SCARAMOUCHE

RAFAEL SABATINI

M. Thierry.

SCARAMOUCHE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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SCARAMOUCHE

By RAFAEL SABATINI

TWELFTH EDITION

LONDON: HUTCHINSON & CO.
PATERNOSTER ROW :: :: ::

To Frank
With Love
Helen—

Hommes sensibles qui pleurez sur les maux de la Révolution versez donc aussi quelques larmes sur les maux qui l'ont amenée.

—MICHELET.

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BOOK I

THE ROBE

SCARAMOUCHE

CHAPTER I

THE REPUBLICAN

HE was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad. And that was all his patrimony. His very paternity was obscure, although the village of Gavrillac had long since dispelled the cloud of mystery that hung about it. Those simple Brittany folk were not so simple as to be deceived by a pretended relationship which did not even possess the virtue of originality. When a nobleman, for no apparent reason, announces himself the godfather of an infant fetched no man knew whence, and thereafter cares for the lad's rearing and education, the most unsophisticated of country folk perfectly understand the situation. And so the good people of Gavrillac permitted themselves no illusions on the score of the real relationship between André-Louis Moreau—as the lad had been named—and Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillac, who dwelt in the big grey house that dominated from its eminence the village clustering below.

André-Louis had learnt his letters at the village school, lodged the while with old Rabouillet, the attorney, who in the capacity of fiscal intendant looked after the affairs of M. de Kercadiou. Thereafter, at the age of fifteen, he had been packed off to Paris, to the Lycée of Louis Le Grand, to study law, which he was now returned to practise in conjunction with Rabouillet. All this at the charges of his godfather, M. de Kercadiou, who by placing him once more under the tutelage of Rabouillet would seem thereby quite clearly to be making provision for his future.

André-Louis, on his side, had made the most of his opportunities. You behold him at the age of four-and-twenty stuffed with learning enough to produce an intellectual indigestion in an ordinary mind. Out of his zestful study of Man, from Thucydides to the Encyclopædists, from Seneca

to Rousseau, he had confirmed into an unassailable conviction his earliest conscious impressions of the general insanity of his own species. Nor can I discover that anything in his eventful life ever afterwards caused him to waver in that opinion.

In body he was a slight wisp of a fellow, scarcely above middle height, with a lean, astute countenance, prominent of nose and cheek-bones, and with lank, black hair that reached almost to his shoulders. His mouth was long, thin-lipped and humorous. He was only just redeemed from ugliness by the splendour of a pair of ever-questing, luminous eyes, so dark as to be almost black. Of the whimsical quality of his mind and his rare gift of graceful expression, his writings—unfortunately but too scanty—and particularly his Confessions, afford us very ample evidence. Of his gift of oratory he was hardly conscious yet, although he had already achieved a certain fame for it in the literary Chamber of Rennes—one of those clubs by now ubiquitous in the land, in which the intellectual youth of France forgathered to study and discuss the new philosophies that were permeating social life. But the fame he had acquired there was hardly enviable. He was too impish, too caustic, too much disposed—so thought his colleagues—to ridicule their sublime theories for the regeneration of mankind. Himself he protested that he merely held up to them the mirror of truth, and that it was not his fault if when reflected there they looked ridiculous.

All that he achieved by this, as you conceive, was to exasperate; and to such an extent, that his expulsion from the Literary Chamber was under serious consideration, and seemed at last to be rendered inevitable by the fact that the Lord of Gavrillac had appointed him his delegate in the States of Brittany. It was felt almost unanimously that there was no room for the official representative of a nobleman, for a man of such avowed reactionary principles, in a society devoted to social reform.

This was no time for half-measures. The light of hope which had begun to glow upon the horizon when M. Necker had at last persuaded the King to convoke the States General—a thing that had not happened for nearly two hundred years—had lately been overcast by the insolence of the nobility and clergy, who were determined that these States General should be so composed as to safeguard their own privileges.

The prosperous, industrious maritime city of Nantes—the first to express the feeling that was now rapidly spreading throughout the land—had issued in the first days of that

November of 1788 a manifesto, which it had constrained the municipality to place before the King. It was not intended that the States of Brittany about to sit in Rennes should be, as in the past, a mere instrument of the nobility and clergy, and that the Third Estate should have no voice or power save that of voting subsidies as bidden. To make an end of the bitter anomaly which placed the whole of the power in the hands of those who paid no taxes, the manifesto demanded that the Third Estate should be represented by one deputy for every ten thousand inhabitants; that this deputy should be drawn strictly from the class he was to represent, and that he should not be a nobleman, or the delegate, seneschal, attorney or intendant of a nobleman; that the representatives of the Third Estate should be of a number equal to that of the other two estates, and that upon all matters the votes should be by heads, and not, as hitherto, by orders.

This manifesto, containing some further but secondary demands, gave elegant triflers in the Œil de Bœuf at Versailles a disconcerting glimpse of the things to which M. Necker was venturing to open the door. If their will had prevailed, the answer to that manifesto is not difficult to surmise. But M. Necker was the pilot endeavouring to make harbour with the foundering ship of State. Upon his advice the King's Majesty had referred the matter back to the States of Brittany for settlement, but with the significant promise to intervene should the privileged orders—the nobility and the clergy—resist the popular demands. And the privileged orders, rushing blindly upon destruction, had of course resisted, whereupon the King had adjourned the States.

But now, if you please, the privileged orders refused to be adjourned, refused to bow to the authority of the sovereign. They would sit in despite of it, ignoring it, and they would proceed with the elections in their own fashion, and thus make sure of safeguarding their privileges and continuing their rapine.

Coming on a November morning to Gavrillac laden with the news of this, Philippe de Vilmorin, a divinity student from the seminary of Rennes and a popular member of the Literary Chamber, found in that sleepy Bréton village matter to quicken his already lively indignation. A peasant of Gavrillac, named Mabey, had been shot dead that morning in the woods of Meupont, across the river, by a gamekeeper of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. The unfortunate fellow had been caught in the act of taking a pheasant from a snare, and the gamekeeper had acted under explicit orders from his master.

Infuriated by an act of tyranny so absolute and merciless, M. de Vilmorin proposed to lay the matter before M. de Kercadiou. Mabey was a vassal of Gavrillac, and Vilmorin hoped to move the Lord of Gavrillac to demand at least some measure of reparation for the widow and the three orphans which that brutal deed had made.

But because André-Louis was Philippe's dearest friend—indeed, his almost brother—the young seminarist sought him out in the first instance. He found him at breakfast alone in the long, low-ceilinged, white-panelled dining-room at Rabouillet's—the only home that André-Louis had ever known—and after embracing him, deafened him with his denunciation of M. de La Tour d'Azyr.

"I have heard of it already," said André-Louis.

"You say it as if the thing occasioned no surprise," his friend reproached him.

"Nothing beastly can surprise me when done by a beast. And La Tour d'Azyr is a beast, as all the world knows. The more fool Mabey for stealing his pheasants. He should have stolen somebody else's."

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

"What more is there to say? I've a practical mind, I hope."

"What more there is to say I propose to say to your godfather, M. de Kercadiou. I shall appeal to him for justice."

"Against M. de La Tour d'Azyr?" André-Louis raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?"

"My dear ingenuous Philippe, dog doesn't eat dog."

"You are unjust to your godfather. He is a humane man."

"Oh, as humane as you please. But this isn't a question of humanity, it's a question of game-laws."

M. de Vilmorin tossed his long arms to Heaven in disgust. He was a tall, slender young gentleman, a year or two younger than André-Louis. He was very soberly dressed in black, as became a seminarist, with white bands at wrists and throat and silver buckles to his shoes. His neatly clubbed brown hair was innocent of powder.

"You talk like a lawyer," he exploded.

"Naturally. But don't waste anger on me on that account. Tell me what you want me to do?"

"I want you to come to M. de Kercadiou with me, and to use your influence to obtain justice. I suppose I am asking too much?"

"My dear Philippe, I exist to serve you. I warn you that

it is a futile quest; but give me leave to finish my breakfast, and I am at your orders."

M. de Vilmorin dropped into a winged arm-chair by the well-swept hearth, on which a piled-up fire of pine-logs was burning cheerily. And whilst he waited he gave his friend the latest news of the events in Rennes. Young, ardent, enthusiastic and inspired by Utopian ideals, he passionately denounced the rebellious attitude of the privileged.

André-Louis, already fully aware of the trend of feeling in the ranks of an order in whose deliberations he took part as the representative of a nobleman, was not at all surprised by what he heard. M. de Vilmorin found it exasperating that his friend should apparently decline to share his own indignation.

"Don't you see what it means?" he cried. "The nobles, by disobeying the King, are striking at the very foundations of the throne. Don't they perceive that their very existence depends upon it; that if the throne falls over, it is they who stand nearest to it who will be crushed? Don't they see that?'

"Evidently not. They are just governing classes, and I never heard of governing classes that had eyes for anything but their own profit."

"That is our grievance. That is what we are going to change."

"You are going to abolish governing classes? An interesting experiment. I believe it was the original plan of creation, and it might have succeeded but for Cain."

"What we are going to do," said M. de Vilmorin, curbing his exasperation, "is to transfer the government to other hands."

"And you think that will make a difference?"

"I know it will."

"Ah! I take it that being now in minor orders, you already possess the confidence of the Almighty. He will have confided to you His intention of changing the pattern of mankind."

M. de Vilmorin's fine ascetic face grew overcast.

"You are profane, André," he reproved his friend.

"I assure you that I am quite serious. To do what you imply would require nothing short of divine intervention. You must change man, not systems. Can you and our vapouring friends of the Literary Chamber of Rennes, or any other learned society of France, devise a system of government that has never yet been tried? Surely not. And can they say of any system tried that it proved other than a failure in the end?

My dear Philippe, the future is to be read with certainty only in the past. Ab actu ad posse valet consecutio. Man never changes. He is always greedy, always acquisitive, always vile. I am speaking of Man in the bulk."

"Do you pretend that it is impossible to ameliorate the lot of the people?" M. de Vilmorin challenged him.

"When you say the people, you mean, of course, the populace. Will you abolish it? That is the only way to ameliorate its lot, for as long as it remains populace its lot will be damnation.

"You argue, of course, for the side that employs you. That is natural, I suppose." M. de Vilmorin spoke between sorrow and indignation.

"On the contrary, I seek to argue with absolute detachment. Let us test these ideas of yours. To what form of government do you aspire? A republic, it is to be inferred from what you have said. Well, you have it already. France in reality is a republic to-day."

Philippe stared at him. "You are being paradoxical, I think. What of the King?"

