallen on with fists and sickles or axes and soon a number of them were more or less seriously wounded.

It was then that the corporal, who was in the thick of it all, suddenly became aware that the man with whom he was at grips at the moment was not the Scarlet Pimpernel at all or any of the English spies, but farmer Papillon with whom he, Corporal Orgelet, had drunk a mug or two of excellent mulled wine at the Bon Camarade in Grécourt only a few hours ago. He had known Citizen Papillon ever since they had run about together, barefooted ragamuffins in ragged breeches, bent on raiding the nearest apple-orchards.

"What the devil does all this mean?" he thundered, as his friend Papillon raised a powerful, menacing fist high above his head.

"It means that thou art a thief," the farmer fulminated in reply. "Aye! a thief and a liar, and that I'll teach thee not to cheat thy friends another time."

With this, he brought his fist down with a crash on his whilom boon-companion's head.

The fight, such as it was, degenerated into fisticuffs. Farmers and drovers expert enough with a gun when out after a hare or a rabbit had little experience in the use of a pistol or a sabre. Seeing that they were not making any headway with these weapons they cast them

incontinently aside and relied on their fists, their sickles and woodchoppers to wreak what mischief they could. And they did wreak any amount of that, for they brought down and wounded a couple of horses, which was an infamous thing to do, and had the effect of turning the wrath of the soldiers into something like execration. They struck at their assailants with their sabres, shouting:

"Take that, thou limb of Satan!"

"'Tis with Mam'zelle Guillotine thou wilt have to reckon."

Indeed, the troopers had already realised that here were no English spies, only a set of drunken jackanapes who in their senseless frenzy were actually daring to lay hands on the soldiers of the Republic. The attack was either an insane hoax, or the result of some ghastly misunderstanding. For the soldiers and the attacking party were all friends together. There was Faret, the drover from Néthon and Constant the washerwoman's son over St. Charles way, and there was Charon the farmer as well as Papillon, and even Antoine, who was own cousin to Corporal Orgelet. What in the devil's name was it all about? It was very mysterious and extremely foolish.

It was also very serious.

These irresponsible fire-eaters would have to be taught a lesson. They would have to learn to their cost that such wanton madness could not remain unpunished and that a man who dares to attack a soldier of the Republic and impede him in the execution of his duty must suffer for his crime. The fight had only lasted a few minutes, but of the thirty-two combatants who took part in it, on one side and the other, there were at least a dozen lying wounded on the ground. And there were the poor horses too. The whole affair might have become even more tragic than it already was. So far the troopers had been unable to use their pistols to good effect. The mounted men were

slashing away with their sabres, and the others who had turned out of the diligence, had been at grips each with two or even three assailants who gave them no respite but pounded away at them with their fists. Corporal Orgelet himself was lying on the ground with his friend Papillon holding him down. He had already received from his whilom boon-companion one or two nasty cracks on the head, when with a clever twist of his body he contrived to get hold of his pistol and to discharge it into Papillon's thigh. The latter uttered a loud imprecation and rolled over on his side yelling: "Assassin! Thou hast murdered me!"

The sudden report, however, had the good effect of sobering the aggressors. It also brought the soldiers back to a sense of discipline, and gave them the confidence which this extraordinary surprise attack had so signally shaken. At once the fight between soldiers and civilians assumed its just proportions, and after a few more pistol shots had been discharged, a few more sabre thrusts gone home and a few stalwarts had been sent rolling over on the ground, Orgelet was able to call a "Halt!". The assailants were ready to surrender. He ordered them to be mustered up. Groaning and cursing, for most of them had suffered pretty severely at the hands of the soldiers, they were lined up, guarded by the troopers, some of whom were in as pitiable a state as themselves. The faint, grey gleam of a winter's night revealed some of them standing, others kneeling or crouching, some with their faces smeared with blood, their eyes bunged up and lips bleeding, all with their hair hanging lank and wet over their eyes. They did indeed present a sorry spectacle. Orgelet himself in a sad plight and dizzy with many a crack on the head, passed up and down the short line, eyeing the wretched men with wrath and contempt in his eyes.

"I ought to have the lot of you summarily shot," he said grimly. "Yes! shot here and now. And I will do it, too," he bellowed at them, "Unless

you tell me at once what is the meaning of this abominable outrage."

"Thou can'st add murder to thy other crimes, citizen corporal," Papillon retorted loudly, "to thy lying and thy cheating, and joining hands with Mam'zelle Guillotine to rob us of what was our due."