"The King? All the world knows there has been no King in France since Louis XIV. There is an obese gentleman at Versailles, who wears the crown, but the very news you bring shows for how little he really counts. It is the nobles and clergy who sit in the high places, with the people of France harnessed under their feet, who are the real rulers. That is why I say that France is a republic; she is a republic built on the best pattern—the Roman pattern. Then, as now, there were great patrician families in luxury, preserving for themselves power and wealth, and what else is accounted worth possessing; and there was the populace crushed and groaning, sweating, bleeding, starving and perishing in the Roman kennels. That was a republic; the mightiest we have seen."

Philippe strove with his impatience. "At least you will admit—you have, in fact, admitted it—that we could not be worse governed than we are?"

"That is not the point. The point is, should we be better governed if we replaced the present ruling class by another? Without some guarantee of that, I should be the last to lift a finger to effect a change. And what guarantee can you give? What is the class that aims at government? I will tell you. The bourgeoisie."

"What?"

"That startles you, eh? Truth is so often disconcerting. You hadn't thought of it? Well, think of it now. Look well into this Nantes manifesto. Who are the authors of it?"

"I can tell you who it was constrained the municipality of Nantes to send it to the King. Some ten thousand workmen—shipwrights, weavers, labourers and artisans of every kind."

"Stimulated to it, driven to it, by their employers, the wealthy traders and shipowners of that city," André-Louis replied. "I have a habit of observing things at close quarters, which is why our colleagues of the Literary Chamber dislike me so cordially in debate. Where I delve they but skim. Behind those labourers and artisans of Nantes, counselling them, urging on these poor, stupid, ignorant toilers to shed their blood in pursuit of the will o' the wisp of freedom, are the sail-makers, the spinners, the ship-owners and the slave-traders. The slave-traders! The men who live and grow rich by a traffic in human flesh and blood in the colonies are conducting at home a campaign in the sacred name of liberty? Don't you see that the whole movement is a movement of hucksters and traders and peddling vassals swollen by wealth into envy of the power that lies in birth alone? The money-changers in Paris who hold the bonds in the national debt, seeing the parlous financial condition of the State, tremble at the thought that it may lie in the power of a single man to cancel the debt by bankruptcy. To secure themselves, they are burrowing underground to overthrow a State and build upon its ruins a new one in which they shall be the masters. And to accomplish this they inflame the people. Already in Dauphiny we have seen blood run like water—the blood of the populace, always the blood of the populace. Now in Brittany we may see the like. And if in the end the new ideas prevail? If the seigneurial rule is overthrown, what then? You will have exchanged an aristocracy for a plutocracy. Is that worth while? Do you think that under money-changers and slave-traders, and men who have waxed rich in other ways by the ignoble arts of buying and selling, the lot of the people will be any better than under their priests and nobles? Has it ever occurred to you, Philippe, what it is that makes the rule of the nobles so intolerable? Acquisitiveness. Acquisitiveness is the curse of mankind. And shall you expect less acquisitiveness in men who have built themselves up by acquisitiveness? Oh, I am ready to admit that the present government is execrable, unjust, tyrannical—what you will—but I beg you to look ahead, and to see that the government for which it is aimed at exchanging it may be infinitely worse."

Philippe sat thoughtful a moment. Then he returned to the attack.

"You do not speak of the abuses, the horrible, intolerable abuses of power under which we labour at present."

"Where there is power there will always be the abuse of it."

"Not if the tenure of power is dependent upon its equitable administration."

"The tenure of power is power. We cannot dictate to those who hold it."

"The people can—the people in its might."

"Again I ask you, when you say the people, do you mean the populace? You do. What power can the populace wield? It can run wild. It can burn and slay for a time. But enduring power it cannot wield, because power demands qualities which the populace does not possess, or it would not be populace. The inevitable, tragic corollary of civilization is populace. For the rest, abuses can be corrected by equity; and equity, if it is not found in the enlightened, is not to be found at all. M. Necker is to set about correcting abuses, and limiting privileges. That is decided. To that end the States General are to assemble."

"And a promising beginning we have made in Brittany, as Heaven hears me," cried Philippe.

"Pooh! That is nothing. Naturally the nobles will not yield without a struggle. It is a futile and ridiculous struggle —but then . . . it is human nature, I suppose, to be futile and ridiculous."

M. de Vilmorin became witheringly sarcastic. "Probably you will also qualify the shooting of Mabey as futile and ridiculous? I should even be prepared to hear you argue in defence of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr that his gamekeeper was merciful in shooting Mabey, since the alternative would have been a life-sentence to the galleys."

André-Louis drank the remainder of his chocolate; set down his cup, and pushed back his chair, his breakfast done.

"I confess that I have not your big charity, my dear Philippe. I am touched by Mabey's fate. But, having conquered the shock of this news to my emotions, I do not forget that, after all, Mabey was thieving when he met his death."

M. de Vilmorin heaved himself up in his indignation.

"That is the point of view to be expected in one who is the assistant fiscal intendant of a nobleman, and the delegate of a nobleman to the States of Brittany."

"Philippe, is that just? You are angry with me!" he cried, in real solicitude.

"I am hurt," Vilmorin admitted. "I am deeply hurt by

your attitude. And I am not alone in resenting your reactionary tendencies. Do you know that the Literary Chamber is seriously considering your expulsion?"

André-Louis shrugged. "That neither surprises nor troubles me."

M. de Vilmorin swept on, passionately: "Sometimes I think that you have no heart. With you it is always the law, never equity. It occurs to me, André, that I was mistaken in coming to you. You are not likely to be of assistance to me in my interview with M. de Kercadiou." He took up his hat, clearly with the intention of departing. André-Louis sprang up and caught him by the arm.

"I vow," said he, "that this is the last time ever I shall consent to talk law or politics with you, Philippe. I love you too well to quarrel with you over other men's affairs."

"But I make them my own," Philippe insisted, vehemently.

"Of course you do, and I love you for it. It is right that you should. You are to be a priest; and everybody's business is a priest's business. Whereas I am a lawyer—the fiscal intendant of a nobleman, as you say—and a lawyer's business is the business of his client. That is the difference between us. Nevertheless, you are not going to shake me off."

"But I tell you frankly, now that I come to think of it, that I should prefer you did not see M. de Kercadiou with me. Your duty to your client cannot be a help to me." His wrath had passed; but his determination remained firm, based upon the reason he gave.

"Very well," said André-Louis. "It shall be as you please. But nothing shall prevent me at least from walking with you as far as the château, and waiting for you while you make your appeal to M. de Kercadiou."

And so they left the house good friends, for the sweetness of M. de Vilmorin's nature did not admit of rancour, and together they took their way up the steep main street of Gavrillac.

CHAPTER II

THE ARISTOCRAT

THE sleepy village of Gavrillac, a half-league removed from the main road to Rennes, and therefore undisturbed by the world's traffic, lay in a curve of the River Meu, at the base, and straggling half-way up the slope of the shallow hill that was crowned by the squat manor. By the time Gavrillac had paid tribute to its seigneur—partly in money and partly in service—tithes to the Church and imposts to the King, it was hard put to it to keep body and soul together with what remained. Yet hard as conditions were in Gavrillac, they were not so hard as in many other parts of France; not half so hard, for instance, as with the wretched feudatories of the great lord of La Tour d'Azyr, whose vast possessions were at one point separated from this little village by the waters of the Meu.

The Château de Gavrillac owed such seigneurial airs as might be claimed for it to its dominant position above the village rather than to any feature of its own. Built of granite, like all the rest of Gavrillac, though mellowed by some three centuries of existence, it was a squat, flat-fronted edifice of two stories, each lighted by four windows with external wooded shutters, and flanked at either end by two square towers or pavilions under extinguisher roofs. Standing well back in a garden, denuded now, but very pleasant in summer, and immediately fronted by a fine sweep of balustrated terrace, it looked what indeed it was, and always had been, the residence of unpretentious folk who found more interest in husbandry than in adventure.

Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillac—Seigneur de Gavrillac was all the vague title that he bore, as his forefathers had borne before him, derived no man knew whence or how—confirmed the impression that his house conveyed. Rude as the granite itself, he had never sought the experience of courts, had not even taken service in the armies of his King. He left it to his younger brother, Étienne, to represent the family in those exalted spheres. His own interests from earliest years had been centred in his woods and pastures. He hunted, and he cultivated his acres, and superficially he appeared to be

little better than any of his rustic *métayers*. He kept no state, or at least no state commensurate with his position or with the tastes of his niece, Aline de Kercadiou. Aline, having spent some two years in the court atmosphere of Versailles under the ægis of her uncle Étienne, had ideas very different from those of her uncle Quintin of what was befitting seigneurial dignity. But though this only child of a third Kercadiou had exercised, ever since she was left an orphan at the early age of four, a tyrannical rule over the Lord of Gavrillac, who had been father and mother to her, she had never yet succeeded in beating down his stubbornness on that score.

She did not yet despair—persistence being a dominant note in her character—although she had been assiduously and fruitlessly at work ever since her return from the great world of Versailles, some three months ago.

She was walking on the terrace when André-Louis and M. de Vilmorin arrived. Her slight body was wrapped against the chill air in a white pelisse; her head was encased in a close-fitting bonnet, edged with white fur. It was caught tight in a knot of pale-blue ribbon on the right of her chin; on the left a long ringlet of corn-coloured hair had been permitted to escape. The keen air had whipped so much of her cheeks as was presented to it, and seemed to have added a sparkle to eyes that were of darkest blue.

André-Louis and M. de Vilmorin had been known to her from infancy. The three had been playmates once, and André-Louis—in view of his spiritual relationship with her uncle—she called her cousin. The cousinly relations had persisted between these two long after Philippe de Vilmorin had outgrown the earlier intimacy, and had become to her Monsieur de Vilmorin.

She waved her hand to them in greeting as they advanced, and stood—an entrancing picture, and fully conscious of it—to await them at the end of the terrace nearest the short avenue by which they approached.

"If you come to see monsieur my uncle, you come inopportunely, messieurs," she told them, a certain feverishness in her air. "He is closely—oh, so very closely—engaged."

"We will wait, mademoiselle," said M. de Vilmorin, bowing gallantly over the hand she extended to him. "Indeed, who would hasten to the uncle that may tarry a moment with the niece?"

"Monsieur l'Abbé," she teased him, "when you are in orders I shall take you for my confessor. You have so ready and sympathetic an understanding."

"But no curiosity," said André-Louis. "You haven't thought of that."

"I wonder what you mean, cousin André?"

"Well you may," laughed Philippe. "For no one ever knows." And then, his glance straying across the terrace settled upon a carriage that was drawn up before the door of the château. It was a vehicle such as was often to be seen in the streets of a great city, but rarely in the country: a beautifully-sprung two-horse cabriolet of walnut, with a varnish upon it like a sheet of glass and little pastoral scenes exquisitely painted on the panels of the door. It was built to carry two persons, with a box in front for the coachman and a stand behind for the footman. This stand was now empty, but the footman paced before the door, and as he emerged from behind the vehicle into the range of M. de Vilmorin's vision, he displayed the resplendent blue and gold livery of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr.

"Why!" he exclaimed. "Is it M. de La Tour d'Azyr who is with your uncle?"

"It is, monsieur," said she, a world of mystery in voice and eyes, of which M. de Vilmorin observed nothing.

"Ah, pardon!" He bowed low, hat in hand. "Serviteur, mademoiselle," and he turned to depart towards the house.

"Shall I come with you, Philippe?" André-Louis called after him.

"It would be ungallant to assume that you would prefer it," said M. de Vilmorin, with a glance at Mademoiselle. "Nor do I think it would serve. If you will wait . . ."

M. de Vilmorin strode off. Mademoiselle, after a moment's blank pause, laughed ripplingly. "Now where is he going in such a hurry?"

"To see M. de La Tour d'Azyr as well as your uncle, I should say."

"But he cannot. They cannot see him. Didn't I say that they are very closely engaged? You don't ask me why, André." There was an arch mysteriousness about her, a latent something that may have been elation or amusement, or perhaps both. André-Louis could not determine it.

"Since obviously you are all eagerness to tell, why should I ask?" quoth he.

"If you are caustic I shall not tell you even if you ask. Oh yes, I will. It will teach you to treat me with the respect that is my due."

"I hope I shall never fail in that."

"Less than ever when you learn that I am very closely

concerned in the visit of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. I am the object of this visit." And she looked at him with sparkling eyes and lips parted in laughter.

"The rest, you would seem to imply, is obvious. But I am a dolt, if you please, for it is not obvious to me."

"Why, stupid, he comes to ask my hand in marriage."

"Good God!" said André-Louis, and stared at her, chapfallen.

She drew back from him a little with a frown and an upward tilt of her chin. "It surprises you?"

"It disgusts me," said he, bluntly. "In fact, I don't believe it. You are amusing yourself with me."

For a moment she put aside her visible annoyance to remove his doubts. "I am quite serious, monsieur. There came a formal letter to my uncle this morning from M. de La Tour d'Azyr, announcing the visit and its object. I will not say that it did not surprise us a little. . . ."

"Oh, I see," cried André-Louis, in relief. "I understand. For a moment I had almost feared——" He broke off, looked at her, and shrugged.

"Why do you stop? You had almost feared that Versailles had been wasted upon me? That I should permit the courtship of me to be conducted like that of any village wench? It was stupid of you. I am being sought in proper form, at my uncle's hands."

"Is his consent, then, all that matters, according to Versailles?"

"What else?"

"There is your own."

She laughed. "I am a dutiful niece . . . when it suits me."

"And will it suit you to be dutiful if your uncle accepts this monstrous proposal?"

"Monstrous!" She bridled. "And why monstrous, if you please?"

"For a score of reasons," he answered irritably.

"Give me one," she challenged him.

"He is twice your age."

"Hardly so much," said she.

"He is forty-five at least."

"But he looks no more than thirty. He is very handsome—so much you will admit; nor will you deny that he is very wealthy and very powerful; the greatest nobleman in Brittany. He will make me a great lady."

"God made you that, Aline."

"Come, that's better. Sometimes you can be almost polite." And she moved along the terrace, André-Louis pacing beside her.

"I can be more than that to show reason why you should not let this beast befoul the beautiful thing that God has made."

She frowned, and her lips tightened. "You are speaking of my future husband," she reproved him.

His lips tightened too; his pale face grew paler.

"And is it so? It is settled, then? Your uncle is to agree? You are to be sold thus, lovelessly, into bondage to a man you do not know. I had dreamed of better things for you, Aline."

"Better than to be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr?"

He made a gesture of exasperation. "Are men and women nothing more than names? Do the souls of them count for nothing? Is there no joy in life, no happiness, that wealth and pleasure and empty, high-sounding titles are to be its only aims? I had set you high—so high, Aline—a thing scarce earthly. There is joy in your heart, intelligence in your mind, and, as I thought, the vision that pierces husks and shams to claim the core of reality for its own. Yet you will surrender all for a parcel of make-believe. You will sell your soul and your body to be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr."

"You are indelicate," said she, and though she frowned her eyes laughed. "And you go headlong to conclusions. My uncle will not consent to more than to allow my consent to be sought. We understand each other, my uncle and I. I am not to be bartered like a turnip."

He stood still, facing her, his eyes aglow, a flush creeping into his pale cheeks.

"You have been torturing me to amuse yourself," he cried. "Ah well, I forgive you out of my relief."

"Again you go too fast, Cousin André. I have permitted my uncle to consent that M. le Marquis shall make his court to me. I like the look of the gentleman. I am flattered by his preference when I consider his eminence. It is an eminence that I may find it desirable to share. M. le Marquis does not look as if he were a dullard. It should be interesting to be wooed by him. It may be more interesting still to marry him, and I think, when all is considered, that I shall probably—very probably—decide to do so."

He looked at her, looked at the sweet, challenging loveliness of that childlike face so tightly framed in the oval of white fur, and all the life seemed to go out of his own countenance.

"God help you, Aline!" he groaned.

She stamped her foot. He was really very exasperating, and something presumptuous too, she thought.

"You are insolent, monsieur."

"It is never insolent to pray, Aline. And I did no more than pray, as I shall continue to do. You'll need my prayers, I think."

"You are insufferable!" She was growing angry, as he saw by the deepening frown, the heightened colour.

"That is because I suffer. Oh, Aline, little cousin, think well of what you do; think well of the realities you will be bartering for these shams—the realities that you will never know, because these cursed shams will block your way to them. When M. de La Tour d'Azyr comes to make his court, study him well; consult your fine instincts; leave your own noble nature free to judge this animal by its intuitions. Consider that . . ."

"I consider, monsieur, that you presume upon the kindness I have always shown you. You abuse the position of toleration in which you stand. Who are you? What are you, that you should have the insolence to take this tone with me?"

He bowed, instantly his cold, detached self again, and resumed the mockery that was his natural habit.

"My congratulations, mademoiselle, upon the readiness with which you begin to adapt yourself to the great rôle you are to play."

"Do you adapt yourself also, monsieur," she retorted angrily, and turned her shoulder to him.

"To be as the dust beneath the haughty feet of Madame la Marquise? I hope I shall know my place in future."

The phrase arrested her. She turned to him again, and he perceived that her eyes were shining now suspiciously. In an instant the mockery in him was quenched in contrition.

"Lord, what a beast I am, Aline!" he cried, as he advanced. "Forgive me, if you can."

Almost had she turned to sue forgiveness from him. But his contrition removed the need.

"I'll try," said she, "provided that you undertake not to offend again."

"But I shall," said he. "I am like that. I will fight to save you, from yourself if need be, whether you forgive me or not."

They were standing so, confronting each other a little breathlessly, a little defiantly, when the others issued from the porch.

First came the Marquis of La Tour d'Azyr, Count of Solz,

Knight of the Orders of the Holy Ghost and Saint Louis, and Brigadier in the armies of the King. He was a tall, graceful man, upright and soldierly of carriage, with his head disdainfully set upon his shoulders. He was magnificently dressed in a full skirted coat of mulberry velvet that was laced with gold. His waistcoat, of velvet too, was of a golden apricot colour; his breeches and stockings were of black silk, and his lacquered, red-heeled shoes were buckled in diamonds. His powdered hair was tied behind in a broad ribbon of watered silk; he carried a little three-cornered hat under his arm, and a gold-hilted slender dress-sword hung at his side.

Considering him now in complete detachment, observing the magnificence of him, the elegance of his movements, the great air, blending in so extraordinary a manner disdain and graciousness, André-Louis trembled for Aline. Here was a practised, irresistible wooer, whose *bonnes fortunes* were become a by-word, a man who had hitherto been the despair of dowagers with marriageable daughters, and the desolation of husbands with attractive wives.

He was immediately followed by M. de Kercadiou, in completest contrast. On legs of the shortest, the Lord of Gavrillac carried a body that at forty-five was beginning to incline to corpulence and an enormous head containing an indifferent allotment of intelligence. His countenance was pink and blotchy, liberally branded by the small-pox which had almost extinguished him in youth. In dress he was careless to the point of untidiness, and to this and the fact that he had never married—disregarding the first duty of a gentleman to provide himself with an heir—he owed the character of misogynist attributed to him by the countryside.

After M. de Kercadiou came M. de Vilmorin, very pale and self-contained, with tight lips and an overcast brow.

To meet them, there stepped from the carriage a very elegant young gentleman, the Chevalier de Chabrillanne, M. de La Tour d'Azyr's cousin, who whilst awaiting his return had watched with considerable interest—his own presence unsuspected—the perambulations of André-Louis and Mademoiselle.

Perceiving Aline, Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr detached himself from the others, and lengthening his stride came straight across the terrace to her.

To André-Louis the Marquis inclined his head with that mixture of courtliness and condescension which he used. Socially, the young lawyer stood in a curious position. By

virtue of the theory of his birth, he ranked neither as noble nor as simple, but stood somewhere between the two classes, and whilst claimed by neither he was used familiarly by both. Coldly now he returned M. de La Tour d'Azyr's greeting, and discreetly removed himself to go and join his friend.

The Marquis took the hand that Mademoiselle extended to him, and bowing over it, bore it to his lips.

"Mademoiselle," he said, looking into the blue depths of her eyes, that met his gaze smiling and untroubled, "monsieur your uncle does me the honour to permit that I pay my homage to you. Will you, mademoiselle, do me the honour to receive me when I come to-morrow? I shall have something of great importance for your ear."

"Of importance, Monsieur le Marquis? You almost frighten me." But there was no fear on the serene little face in its furred hood. It was not for nothing that she had graduated in the Versailles school of artificialities.

"That," said he, "is very far from my design."

"But of importance to yourself, monsieur, or to me?"

"To us both, I hope," he answered her, a world of meaning in his fine, ardent eyes.

"You whet my curiosity, monsieur; and, of course, I am a dutiful niece. It follows that I shall be honoured to receive you."

"Not honoured, mademoiselle; you will confer the honour. To-morrow at this hour, then, I shall have the felicity to wait upon you."