"Joining hands with Mam'zelle Guillotine to rob you?" Orgelet countered, lost in bewilderment. "What the devil do you mean? Of what did I rob you?"

"Of the reward due to us for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel."

"The capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel?" Orgelet thundered at them. "You fools! You dolts! That is impossible now after the hellish row you have been making."

"Do not lie to us, Orgelet," one of the wounded men responded. "We know that thou didst capture the English spy in our district and that thou and Mam'zelle Guillotine will share the prize money which is rightly due to us. We came to avenge a wrong . . ."

"What balderdash is this?" Orgelet broke in gruffly. "Who says we captured the English spy?"

"I do," declared Faret, the drover from Néthon.

Orgelet gave a shrug of contempt, a light had suddenly broken in on the confusion of his mind. He was beginning to understand.

"If we captured him," he queried, "what have we done with him?"

"You've got him locked up in there." And with a dramatic gesture Antoine, who was own cousin to Orgelet, pointed to the diligence. "Thief! Liar, thy mother shall hear of this."

This was altogether too much for the corporal's gravity. He burst out laughing and continued to laugh immoderately until feeling faint and giddy with the pain in his head, he nearly measured his length on the road.

"Ah!" he said, his voice still shaking with inward laughter, "is that where that mysterious English spy is? . . . Well," he went on, after a slight pause, "go and get him out, my friends."

Funnily enough, in the heat and excitement of the fight the one object that had induced these madmen to commit the unpardonable folly of attacking troopers of the Republican army had been lost sight of by them. From the moment when they came to close quarters with the soldiers, thoughts of the Scarlet Pimpernel and the English horde vanished from their minds. The only idea that did remain fixed was the question of a hundred louis apiece which these soldiers had filched from them. But now, when Corporal Orgelet himself pointed to the diligence and said: "Go and get him out," there was, in spite of wounds and despite exhaustion, one concerted rush for the coach. Something like a scramble, in fact, which left an unpleasant trail of blood in its wake. The carriage door was still wide open. Farmer Papillon was the first to set foot inside the coach. He groped about the interior with his hands, administered vigorous kicks to supposed and non-existent occupants. Kicks which only reached his unfortunate boon-companions and drew groans and curses from them in response. Some seven or eight of them succeeded in entering the coach and as they tumbled one on the top of the other all they did was to aggravate their woes and the soreness of their wounds.

And all the while Orgelet and the men stood outside whole-heartedly enjoying the joke. For them the whole thing had degenerated into a joke. Whether in the meanwhile the English spies had gone never to return, whether their chance of earning a bit of money had vanished

into the night air, on the wings of noise and confusion and hard blows freely dealt and received, they could form no idea as yet. One thing only was certain, and that was that orders must be obeyed. Orders were to fight to the last man and then proceed to Falize where Mam'zelle Guillotine would rejoin the party. Orgelet, who was a good soldier and good disciplinarian, rallied the troopers round him. He ordered the wounded to enter the diligence, and the others to get back to horse. The horses brought hither by the attacking party had wandered away across fields for the most part. A few had stampeded and bolted back to the stables whence they had come. Others again were presently recaptured, after a short difference of opinion 'tween man and beast. Those that were hurt must of necessity be walked along very quietly on the lead. Fortunately their wounds were not serious and Falize was not far.

As for the miserable aggressors, there they were, crestfallen, and dolefully nursing their wounds. It was easy to see that Corporal Orgelet and the soldiers looked upon them with contempt and pity rather than ill-feeling. The whole affair had been inglorious. Victory over such rabble was nothing to be proud of. Orgelet mounted to the box-seat and took the reins. The escort was formed once more. A crack of the whip and a click of the tongue and the team settled into their collars. The cumbrous vehicle once more started on its way, whilst a score of discomfited and bedraggled rustics made their way as best they could afoot or astride a horse, back to Grécourt.

Chapter XXIX: HELL-FOR-LEATHER

Blakeney held Eve de Saint-Lucque close to him under the folds of his voluminous mantle. Keeping to the edge of the road, where the ground was soft, he gave the mettlesome three-year-old full rein. He seemed indeed to have imbued his mount with all the devilment that was in his own blood, enjoying to the full the noble sport which in an earnest profession of faith he had extolled before his royal friend on that winter's evening more than a sen'night ago, when surrounded by every luxury that wealth and epicurism could devise, he had boldly declared:

"I'll back my favourite sport against any that has ever been invented for making a man feel akin to the gods. . . . With the keen air fanning your cheeks, with the night wrapping you round. With woman or child clinging to you, their weak arms holding tightly to your waist, with human wolves behind you while you ride for dear life through unknown country, riding, galloping, not knowing where you may land, out of one death-trap into another . . . that, Your Highness, is the sport for me . . ."