He bowed again; and again he bore her fingers to his lips, what time she curtsied. Thereupon, with no more than this formal breaking of the ice, they parted.

She was a little breathless now, a little dazzled by the beauty of the man, his princely air, and the confidence of power he seemed to radiate. Involuntarily, almost, she contrasted him with his critic—the lean and impudent André-Louis in his plain brown coat and steel-buckled shoes—and she felt guilty of an unpardonable offence in having permitted even one word of that presumptuous criticism. To-morrow M. le Marquis would come to offer her a great position, a great rank. And already she had derogated from the increase of dignity accruing to her from his very intention to translate her to so great an eminence. Not again would she suffer it; not again would she be so weak and childish as to permit André-Louis to utter his ribald comments upon a man by comparison with whom he was no better than a lackey.

Thus argued vanity and ambition with her better self; and to her vast annoyance her better self would not admit entire conviction.

Meanwhile, M. de La Tour d'Azyr was climbing into his carriage. He had spoken a word of farewell to M. de Kercadiou, and he had also had a word for M. de Vilmorin, in reply to which M. de Vilmorin had bowed in assenting silence.

The carriage rolled away, the powdered footman in blue and gold very stiff behind it, M. de La Tour d'Azyr bowing to Mademoiselle, who waved to him in answer.

Then M. de Vilmorin put his arm through that of André-Louis, and said to him :

" Come, André."

" But you'll stay to dine, both of you," cried the hospitable Lord of Gavrillac. " We'll drink a certain toast," he added, winking an eye that strayed towards Mademoiselle, who was approaching. He had no subtleties, good soul that he was.

M. de Vilmorin deplored an appointment that prevented him doing himself the honour. He was very stiff and formal.

" And you, André ? "

" I ? Oh, I share the appointment, godfather," he lied, " and I have a superstition against toasts." He had no wish to remain. He was angry with Aline for her smiling reception of M. de La Tour d'Azyr, and the sordid bargain he saw her set on making. He was suffering from the loss of an illusion.

CHAPTER III

THE ELOQUENCE OF M. DE VILMORIN

AS they walked down the hill together, it was now M. de Vilmorin who was silent and preoccupied, André-Louis who was talkative. He had chosen Woman as a subject for his present discourse. He claimed—quite unjustifiably—to have discovered Woman that morning; and the things he had to say of the sex were unflattering, and occasionally almost gross. M. de Vilmorin, having ascertained the subject, did not listen. Singular though it may seem in a young French abbé of his day, M. de Vilmorin was not interested in Woman. Poor Philippe was in several ways exceptional.

Opposite the Breton Armé—the inn and posting-house at the entrance of the village of Gavrillac—M. de Vilmorin interrupted his companion just as he was soaring to the dizziest heights of caustic invective, and André-Louis, restored thereby to actualities, observed the carriage of M. de La Tour d'Azyr standing before the door of the hostelry.

"I don't believe you've been listening to me," said he.

"Had you been less interested in what you were saying, you might have observed it sooner and spared your breath. The fact is, you disappoint me, André. You seem to have forgotten what we went for. I have an appointment here with M. le Marquis. He desires to hear me further in the matter. Up there at Gavrillac I could accomplish nothing. The time was ill-chosen, as it happened. But I have hopes of M. le Marquis."

"Hopes of what?"

"That he will make what reparation lies in his power. Provide for the widow and the orphans. Why else should he desire to hear me further?"

"Unusual condescension," said André-Louis, and quoted: "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*"

"Why?" asked Philippe.

"Let us go and discover—unless you consider that I shall be in the way."

Into a room on the right, rendered private to M. le Marquis

for so long as he should elect to honour it, the young men were ushered by the host. A fire of logs was burning brightly at the room's far end, and by this sat now M. de La Tour d'Azyr and his cousin, the Chevalier de Chabrillanne. Both rose as M. de Vilmorin came in. André-Louis, following, paused to close the door.

"You oblige me by your prompt courtesy, M. de Vilmorin," said the Marquis, but in a tone so cold as to belie the politeness of his words. "A chair, I beg. Ah, Moreau?" The note was frigidly interrogative. "He accompanies you, monsieur?" he asked.

"If you please, M. le Marquis."

"Why not? Find yourself a seat, Moreau." He spoke over his shoulder as to a lackey.

"It is good of you, monsieur," said Philippe, "to have offered me this opportunity of continuing the subject that took me so fruitlessly, as it happens, to Gavrillac."

The Marquis crossed his legs, and held one of his fine hands to the blaze. He replied, without troubling to turn to the young man, who was slightly behind him.

"The goodness of my request we will leave out of question for the moment," said he, darkly, and M. de Chabrillanne laughed. André-Louis thought him easily moved to mirth, and almost envied him the faculty.

"But I am grateful," Philippe insisted, "that you should condescend to hear me plead their cause."

The Marquis stared at him over his shoulder. "Whose cause?" quoth he.

"Why, the cause of the widow and orphans of this unfortunate Mabey."

The Marquis looked from Vilmorin to the Chevalier, and again the Chevalier laughed, slapping his leg this time.

"I think," said M. de La Tour d'Azyr, slowly, "that we are at cross purposes. I asked you to come here because the Château de Gavrillac was hardly a suitable place in which to carry our discussion further, and because I hesitated to incommode you by suggesting that you should come all the way to Azyr. But my object is connected with certain expressions that you let fall up there. It is on the subject of those expressions, monsieur, that I would hear you further—if you will honour me."

André-Louis began to apprehend that there was something sinister in the air. He was a man of quick intuitions, quicker far than those of M. de Vilmorin, who evinced no more than a mild surprise.

"I am at a loss, monsieur," said he. "To what expressions does monsieur allude?"

"It seems, monsieur, that I must refresh your memory." The Marquis uncrossed his legs, and swung sideways on his chair, so that at last he directly faced M. de Vilmorin. "You spoke, monsieur—and however mistaken you may have been, you spoke very eloquently, too eloquently almost, it seemed to me—of the infamy of such a deed as the act of summary justice upon this thieving fellow Mabey, or whatever his name may be. *Infamy* was the precise word you used. You did not retract that word when I had the honour to inform you that it was by my orders that my gamekeeper Benet proceeded as he did."

"If," said M. de Vilmorin, "the deed was infamous, its infamy is not modified by the rank, however exalted, of the person responsible. Rather is it aggravated."

"Ah!" said M. le Marquis, and drew a gold snuff-box from his pocket. "You say, 'if the deed was infamous,' monsieur. Am I to understand that you are no longer as convinced as you appeared to be of its infamy?"

M. de Vilmorin's fine face wore a look of perplexity. He did not understand the drift of this.

"It occurs to me, M. le Marquis, in view of your readiness to assume responsibility, that you must believe in some justification for the deed which is not apparent to myself."

"That is better. That is distinctly better." The Marquis took snuff delicately, dusting the fragments from the fine lace at his throat. "You realise that with an imperfect understanding of these matters, not being yourself a landowner, you may have rushed to unjustifiable conclusions. That is indeed the case. May it be a warning to you, monsieur. When I tell you that for months past I have been annoyed by similar depredations, you will perhaps understand that it had become necessary to employ a deterrent sufficiently strong to put an end to them. Now that the risk is known, I do not think there will be any more prowling in my coverts. And there is more in it than that, M. de Vilmorin. It is not the poaching that annoys me so much as the contempt for my absolute and inviolable rights. There is, monsieur, as you cannot fail to have observed, an evil spirit of insubordination in the air, and there is only one way in which to meet it. To tolerate it, in however slight a degree, to show leniency, however leniently disposed, would entail having recourse to still harsher measures to-morrow. You understand me, I am sure, and you will also, I am sure, appreciate the condescension of what

amounts to an explanation from me where I cannot admit that any explanations were due. If anything in what I have said is still obscure to you, I refer you to the game laws, which your lawyer friend there will expound for you at need."

With that the gentleman swung round again to face the fire. It appeared to convey the intimation that the interview was at an end. And yet this was not by any means the intimation that it conveyed to the watchful, puzzled, vaguely uneasy André-Louis. It was, thought he, a very curious, a very suspicious oration. It affected to explain, with a politeness of terms and a calculated insolence of tone; whilst in fact it could only serve to stimulate and goad a man of M. de Vilmorin's opinions. And that is precisely what it did. He rose.

"Are there in the world no laws but game laws?" he demanded heatedly. "Have you never by any chance heard of the laws of humanity?"

The Marquis sighed wearily. "What have I to do with the laws of humanity?" he wondered.

M. de Vilmorin looked at him a moment in speechless amazement.

"Nothing, Monsieur le Marquis. That is—alas!—too obvious. I hope you will remember it in the hour when you may wish to appeal to those laws which you now deride."

M. de La Tour d'Azyr threw back his head sharply, his high-bred face imperious.

"Now what precisely shall that mean? It is not the first time to-day that you have made use of dark sayings that I could almost believe to veil the presumption of a threat."

"Not a threat, Monsieur le Marquis—a warning. A warning that such deeds as these against God's creatures . . . Oh, you may sneer, monsieur, but they are God's creatures, even as you or I—neither more nor less, deeply though the reflection may wound your pride. In His eyes . . ."

"Of your charity, spare me a sermon, Monsieur l'Abbé!"

"You mock, monsieur. You laugh. Will you laugh, I wonder, when God presents His reckoning to you for the blood and plunder with which your hands are full?"

"Monsieur!" The word, sharp as the crack of a whip, was from M. de Chabrillanne, who bounded to his feet. But instantly the Marquis repressed him.

"Sit down, Chevalier. You are interrupting Monsieur l'Abbé, and I should like to hear him further. He interests me profoundly."

In the background, André-Louis, too, had risen, brought to his feet by alarm, by the evil that he saw written on the

handsome face of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. He approached, and touched his friend upon the arm.

"Better be going, Philippe," said he.

But M. de Vilmorin, caught in the relentless grip of passions long repressed, was being hurried by them recklessly along.

"Oh, monsieur," said he, "consider what you are and what you will be. Consider how you and your kind live by abuses, and consider the harvest that abuses must ultimately bring."

"Revolutionist!" said Monsieur le Marquis contemptuously. "You have the effrontery to stand before my face and offer me this stinking cant of your modern so-called intellectuals!"