Gabrielle was doing her best to keep up with him. Something of his wild animal spirits had got into her now. No longer dispirited, no longer doubtful of success, she kept her mind fixed on this wonderful victory which she had achieved over those whom she hated so bitterly. True the other members of the execrated family had escaped her, but she hugged herself with the comforting thought that the Saint-Lucque children would be motherless, and their father a widower, and all of them broken-hearted. And this was thanks to André Renaud—or whoever he was—who had been the *deus ex machina*, the final instrument of her revenge.

Gallopig sometimes behind him, at others some little distance in

the rear, all that she could see of him through the gloom was the square mass of his mantle, which enveloped him from the neck to the knees. Yes, there was a devil in the man, she said to herself, while she made vigorous efforts not to lag behind.

After the first ten minutes of this wild gallopade, when the sounds of fighting, way over the cross-roads, had been swallowed up by the night, she had ceased to try to determine whither she was being led. She had lost all sense of direction. All she could do was to follow blindly on. It was only after a long climb over a steep portion of the road, when the man drew rein to give his horse a breather, that she ventured on questioning him.

"What is our first objective?" she asked.

"The unknown," he cried joyously in response.

"The unknown?" she echoed grimly. "You are mad."

"By George! I believe I am," he assented, and peeped down through the closure of his mantle at the burden which lay in his arms.

"We are not heading for Paris," she objected; "I do not even know where we are."

"No more do I, citizeness," he responded with a happy chuckle. "But we'll get somewhere in time. Before dawn if we are lucky. En avant, citizeness, the unknown means victory to two of us over our enemies. They'll never look for us there."

Even before he had finished speaking, he had touched his mount slightly with a spur and off they were again, he with his burden under his mantle, and she, galloping as close to him as she could, with her thoughts once more beginning to whirl about in her brain and her

nerves strained to breaking-point.

At one time she thought that they were making tracks for Mézières. It was too dark to see much and Gabrielle Damiens was not a country wench, not a rustic who would know direction by instinct, by the way the wind blew, and by the fleeting clouds. Less than five years ago she was still a captive in the Bastille. Since then she had roamed in and out of cities and knew little of the open country. She had not seen much of her own Province of Artois. Mézières and its immediate neighbourhood she knew, of course. She also knew Grécourt and Falize and the main roads which led to Paris one way and to the Belgian frontier the other. It was not along either of these roads they were speeding now. Then whither were they going? Her tired eyes wandered round striving to pierce the darkness of the night. Now and again, when for a few brief moments the moon peeped through a fissure in the clouds, she thought to perceive somewhere in the distance a half-forgotten landmark: a jutting hillock, a belt of trees or the white church steeple of an isolated village. And when presently the road plunged into a thicket she thought it must be the forest of Mézières. But the forest of Mézières was more dense, the undergrowth thicker, the road in places more steep. It was here that the encounter with the English spies was to have taken place. No, no! This was not the forest of Mézières. Then what was it?

Once outside the belt of trees, her straining ears perceived the sound of running water. Swift and turbulent. Where could this be? They went over a bridge and to right and left she could hear the water rushing and tumbling down from a height over rocky projections. The rider on ahead put his horse to a trot, and she was able to come up to him. Quite close. It seemed to her then as if at a short distance away a few solid masses inky-black and grouped together loomed out of the gloom darker than the night. A village probably.

"The unknown," he called out, with a ring of triumph in his voice, and pointed in that direction. "En avant, citizeness."

And before she was aware of what was happening, he had caught hold of her bridle rein, and thereafter she knew nothing more, for her mount was being carried along with its stable companion, hell-for-leather at breakneck speed.

She made an effort to wrench the bridle out of his hand, but it was held in a grip that was as hard and as unyielding as steel. Half dazed with fatigue and want of breath, she tried to slide down out of the saddle. Her foot had just touched the ground the ground, when with a vigorous jerk he drew rein. Panting and snorting and beating the air with their hoofs, the horses presently came to a dead halt. Gabrielle fell clean out of the saddle and lay in a heap on the ground. She was on the point of swooning. Through a state of semi-consciousness, she heard the man calling repeatedly for the landlord, and later on there was a banging of shutters and creaking of door hinges. She lay quite still for she was bruised all over and inexpressibly weary. Again she heard the man's voice:

"Hey there! citizen landlord."