"Is it cant, monsieur? Do you think—do you believe in your soul—that it is cant? Is it cant that the feudal grip is on all things that live, crushing them like grapes in the press, to its own profit? Does it not exercise its rights upon the waters of the river, the fire that bakes the poor man's bread of grass and barley, on the wind that turns the mill? The peasant cannot take a step upon the road, cross a crazy bridge over a river, buy an ell of cloth in the village market, without meeting feudal rapacity, without being taxed in feudal dues. Is not that enough, Monsieur le Marquis? Must you also demand his wretched life in payment for the least infringement of your sacred privileges, careless of what widows or orphans you dedicate to woe? Will naught content you but that your shadow must lie like a curse upon the land? And do you think in your pride that France, this Job among the nations, will suffer it forever?"

He paused as if for a reply. But none came. The Marquis considered him, strangely silent, a half-smile of disdain at the corner of his lips, an ominous hardness in his eyes.

Again André-Louis tugged at his friend's sleeve.

"Philippe."

Philippe shook him off, and plunged on, fanatically.

"Do you see nothing of the gathering clouds that herald the coming of the storm? You imagine perhaps that these States General summoned by M. Necker, and promised for next year, are to do nothing but devise fresh means of extortion to liquidate the bankruptcy of the State? You delude yourselves, as you shall find. The Third Estate, which you despise, will prove itself the preponderating force, and it will find a way to make an end of this canker of Privilege that is devouring the vitals of this unfortunate country."

Monsieur le Marquis shifted in his chair, and spoke at last.

"You have, monsieur," said he, "a very dangerous gift of eloquence. And it is of yourself rather than of your subject.

For after all, what do you offer me? A réchauffé of the dishes served to out-at-elbow enthusiasts in the provincial literary chambers, compounded of the effusions of your Voltaires and Jean-Jacques, and such dirty-fingered scribblers. You have not among all your philosophers one with the wit to understand that we are an order consecrated by antiquity, that for our rights and privileges we have behind us the authority of centuries."

"Humanity, monsieur," Philippe replied, "is more ancient than nobility. Human rights are contemporary with man."

The Marquis laughed and shrugged.

"That is the answer I might have expected. It has the right note of cant that distinguishes the philosophers."

And then M. de Chabrillanne spoke.

"You go a long way round," he criticised his cousin, on a note of impatience.

"But I am getting there," he was answered. "I desired to make quite certain first."

"Faith, you should have no doubt by now."

"I have none." The Marquis rose and turned again to M. de Vilmorin, who had understood nothing of that brief exchange. "M. l'Abbé," said he once more, "you have a very dangerous gift of eloquence. I can conceive of men being swayed by it. Had you been born a gentleman, you would not so easily have acquired these false views that you express."

Monsieur de Vilmorin stared blankly, uncomprehending.

"Had I been born a gentleman, do you say?" quoth he, in a slow, bewildered voice. "But I was born a gentleman. My race is as old, my blood as good, as yours, monsieur."

From Monsieur le Marquis there was a slight play of eyebrows, a vague, indulgent smile. His dark, liquid eyes looked squarely into the face of M. de Vilmorin.

"You have been deceived in that, I fear."

"Deceived?"

"Your sentiments betray the indiscretion of which madame your mother must have been guilty."

The brutally affronting words were sped beyond recall, and the lips that had uttered them, coldly, as if they had been the merest commonplace, remained calm and faintly sneering.

A dead silence followed. André-Louis's wits were numbed. He stood aghast, all thought suspended in him, what time M. de Vilmorin's eyes continued fixed upon M. de La Tour d'Azyr's, as if searching there for a meaning that eluded him. Quite suddenly he understood the vile affront. The blood

leapt to his face, fire blazed in his gentle eyes. A convulsive quiver shook him. Then, with an inarticulate cry, he leaned forward, and with his open hand struck M. le Marquis full and hard upon his sneering face.

In a flash M. de Chabrillanne was on his feet, between the two men.

Too late André-Louis had seen the trap. La Tour d'Azyr's words were but as a move in a game of chess, calculated to exasperate his opponent into some such counter-move as this —a counter-move that left him entirely at the other's mercy.

M. le Marquis looked on, very white save where M. de Vilmorin's finger-prints began slowly to colour his face: but he said nothing more. Instead, it was M. de Chabrillanne who now did the talking, taking up his preconcerted part in this vile game.

"You realise, monsieur, what you have done?" said he, coldly, to Philippe. "And you realise, of course, what must inevitably follow?"

Monsieur de Vilmorin had realised nothing. The poor young man had acted upon impulse, upon the instinct of decency and honour, never counting the consequences. But he realised them now at the sinister invitation of M. de Chabrillanne, and if he desired to avoid these consequences, it was out of respect for his priestly vocation, which strictly forbade such adjustments of disputes as M. de Chabrillanne was clearly thrusting upon him.

He drew back. "Let one affront wipe out the other," said he, in a dull voice. "The balance is still in M. le Marquis's favour. Let that content him."

"Impossible." The Chevalier's lips came together tightly. Thereafter he was suavity itself, but very firm. "A blow has been struck, monsieur. I think I am correct in saying that such a thing has never happened before to Monsieur le Marquis in all his life. If you felt yourself affronted, you had but to ask the satisfaction due from one gentleman to another. Your action would seem to confirm the assumption that you found so offensive. But it does not on that account render you immune from the consequences."

It was, you see, M. de Chabrillanne's part to heap coals upon this fire, to make quite sure that their victim should not escape them.

"I desire no immunity," flashed back the young seminarist, stung by this fresh goad. After all, he was nobly born, and the traditions of his class were strong upon him—stronger far than the seminarist schooling in humility. He owed it to

himself, to his honour, to be killed rather than avoid the consequences of the thing he had done.

"But he does not wear a sword, messieurs!" cried André-Louis, aghast.

"That is easily amended. He may have the loan of mine."

"I mean, messieurs," André-Louis insisted between fear for his friend and indignation, "that it is not his habit to wear a sword, that he has never worn one, that he is untutored in its uses. He is a seminarist—a postulant for holy orders, already half a priest, and so forbidden from such an engagement as you propose."

"All that he should have remembered before he struck the blow," said M. de Chabrillanne politely.

"The blow was deliberately provoked," raged André-Louis. Then he recovered himself, though the other's haughty stare had no part in that recovery. "Oh my God, I talk in vain! How is one to argue against a purpose formed? Come away, Philippe. Don't you see the trap . . ."

M. de Vilmorin cut him short, and flung him off. "Be quiet, André. Monsieur le Marquis is entirely in the right."

"Monsieur le Marquis is in the right?" André-Louis let his arms fall helplessly. This man he loved above all other living men was caught in the snare of the world's insanity. He was baring his breast to the knife for the sake of a vague, distorted sense of the honour due to himself. It was not that he did not see the trap. It was that his honour compelled him to disdain consideration of it. To André-Louis in that moment he seemed a singularly tragic figure. Noble, perhaps, but very pitiful.

CHAPTER IV

THE HERITAGE

IT was M. de Vilmorin's desire that the matter should be settled out of hand. In this he was at once objective and subjective. A prey to emotions sadly at conflict with his priestly vocation, he was above all in haste to have done, so that he might resume a frame of mind more proper to it. Also he feared himself a little; by which I mean that his honour feared his nature. The circumstances of his education, and the goal that for some years now he had kept in view, had robbed him of much of that spirited brutality that is the birthright of the male. He had grown timid and gentle as a woman. Aware of it, he feared that once the heat of his passion were spent he might betray a dishonouring weakness in the ordeal.

Monsieur le Marquis, on his side, was no less eager for an immediate settlement; and since they had M. de Chabrillanne to act for his cousin, and André-Louis to serve as witness for M. de Vilmorin, there was nothing to delay them.

And so, within a few minutes, all arrangements were concluded, and you behold that sinisterly-intentioned little group of four assembled in the afternoon sunshine on the bowling-green behind the inn. They were entirely private, screened more or less from the windows of the house by a ramage of trees which, if leafless now, was at least dense enough to provide an effective lattice.

There were no formalities over measurements of blades or selection of ground. Monsieur le Marquis removed his sword-belt and scabbard, but declined—not considering it worth while for the sake of so negligible an opponent—to divest himself either of his shoes or his coat. Tall, lithe, and athletic, he stood to face the no less tall, but very delicate and frail, M. de Vilmorin. The latter also disdained to make any of the usual preparations. Since he recognised that it could avail him nothing to strip, he came on guard fully dressed, two hectic spots above the cheekbones burning on his otherwise grey face.

M. de Chabrillanne, leaning upon a cane—for he had relinquished his sword to M. de Vilmorin—looked on with quiet

interest. Facing him on the other side of the combatants stood André-Louis, the palest of the four, staring from fevered eyes, twisting and untwisting clammy hands.

His every instinct was to fling himself between the antagonists, to protest against and frustrate this meeting. That sane impulse was curbed, however, by the consciousness of its futility. To calm him, he clung to the conviction that the issue could not really be very serious. If the obligations of Philippe's honour compelled him to cross swords with the man he had struck, M. de La Tour d'Azyr's birth compelled him no less to do no serious hurt to the unfledged lad he had so grievously provoked. M. le Marquis, after all, was a man of honour. He could intend no more than to administer a lesson; sharp, perhaps, but one by which his opponent must live to profit. André-Louis clung obstinately to this for comfort.

Steel beat on steel, and the men engaged. The Marquis presented to his opponent the narrow edge of his upright body, his knees slightly flexed and converted into living springs, whilst M. de Vilmorin stood squarely, a full target, his knees wooden. Honour and the spirit of fair play alike cried out against such a match.

The encounter was very short, of course. In youth, Philippe had received the tutoring in sword-play that was given to every boy born into his station of life. And so he knew at least the rudiments of what was now expected of him. But what could rudiments avail him here? Three disengages completed the exchanges, and then without any haste the Marquis slid his right foot along the moist turf, his long graceful body extending itself in a lunge that went under M. de Vilmorin's clumsy guard, and with the utmost deliberation he drove his blade through the young man's vitals.

André-Louis sprang forward just in time to catch his friend's body under the armpits as it sank. Then, his own legs bending beneath the weight of it, he went down with his burden until he was kneeling on the damp turf. Philippe's limp head lay against André-Louis's left shoulder; Philippe's relaxed arms trailed at his sides; the blood welled and bubbled from the ghastly wound to saturate the poor lad's garments.

With white face and twitching lips, André-Louis looked up at M. de La Tour d'Azyr, who stood surveying his work with a countenance of grave but remorseless interest.

"You have killed him!" cried André-Louis.

"Of course."

The Marquis ran a lace handkerchief along his blade to

wipe it. As he let the dainty fabric fall, he explained himself. "He had, as I told him, a too dangerous gift of eloquence."

And he turned away, leaving completest understanding with André-Louis. Still supporting the limp, draining body, the young man called to him.