And she murmured: "Where am I?"

It was shortly before the dawn, a pale grey light in the east picked out with a silvery sheen here and there a sloping roof or the topmost branch of tall cypress trees. It was cold and damp. Gabrielle rolled over on her side. She was lying prone on the mud of the road. Over her head something squeaked with irritating persistency. She glanced up and vaguely discerned a painted sign swinging on its post. She heard one man's voice alternating with another.

"Travellers, citizen landlord. We have lost our way. Can you put us

up until daylight?"

There was some demur followed by a jingle of precious metal. After which the other voice put in gruffly:

"I have one room. . . ."

"This purse contains a louis d'or, citizen landlord. If there were two rooms there would be two louis."

Further demur apparently and then:

"It is too late for supper, anyway."

"If you bring us three mugs of hut mulled wine, there will be four louis d'or inside this purse."

After which a shrill voice called from above:

"Don't be a fool, Mathieu. Let the travellers come in and give them mulled wine while I get the rooms ready. It will cost you five louis," she went on after a slight pause, "and no questions asked."

The three of them sat at a table in the tap-room of this wayside inn. The landlord had brought in three large pewter mugs filled to the brim with steaming, spiced wine. There is no better drink in the world than mulled wine concocted by a French countryman. Eve de Saint-Lucque, looking a pitiful rag of femininity, gave a wan smile as Blakeney persuaded her to drink.

"You too, citizeness," he said turning to Gabrielle, who sat there sullen and mute doing her best to fight that intense weariness which took all the life out of her. Blakeney drew a flask out of his pocket.

"The wine is good," he said, "but a drop of good old cognac will

improve it."

He poured out the contents of his flask into Gabrielle's pewter mug. She drank it all down at one draught.

A woman's footsteps were heard clattering down the wooden stairs.

"The rooms are ready," she announced curtly.

"And so are the five louis d'or," Blakeney responded gaily and counted out the gold in the woman's wrinkled hand.

"Will you follow our kind hostess, citizeness," he said, lightly touching Gabrielle on the shoulder. She gave no answer, spread out her arms over the table and let her head drop down heavily upon them.

"I'll stay here," she murmured almost inaudibly.

Blakeney stood by for a moment looking down on her with an expression in his face that was partly of contempt and partly of pity. She never moved.

He then went over to the other side of the table where Eve de Saint-Lucque sat fingering the pewter mug, and gazing out before her, at Gabrielle for a time and then at him. Her eyes circled with purple, her quivering lips, her wan and sunken cheeks, showed plainly the extent to which this unfortunate and plucky woman had suffered. But in spite of the pain which she still endured, in spite of intense fatigue, bruised body and aching head, it was a pæan of praise and benediction and reverence that her poor, weary eyes expressed as she looked on the man to whom she owed her life and that of her children.

When she rested in his arms throughout this mad gallopade through

the darkness and the frosty air, he had at one moment peeped down at her through the folds of his mantle and murmured just loudly enough for her to hear:

"Your children are safe in the care of my friends. You are safe with me. The Scarlet Pimpernel has kept his word."

She had snuggled up closer to him then, striving to make herself as small, as little burdensome to him as she could. She had never seen him yet, but from the moment that he dragged her out of the diligence, she felt somehow secure in his protecting arms.

Now in this squalid room, with its drab walls and its menacing inscriptions: *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité ou la Mort*, with the silence around only broken by the prosaic sound of the other woman's stertorous breathing. Eve looked up and tried to make out something of the mysterious personality of her rescuer. All she saw of him was the top of his head masked by coal-black hair which lay across his forehead like a funereal band. She saw a pair of bushy, black eyebrows, a long thin nose, a chin buried in a white linen stock. The tallow candle set on the table flickered in the draught. The sight which she got of that curious face was fitful and intermittent, but in her own mind she was quite sure that the black hair was a wig and that the nose was a false one, and the beetling brow a final touch to what was obviously a disguise. She gazed at him whilst an expression of puzzlement settled into her eyes. Puzzlement that turned into an appeal. Would she ever look into his face, his real face, she wondered. Would she ever behold the man as he really was, or would he ever remain for her an enigma, a mysterious entity, the hero of her dreams?

"Do you think you can bear it Madame?" he now asked. He had said something else before that, but she had not heard. So she said simply:

"I can bear anything that you impose upon me. What is it?"

"Three, perhaps four days in a rickety, jolting cart with intervals of rest in derelict cottages with a hard floor for a bed and straw for a pillow. Can you bear it?"

"You mock me, sir," she countered with a smile, "by asking me this. When do we start?"

"As soon as I have made arrangements with our rapacious landlord. In the meanwhile try and snatch a couple of hours' sleep. The woman is just outside. She will conduct you to your room."

He went to the door and called to the woman. When he turned back to Eve she was standing beside Gabrielle's inert form. She raised enquiring eyes to his.

"Will she be with us all the time?" she asked.

He gave a short, low laugh. Then he said with a curious sudden change to earnestness.

"No, Madame, whatever the fool or the heathen may say, God is just." He paused a moment, then added:

"We'll leave her here in the care of her master."

"Her master? You mean . . .?"

"I mean the master who has prompted all her actions in the past. He will, I doubt not, looked after her now and in the future."

Eve, wondering what he meant, went thoughtfully to her room.

Chapter XXX: THE SILENT POOL

When Gabrielle roused herself from her drugged sleep, a pale wintry sun was peeping in through the grimy window of the tap-room. It was broad daylight. Half a dozen men were sitting at the table, some of them were drinking wine, others eating some sort of savoury stew which they ladled out for themselves out of a metal tureen. Gabrielle opened her eyes and looked about her. She had no recollection whatever of where she was. She sniffed the air like a hungry dog, the odour of the stew had roused her and she was hungry. Her tongue felt parched and clung to the roof of her mouth.

An elderly woman was busy about the room serving the men who called for this, that and the other. They were all labourers or countrymen of some sort. Gabrielle looked at them with bleared eyes. When her gaze came to rest on the woman, she blinked and then called thickly for food and drink. No one took much notice of her. The woman brought her a mug and a bottle and set them on the table; she also brought a spoon and a metal plate and Gabrielle helped herself to the savoury stew out of the tureen.

"There's a room ready for you upstairs," the woman said to her, "It is paid for. You can go up if you like."

Gabrielle rose, she shook herself like a frowsy cur, for she felt cold and stiff. Wrapping the fur mantle closely round her she strode out of the room. A slatternly wench on the landing showed her up to the attic where a truckle-bed had been made up for her. Gabrielle threw herself down on the palliasse, closed her eyes and went to sleep.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, she was wide awake. It must have been late in the afternoon. The last of a wintry twilight shed its wan light through the cracked window of the squalid attic. Gabrielle rose.

She still felt cold and stiff and dizzy from the fatigue of that wild ride through the night. She wandered down the rickety stairs and peeped into the tap-room. The slatternly wench was there doing some perfunctory cleaning of the table and setting down mugs, plates and spoons for supper-guests. The landlord came stumping out from the back premises, his sabots clattering on the tiled floor.

"Your room has been paid for for a week," he said gruffly, as soon as he caught of Gabrielle. "Do you want to stay?"

She said: "Perhaps." And turning on her heel went in the direction of the front door.

"The other two went at crack of dawn," the man went on. "They left a small parcel for you. I'll go and get it."

He stumped back to the kitchen and returned after a moment or two with something soft wrapped in a dirty scrap of paper, held tightly in his hand. Gabrielle took the parcel from him. It was dark in the passage, so she went back to the tap-room, sat down at the table and drew the tallow candle nearer to her. She undid the parcel and spread the contents out on the table. The landlord peered inquisitively over her shoulder.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "what on earth are these things?"

"As you see, citizen," Gabrielle replied. And the landlord declared subsequently that never had he heard a woman's voice sound so strange and inhuman. It was, he said, more like the growling of a wounded beast than the voice of a woman. She fingered the things that were lying on the table: a wig of black hair, a papier-mâché nose, a pair of false eyebrows. She touched each thing with a hand that shook visibly. The man picked them up one by one and quickly dropped them again, as if they scorched his fingers.

"What devil's work is this?" he muttered.

"Devil's work, as you say, citizen landlord," she rejoined dully. "The work of the English spy who was here in this very room a few hours ago. Had you detained him, you would be richer now by a hundred louis. Think of that, citizen landlord. Good night. Pleasant dreams."