"Come back, you cowardly murderer, and make yourself quite safe by killing me too."

The Marquis half-turned his face, dark with anger. Then M. de Chabrillanne set a restraining hand upon his arm. Although a party throughout to the deed, the Chevalier was a little appalled now that it was done. He had not the high stomach of M. de La Tour d'Azyr, and he was a good deal younger.

"Come away," he said. "The lad is raving. They were friends."

"You heard what he said?" quoth the Marquis.

"Nor can he, or you, or any man deny it," flung back André-Louis. "Yourself, monsieur, you made confession when you gave me now the reason why you killed him. You did it because you feared him."

"If that were true—what then?" asked the great gentleman.

"Do you ask? Do you understand of life and humanity nothing but how to wear a coat and dress your hair—oh, yes, and to handle weapons against boys and priests? Have you no mind to think, no soul into which you can turn its vision? Must you be told that it is a coward's part to kill the thing he fears, and doubly a coward's part to kill in this way? Had you stabbed him in the back with a knife, you would have shown the courage of your vileness. It would have been a vileness undisguised. But you feared the consequences of that, powerful as you are; and so you shelter your cowardice under the pretext of a duel."

The Marquis shook off his cousin's hand, and took a step forward, holding now his sword like a whip. But again the Chevalier caught and held him.

"No, no, Gervais! Let be, in God's name!"

"Let him come, monsieur," raved André-Louis, his voice thick and concentrated. "Let him complete his coward's work on me, and thus make himself safe from a coward's wages."

M. de Chabrillanne let his cousin go. He came, white to the lips, his eyes glaring at the lad who so recklessly insulted him. And then he checked. It may be that he remembered suddenly the relationship in which this young man was popularly believed

to stand to the Seigneur de Gavrillac, and the well-known affection in which the Seigneur held him. And so he may have realised that if he pushed this matter further, he might find himself upon the horns of a dilemma. He would be confronted with the alternatives of shedding more blood, and so embroiling himself with the Lord of Gavrillac at a time when that gentleman's friendship was of the first importance to him, or else of withdrawing with such hurt to his dignity as must impair his authority in the countryside hereafter.

Be it so or otherwise, the fact remains that he stopped short; then, with an incoherent ejaculation, between anger and contempt, he tossed his arms, turned on his heel, and strode off quickly with his cousin.

When the landlord and his people came, they found André-Louis, his arms about the body of his dead friend, murmuring passionately into the deaf ear that rested almost against his lips:

"Philippe! Speak to me, Philippe! Philippe. . . don't you hear me? Oh God of Heaven! Philippe!"

At a glance they saw that here neither priest nor doctor could avail. The cheek that lay against André-Louis's was leaden-hued, the half-open eyes were glazed, and there was a little froth of blood upon the vacuously parted lips.

Half-blinded by tears, André-Louis stumbled after them when they bore the body into the inn. Upstairs in the little room to which they conveyed it he knelt by the bed, and holding the dead man's hand in both his own, he swore to him out of his impotent rage that M. de La Tour d'Azyr should pay a bitter price for this.

"It was your eloquence he feared, Philippe," he said. "Then if I can get no justice for this deed, at least it shall be fruitless to him. The thing he feared in you, he shall fear in me. He feared that men might be swayed by your eloquence to the undoing of such things as himself. Men shall be swayed by it still. For your eloquence and your arguments shall be my heritage from you. I will make them my own. It matters nothing that I do not believe in your gospel of freedom. I know it—every word of it; that is all that matters to our purpose, yours and mine. If all else fails, your thoughts shall find expression in my living tongue. Thus at least we shall have frustrated his vile aim to still the voice he feared. It shall profit him nothing to have your blood upon his soul. That voice in you would never half so relentlessly have hounded him and his as it shall in me—if all else fails."

It was an exulting thought. It calmed him; it soothed

his grief, and he began very softly to pray. And then his heart trembled as he considered that Philippe, a man of peace, almost a priest, an apostle of Christianity, had gone to his Maker with the sin of anger on his soul. It was horrible. Yet God would see the righteousness of that anger. And in no case—be man's interpretation of Divinity what it might—could that one sin outweigh the loving good that Philippe had ever practised, the noble purity of his great heart. God after all, reflected André-Louis, was not a grand-seigneur.

CHAPTER V

THE LORD OF GAVRILLAC

FOR the second time that day André-Louis set out for the château, walking briskly, and heeding not at all the curious eyes that followed him through the village, and the whisperings that marked his passage through the people, all agog by now with that day's event in which he had been an actor.

He was ushered by Bénoît, the elderly body-servant, rather grandiloquently called the seneschal, into the ground-floor room known traditionally as the library. It still contained several shelves of neglected volumes, from which it derived its title, but implements of the chase—fowling-pieces, powder-horns, hunting-bags, sheath-knives—obtruded far more prominently than those of study. The furniture was massive, of oak richly carved, and belonging to another age. Great massive oak beams crossed the rather lofty whitewashed ceiling.

Here the squat Seigneur de Gavrillac was restlessly pacing when André-Louis was introduced. He was already informed, as he announced at once, of what had taken place at the Bréton Armé. M. de Chabrillanne had just left him, and he confessed himself deeply grieved and deeply perplexed.

"The pity of it!" he said. "The pity of it!" He bowed his enormous head. "So estimable a young man, and so full of promise. Ah, this La Tour d'Azyr is a hard man, and he feels very strongly in these matters. He may be right. I don't know. I have never killed a man for holding different views from mine. In fact, I have never killed a man at all. It isn't in my nature. I shouldn't sleep of nights if I did. But men are differently made."

"The question, monsieur my godfather," said André-Louis, "is what is to be done?" He was quite calm and self-possessed, but very white.

M. de Kercadiou stared at him blankly out of his pale eyes.

"Why, what the devil is there to do? From what I am told, Vilmorin went so far as to strike M. le Marquis."

" Under the very grossest provocation."

" Which he himself provoked by his revolutionary language. The poor lad's head was full of this encyclopædist trash. It comes of too much reading. I have never set much store by books, André; and I have never known anything but trouble to come out of learning. It unsettles a man. It complicates his views of life, destroys the simplicity which makes for peace of mind and happiness. Let this miserable affair be a warning to you, André. You are, yourself, too prone to these new-fashioned speculations upon a different constitution of the social order. You see what comes of it. A fine, estimable young man, the only prop of his widowed mother too, forgets himself, his position, his duty to that mother—everything; and goes and gets himself killed like this. It is infernally sad. On my soul it is sad." He produced a handkerchief and blew his nose with vehemence.

André-Louis felt a tightening of his heart, a lessening of the hopes, never too sanguine, which he had founded upon his godfather.

" Your criticisms," he said, " are all for the conduct of the dead, and none for that of the assassin. It does not seem possible that you should be in sympathy with such a crime."

" Crime? " shrilled M. de Kercadiou. " My God, boy, you are speaking of M. de La Tour d'Azyr! "

" I am, and of the abominable murder he has committed . . ."

" Stop! " M. de Kercadiou was very emphatic. " I cannot permit that you apply such terms to him. I cannot permit it. M. le Marquis is my friend, and is likely very soon to stand in a still closer relationship."

" Notwithstanding this? " asked André-Louis.

M. de Kercadiou was frankly impatient.

" Why, what has this to do with it? I may deplore it. But I have no right to condemn it. It is a common way of adjusting differences between gentlemen."

" You really believe that? "

" What the devil do you imply, André? Should I say a thing that I don't believe? You begin to make me angry."

" 'Thou shalt not kill,' is the King's law as well as God's."

" You are determined to quarrel with me, I think. It was a duel. . . ."

André-Louis interrupted him. " It was no more a duel than if it had been fought with pistols of which only M. le Marquis's was loaded. He invited Philippe to discuss the matter further, with the deliberate intent of forcing a quarrel upon him and killing him. Be patient with me, monsieur my godfather.

I am not telling you of what I imagine, but what M. le Marquis himself admitted to me."

Dominated a little by the young man's earnestness, M. de Kercadiou's pale eyes fell away. He turned with a shrug, and sauntered over to the window.

"It would need a court of honour to decide such an issue. And we have no courts of honour," he said.

"But we have courts of justice."

With returning testiness the Seigneur swung round to face him again. "And what court of justice, do you think, would listen to such a plea as you appear to have in mind?"

"There is the court of the King's Lieutenant at Rennes."

"And do you think the King's Lieutenant would listen to you?"

"Not to me, perhaps, monsieur. But if you were to bring the plaint . . ."

"I bring the plaint?" M. de Kercadiou's pale eyes were wide with the horror of the suggestion.

"The thing happened here on your domain."

"I bring a plaint against M. de La Tour d'Azyr? You are out of your senses, I think. O, you are mad; as mad as that poor friend of yours who has come to this end through meddling in what did not concern him. The language he used here to M. le Marquis on the score of Mabey was of the most offensive. Perhaps you didn't know that. It does not at all surprise me that the Marquis should have desired satisfaction."

"I see," said André-Louis, on a note of hopelessness.

"You see? What the devil do you see?"

"That I shall have to depend upon myself alone."

"And what the devil do you propose to do, if you please?"

"I shall go to Rennes, and lay the facts before the King's Lieutenant."

"He'll be too busy to see you." And M. de Kercadiou's mind swung a trifle inconsequently, as weak minds will. "There is trouble enough in Rennes already on the score of those crazy States General, with which the wonderful M. Necker is to repair the finances of the kingdom. As if a peddling Swiss bank-clerk, who is also a damned Protestant, could succeed where such men as Calonne and Brienne have failed."

"Good afternoon, monsieur my godfather," said André-Louis.

"Where are you going?" was the querulous demand.

"Home at present. To Rennes in the morning."

"Wait, boy, wait!" The squat little man rolled forward, affectionate concern on his great ugly face, and he set one of his podgy hands on his godson's shoulder. "Now listen to me, André," he reasoned. "This is sheer knight-errantry—moonshine, lunacy. You'll come to no good by it if you persist. You've read Don Quixote, and what happened to him when he went tilting against windmills. It's what will happen to you, neither more nor less. Leave things as they are, my boy. I wouldn't have a mischief happen to you."

André-Louis looked at him, smiling wanly.

"I swore an oath to-day which it would damn my soul to break."

"You mean that you'll go in spite of anything that I may say?" Impetuous as he was inconsequent, M. de Kercadiou was bristling again. "Very well, then, go. . . Go to the devil!"

"I will begin with the King's Lieutenant."

"And if you get into the trouble you are seeking, don't come whimpering to me for assistance," the Seigneur stormed. He was very angry now. "Since you choose to disobey me, you can break your empty head against the windmill, and be damned to you!"

André-Louis bowed with a touch of irony, and reached the door.

"If the windmill should prove too formidable," said he, from the threshold, "I may see what can be done with the wind. Good-bye, monsieur my godfather."

He was gone, and M. de Kercadiou was alone, purple in the face, puzzling out that last cryptic utterance, and not at all happy in his mind, either on the score of his godson or of M. de La Tour d'Azyr. He was disposed to be angry with them both. He found these headstrong, wilful men who relentlessly followed their own impulses very disturbing and irritating. Himself, he loved his ease, and to be at peace with his neighbours; and that seemed to him so obviously the supreme good of life that he was disposed to brand them as fools who troubled to seek other things.

CHAPTER VI

THE WINDMILL

THERE was between Nantes and Rennes an established service of three stage-coaches weekly in each direction, which for a sum of twenty-four livres—roughly, the equivalent of an English guinea—would carry you the seventy and odd miles of the journey in some fourteen hours. Once a week one of the diligences going in each direction would swerve aside from the highroad to call at Gavrillac, to bring and take letters, newspapers, and sometimes passengers. It was usually by this coach that André-Louis came and went when the occasion offered. At present, however, he was too much in haste to lose a day awaiting the passing of that diligence. So it was on a horse hired from the Bréton Armé that he set out next morning; and an hour's brisk ride under a grey wintry sky, by a half-ruined road through ten miles of flat, uninteresting country, brought him to the City of Rennes.

He rode across the main bridge over the Vilaine, and so into the upper and principal part of that important city of some thirty thousand souls, most of whom, he opined from the seething, clamant crowds that everywhere blocked his way, must on this day have taken to the streets. Clearly Philippe had not overstated the excitement prevailing there.

He pushed on as best he could, and so came at last to the Place Royale, where he found the crowd to be most dense. From the plinth of the equestrian statue of Louis XV. a white-faced young man was excitedly addressing the multitude. His youth and dress proclaimed the student, and a group of his fellows, acting as a guard of honour to him, kept the immediate precincts of the statue.

Over the heads of the crowd André-Louis caught a few of the phrases flung forth by that eager voice.

"It was the promise of the King. . . . It is the King's authority they flout . . . they arrogate to themselves the whole sovereignty in Brittany. The King has dissolved them. . . . These insolent nobles defying their sovereign and the people. . . ."

Had he not known already, from what Philippe had told him, of the events which had brought the Third Estate to the point of active revolt, those few phrases would fully have informed him. This popular display of temper was most opportune to his need, he thought. And in the hope that it might serve his turn by disposing to reasonableness the mind of the King's Lieutenant, he pushed on up the wide and well-paved Rue Royale, where the concourse of people began to diminish. He put up his hired horse at the Corne de Cerf, and set out again, on foot, to the Palais de Justice.

There was a brawling mob by the framework of poles and scaffoldings about the building Cathedral, upon which work had been commenced a year ago. But he did not pause to ascertain the particular cause of that gathering. He strode on, and thus came presently to the handsome Italianate palace that was one of the few public edifices that had survived the devastating fire of sixty years ago.

He won through with difficulty to the great hall, known as the Salle des Pas Perdus, where he was left to cool his heels for a full half-hour after he had found an usher so condescending as to inform the god who presided over that shrine of Justice that a lawyer from Gavrillac humbly begged an audience on an affair of gravity.

That the god condescended to see him at all was probably due to the grave complexion of the hour. At long length he was escorted up the broad stone staircase, and ushered into a spacious meagrely-furnished anteroom, to make one of a waiting crowd of clients, mostly men.

There he spent another half-hour, and employed the time in considering exactly what he should say. This consideration made him realise the weakness of the case he proposed to set before a man whose views of law and morality were coloured by his social rank.

At last, he was ushered through a narrow but very massive and richly decorated door into a fine, well-lighted room, furnished with enough gilt and satin to have supplied the boudoir of a lady of fashion.

It was a trivial setting for a King's Lieutenant, but about the King's Lieutenant there was—at least to ordinary eyes—nothing trivial. At the far end of the chamber, to the right of one of the tall windows that looked out over the inner court, before a goat-legged writing-table with Watteau panels, heavily encrusted with ormolu, sat that exalted being. Above a scarlet coat with an order flaming on its breast, and a billow of lace in which diamonds sparkled like drops of water

sprouted the massive powdered head of M. de Lesdiguières. It was thrown back to scowl upon this visitor with an expectant arrogance that made André-Louis wonder almost was a genuflexion awaited from him.

Perceiving a lean, lantern-jawed young man, with straight, lank black hair, in a caped riding-coat of brown cloth, and yellow buckskin breeches, his knee-boots splashed with mud, the scowl upon that august visage deepened until it brought together the thick black eyebrows above the great hooked nose.

"You announce yourself as a lawyer of Gavrillac with an important communication," he growled. It was a peremptory command to make this communication without wasting the valuable time of the King's Lieutenant, of whose immense importance it conveyed something more than a hint. Monsieur de Lesdiguières accounted himself an imposing personality, and he had every reason to do so, for in his time he had seen many a poor devil scared out of all his senses by the thunder of his voice.

He waited now to see the same thing happen to this youthful lawyer from Gavrillac. But he waited in vain.

André-Louis found him ridiculous. He knew pretentiousness for the mask of worthlessness and weakness. And here he beheld pretentiousness incarnate It was to be read in that arrogant poise of the head, that scowling brow, the inflexion of that reverberating voice. Even more difficult than it is for a man to be a hero to his valet—who has witnessed the dispersal of the parts that make up the imposing whole—is it for a man to be a hero to the student of Man, who has witnessed the same in a different sense.

André-Louis stood forward boldly—impudently, thought M. de Lesdiguières.

"You are His Majesty's Lieutenant here in Brittany," he said—and it almost seemed to the august lord of life and death that this fellow had the incredible effrontery to address him as one man speaking to another. "You are the dispenser of the King's high justice in this province."

Surprise spread on that handsome, sallow face under the heavily-powdered wig.

"Is your business concerned with this infernal insubordination of the canaille?" he asked.

"It is not, monsieur."

The black eyebrows rose. "Then what the devil do you mean by intruding upon me at a time when all my attention is being claimed by the obvious urgency of this disgraceful affair?"

" The affair that brings me is no less disgraceful and no less urgent."

" It will have to wait ! " thundered the great man in a passion, and tossing back a cloud of lace from his hand, he reached for the little silver bell upon his table.

" A moment, monsieur ! " André-Louis's tone was peremptory. M. de Lesdiguières checked in sheer amazement at its impudence. " I can state it very briefly . . . "

" Haven't I said already . . . "

" And when you have heard it," André-Louis went on relentlessly, interrupting the interruption, " you will agree with me as to its character."

M. de Lesdiguières considered him very sternly.

' What is your name ? " he asked.

" André-Louis Moreau."

" Well, André-Louis Moreau, if you can state your plea briefly, I will hear you. But I warn you that I shall be very angry if you fail to justify the impertinence of this insistence at so inopportune a moment."

" You shall be the judge of that, monsieur," said André-Louis, and he proceeded at once to state his case, beginning with the shooting of Mabey, and passing thence to the killing of M. de Vilmorin. But he withheld until the end the name of the great gentleman against whom he demanded justice, persuaded that did he introduce it earlier he would not be allowed to proceed.

He had a gift of oratory of whose full powers he was himself hardly conscious yet, though destined very soon to become so. He told his story well, without exaggeration, yet with a force of simple appeal that was irresistible. Gradually the great man's face relaxed from its forbidding severity. Interest, warming almost to sympathy, came to be reflected on it.

" And who, sir, is the man you charge with this ? "

" The Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr."

The effect of that formidable name was immediate. Dismayed anger, and an arrogance more utter than before, took the place of the sympathy he had been betrayed into displaying.

" Who ? " he shouted, and without waiting for an answer. " Why, here's impudence," he stormed on, " to come before me with such a charge against a gentleman of M. de La Tour d'Azyr's eminence ! How dare you speak of him as a coward. . . "

" I speak of him as a murderer," the young man corrected. "And I demand justice against him."

"You demand it, do you? My God, what next?"

"That is for you to say, monsieur."

It surprised the great gentleman into a more or less successful effort at self-control.

"Let me warn you," said he, acidly, "that it is not wise to make wild accusations against a nobleman. That, in itself, is a punishable offence, as you may learn. Now listen to me. In this matter of Mabey—assuming your statement of it to be exact—the gamekeeper may have exceeded his duty; but by so little that it is hardly worth comment. Consider, however, that in any case it is not a matter for the King's Lieutenant, or for any court but the seigneurial court of M. de La Tour d'Azyr himself. It is before the magistrates of his own appointing that such a matter must be laid, since it is a matter strictly concerning his own seigneurial jurisdiction. As a lawyer, you should not need to be told so much."

"As a lawyer, I am prepared to argue the point. But as a lawyer, I also realise that if that case were prosecuted, it could only end in the unjust punishment of a wretched gamekeeper, who did no more than carry out his orders, but who none the less would now be made a scapegoat, if scapegoat were necessary. I am not concerned to hang Benet on the gallows earned by M. de La Tour d'Azyr."

M. de Lesdiguières smote the table violently. "My God!" he cried out, to add more quietly, on a note of menace, "You are singularly insolent, my man."

"That is not my intention, sir, I assure you. I am a lawyer, pleading a case—the case of M. de Vilmorin. It is for his assassination that I have come to beg the King's justice."

"But you yourself have said that it was a duel!" cried the Lieutenant, between anger and bewilderment.

"I have said that it was made to appear a duel. There is a distinction, as I shall show, if you will condescend to hear me out."

"Take your own time, sir!" said the ironical M. de Lesdiguières, whose tenure of office had never yet held anything that remotely resembled this experience.

André-Louis took him literally. "I thank you, sir," he answered solemnly, and submitted his argument. "It can be shown that M. de Vilmorin never practised fencing in all his life, and it is notorious that M. de La Tour d'Azyr is an exceptional swordsman. Is it a duel, monsieur, where one of the combatants alone is armed? For it amounts to that on a comparison of their measures of respective skill."

"There has scarcely been a duel fought on which the same trumpery argument might not be advanced."

"But not always with equal justice. And in one case, at least, it was advanced successfully."

"Successfully? When was that?"

"Ten years ago, in Dauphiny. I refer to the case of M. de Gesvres, a gentleman of that province, who forced a duel upon M. de la Roche Jeannine, and killed him. M. de Jeannine was a member of a powerful family, which exerted itself to obtain justice. It put forward just such arguments as now obtain against M. de La Tour d'Azyr. As you will remember, the judges held that the provocation had proceeded of intent from M. de Gesvres; they found him guilty of premeditated murder, and he was hanged."