She gave a curious, mirthless laugh, as if she were demented, so the landlord said later on. She picked up one by one the miscellaneous contents of the parcel, strode out of the room and went out into the street.

The last of the twilight had faded out of the sky. The village street lay still and dark to right and left of the wayside inn, in the doorway of which stood the lonely woman. She glanced up and down the street, trying to distinguish some landmark or other in the gloom, or perhaps just making up her mind as to which way to turn for her solitary ramble in the night. The sound of running water came faintly to her ear from the left. She turned in that direction, ambling along aimlessly at first. Then as the sound grew more distinct, she quickened her step, walked more resolutely along. Always in the darkness which only revealed vaguely the edge of the road, and always in the direction whence came the sound of running water.

Thus she came to the bridge which spanned the torrent, the bridge over which she had ridden full tilt yesterday, with her bridle rein held in a grip that was like steel, whilst she herself was held in bondage and rendered helpless in the hands of a ruthless and relentless enemy.

"What is our first objective?" she had asked him then.

And he had replied: "The unknown."

And for her the unknown was a torrent that came scurrying and tumbling down over rocky projections. She stood quite still, looking down on the waters which she heard but could not see. On the right a mossy path ran along the edge of the stream. Gabrielle turned her wearied footsteps down that way. On she wandered with the sound of running water falling on her ear like the accusing voice of a relentless Nemesis.

"Thy revenge," it murmured, "where is it now? For it thou didst scheme and murder and commit every crime that disgraced thy womanhood. Where is it now? Those whom thy hatred has pursued are safe and happy out of thy reach. Where art thou at this hour? Whither doest thou go?"

And idly wandering Gabrielle Damiens came to the pool wherein the turbulent eddy found its rest. Here the swirl of the falling waters caused innumerable bubbles to form and to burst again. Beyond the swirl, the pool seemed to be placid and very still. Gabrielle came to a halt, and looking down she tried to gauge the depth of the water, but the night was like ebony and the over-hanging trees threw a further veil of darkness over the silent pool. She stood quite still now, and around her everything was still save for the occasional crackling of dry twigs overhead or the movement of tiny furtive feet in the undergrowth. She still had in her hands that collection of curious objects--the wig, the false eyebrows, the nose made of papier-mâché such as clowns wear at the circus. She fingered them lightly for a while, then laid them down on a flat piece of projecting stone. There was no wind and the things remained all night where she had put them. They were found in the early morning by a couple of labourers on their way to work. They wondered what on earth these things could possibly be, and how they got there. No one ever knew.

Throughout the length and breadth of the Province of Artois no one

ever knew what had become of Mam'zelle Guillotine. She had come no one knew whence. She went no one knew whither. Six months later the Reign of Terror in France came to an end. The guillotine in the province was no longer kept busy and an honest butcher of Mézières did all that there was to do.

Chapter XXXI: AN INTERLUDE

Marguerite Blakeney was in her husband's arms. She was looking pale and wan and her wonderful, luminous eyes still bore the traces of all the tears which she had shed. She had been the first to arrive in Dover at the Fisherman's Rest, in the company of Percy's devoted followers and the two little children for whose sake he had thrown his precious life in the balance of Fate, courting death with joy in his heart and a smile on his lips. For close on a month Marguerite in her weary travelling to Belgium and through Belgium on to England, had known nothing of her adored husband, save that at every hour of the day and night that heroic life was in deadly peril.

Now when his arms were once more round her and she looked into his merry deep-set eyes, the joy of reunion was almost more than she could bear. She tried to make him tell her something of what he had endured and gone through for the sake of an unfortunate woman and two innocent children now happily reunited to husband, father and brother.

"Luck was on my side, light of my life," was all he said, "because you were so near me all the time. And luck was backed by the courage and understanding of brave men like Ffoulkes and Tony, Glynde and St. Dennys, and your adorable self."

"But, Percy," she insisted, "if luck had failed you. If . . ."

"Luck, my beloved," he said, and once more that wonderful look of the born adventurer, the gambler, the fearless sportsman, the look which she dreaded to see more than any other, came back into his eyes; "luck is just an old woman, m'dear, bald save for one hair on her head. It is up to her courtier to seize her by that one hair when perchance she flits by past him at arm's length. But, by George," he

concluded with his infectious, merry laugh, "having got hold of that hair, it is up to him not to let it go. And that is all I did, my adored, I did not let go."

THE END

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