M. de Lesdiguières exploded yet again. "Death of my life!" he cried. "Have you the effrontery to suggest that M. de La Tour d'Azyr should be hanged? Have you?"

"But why not, monsieur, if it is the law, and there is precedent for it, as I have shown you, and if it can be established that what I state is the truth—as established it can be without difficulty?"

"Do you ask me, why not? Have you temerity to ask me that?"

"I have, monsieur. Can you answer me? If you cannot, monsieur, I shall understand that whilst it is possible for a powerful family like that of La Roche Jeannine to set the law in motion, the law must remain inert for the obscure and uninfluential, however brutally wronged by a great nobleman."

Monsieur de Lesdiguières perceived that in argument he would accomplish nothing against this impassive, resolute young man. The menace of him grew more fierce.

"I should advise you to take yourself off at once, and to be thankful for the opportunity to depart unscathed."

"I am, then, to understand, monsieur, that there will be no inquiry into this case? That nothing that I can say will move you?"

"You are to understand that if you are still there in two minutes it will be very much the worse for you." And Monsieur de Lesdiguières tinkled the silver handbell upon his table.

"I have informed you, monsieur, that a duel—so-called—has been fought, and a man killed. It seems that I must remind you, the administrator of the King's justice, that duels are against the law, and that it is your duty to hold an inquiry. I come as the legal representative of the bereaved mother of

Monsieur de Vilmorin to demand of you the inquiry that is due."

The door behind André-Louis opened softly. Monsieur de Lesdiguières, pale with anger, contained himself with difficulty.

"You seek to compel us, do you, you impudent rascal?" he growled. "You think the King's justice is to be driven headlong by the voice of any impudent roturier? I marvel at my own patience with you. But I give you a last warning, master lawyer; keep a closer guard over that insolent tongue of yours, or you will have cause very bitterly to regret its glibness." He waved a jewelled, contemptuous hand, and spoke to the usher standing behind André. "To the door!" he said shortly.

André-Louis hesitated a second. Then with a shrug he turned. This was the windmill indeed, and he a poor knight of rueful countenance. To attack it at closer quarters would mean being dashed to pieces. Yet on the threshold he turned again.

"Monsieur de Lesdiguières," said he, "may I recite to you an interesting fact in natural history? The tiger is a great lord in the jungle, and was for centuries the terror of lesser beasts, including the wolf. The wolf, himself a hunter, wearied of being hunted. He took to associating with other wolves, and then the wolves, driven to form packs for self-protection, discovered the power of the pack, and took to hunting the tiger, with disastrous results to him. You should study Buffon, Monsieur de Lesdiguières."

"I have studied a buffoon this morning, I think," was the punning sneer with which Monsieur de Lesdiguières replied. But that he conceived himself witty, it is probable he would not have condescended to reply at all. "I don't understand you," he added.

"But you will, Monsieur de Lesdiguières. You will," said André-Louis, and so departed.

CHAPTER VII

THE WIND

HE had broken his futile lance with the windmill—the image suggested by M. de Kercadiou persisted in his mind—and it was, he perceived, by sheer good fortune that he had escaped without hurt. There remained the wind itself—the whirlwind. And the events in Rennes, reflex of the graver events in Nantes, had set that wind blowing in his favour.

He set out briskly to retrace his steps towards the Place Royale, where the gathering of the populace was greatest, where, as he judged, lay the heart and brain of this commotion that was exciting the city.

But the commotion that he had left there was as nothing to the commotion which he found on his return. Then there had been a comparative hush to listen to the voice of a speaker who denounced the First and Second Estates from the pedestal of the statue of Louis XV. Now the air was vibrant with the voice of the multitude itself, raised in anger. Here and there men were fighting with canes and fists; everywhere a fierce excitement raged, and the gendarmes sent thither by the King's Lieutenant to restore and maintain order were so much helpless flotsam in that tempestuous human ocean.

There were cries of "To the Palais! To the Palais! Down with the assassins! Down with the nobles! To the Palais!"

An artisan who stood shoulder to shoulder with him in the press enlightened André-Louis on the score of the increased excitement.

"They've shot him dead. His body is lying there where it fell at the foot of the statue. And there was another student killed not an hour ago over there by the Cathedral works. *Pardi!* If they can't prevail in one way they'll prevail in another." The man was fiercely emphatic. "They'll stop at nothing. If they can't overawe us, by God, they'll assassinate us! They are determined to conduct these States of Brittany in their own way. No interests but their own shall be considered."

André-Louis left him still talking, and clove himself a way through that human press.

At the statue's base he came upon a little cluster of students about the body of the murdered lad, all stricken with fear and helplessness.

"You here, Moreau!" said a voice.

He looked round to find himself confronted by a slight, swarthy man of little more than thirty, firm of mouth and impertinent of nose, who considered him with disapproval. It was Le Chapelier, a lawyer of Rennes, a prominent member of the Literary Chamber of that city, a forceful man, fertile in revolutionary ideas and of an exceptional gift of eloquence.

"Ah, it is you, Chapelier? Why don't you speak to them? Why don't you tell them what to do? Up with you, man!" And he pointed to the plinth.

Le Chapelier's dark, restless eyes searched the other's impassive face for some trace of the irony he suspected. They were as wide asunder as the poles, these two, in their political views; and mistrusted as André-Louis was by all his colleagues of the Literary Chamber of Rennes, he was by none mistrusted so thoroughly as by this vigorous republican. Indeed, had Le Chapelier been able to prevail against the influence of the seminarist Vilmorin, André-Louis would long since have found himself excluded from that assembly of the intellectual youth of Rennes, which he exasperated by his eternal mockery of their ideals.

So now Le Chapelier suspected mockery in that invitation, suspected it even when he failed to find traces of it on André-Louis's face, for he had learnt by experience that it was a face not often to be trusted for an indication of the real thoughts that moved behind it.

"Your notions and mine on that score can hardly coincide," said he.

"Can there be two opinions?" quoth André-Louis.

"There are usually two opinions whenever you and I are together, Moreau—more than ever now that you are the appointed delegate of a nobleman. You see what your friends have done. No doubt you approve their methods." He was coldly hostile.

André-Louis looked at him without surprise. So invariably opposed to each other in academic debates, how should Le Chapelier suspect his present intentions?

"If you won't tell them what is to be done, I will," said he.

"*Nom de Dieu!* If you want to invite a bullet from the

other side, I shall not hinder you. It may help to square the account."

Scarcely were the words out than he repented them; for as if in answer to that challenge André-Louis sprang up on to the plinth. Alarmed now, for he could only suppose it to be André-Louis's intention to speak on behalf of Privilege, of which he was a publicly appointed representative, Le Chapelier clutched him by the leg to pull him down again.

"Ah, that no!" he was shouting. "Come down, you fool! Do you think we will let you ruin everything by your clowning? Come down!"

André-Louis, maintaining his position by clutching one of the legs of the bronze horse, flung his voice like a bugle-note over the heads of that seething mob.

"Citizens of Rennes, the motherland is in danger!"

The effect was electrical. A stir ran, like a ripple over water, across that froth of upturned human faces, and completest silence followed. In that great silence they looked at this slim young man, hatless, long wisps of his black hair fluttering in the breeze, his neck-cloth in disorder, his face white, his eyes on fire.

André-Louis felt a sudden surge of exultation as he realised by instinct that at one grip he had seized that crowd, and that he held it fast in the spell of his cry and his audacity.

Even Le Chapelier, though still clinging to his ankle, had ceased to tug. The reformer, though unshaken in his assumption of André-Louis's intentions, was for a moment bewildered by the first note of his appeal.

And then, slowly, impressively, in a voice that travelled clear to the ends of the square, the young lawyer of Gavrillac began to speak.

"Shuddering in horror of the vile deed here perpetrated, my voice demands to be heard by you. You have seen murder done under your eyes—the murder of one who nobly, without any thought of self, gave voice to the wrongs by which we are all oppressed. Fearing that voice, shunning the truth as foul things shun the light, our oppressors sent their agents to silence him in death."

Le Chapelier released at last his hold of André-Louis's ankle, staring up at him the while in sheer amazement. It seemed that the fellow was in earnest; serious for once; and for once on the right side. What had come to him?

"Of assassins what shall you look for but assassination?

I have a tale to tell which will show that this is no new thing that you have witnessed here to-day; it will reveal to you the forces with which you have to deal. Yesterday. . . ."

There was an interruption. A voice in the crowd, some twenty paces off, perhaps, was raised to shout:

"Yet another of them!"

Immediately after the voice came a pistol-shot, and a bullet flattened itself against the bronze figure just behind André-Louis.

Instantly there was turmoil in the crowd, most intense about the spot whence the shot had been fired. The assailant was one of a considerable group of the opposition, a group that found itself at once beset on every side, and hard put to it to defend him.

From the foot of the plinth rang the voice of the students making chorus to Le Chapelier, who was bidding André-Louis to seek shelter.

"Come down! Come down at once! They'll murder you as they murdered La Rivière."

"Let them!" He flung wide his arms in a gesture supremely theatrical, and laughed. "I stand here at their mercy. Let them, if they will, add mine to the blood that will presently rise up to choke them. Let them assassinate me. It is a trade they understand. But until they do so, they shall not prevent me from speaking to you, from telling you what is to be looked for in them." And again he laughed, not merely in exultation, as they supposed who watched him from below, but also in amusement. And his amusement had two sources. One was to discover how glibly he uttered the phrases proper to whip up the emotions of a crowd; the other was in the remembrance of how the crafty Cardinal de Retz, for the purpose of inflaming popular sympathy on his behalf, had been in the habit of hiring fellows to fire upon his carriage. He was in just such case as that arch-politician. True, he had not hired the fellow to fire that pistol-shot; but he was none the less obliged to him, and ready to derive the fullest advantage from the act.

The group that sought to protect the assassin was battling on, seeking to hew a way out of that angry, heaving press.

"Let them go!" André-Louis called down. "What matters one murderer more or less? Let them go, and listen to me, my countrymen."

And presently, when some measure of order was restored, he began his tale. In simple language now, yet with a vehemence

and directness that drove home every point, he tore their hearts with the story of yesterday's happenings at Gavrillac. He drew tears from them with the pathos of his picture of the bereaved widow Mabey and her three starving, destitute children—" orphaned to avenge the death of a pheasant "—and the bereaved mother of that M. de Vilmorin, a student of Rennes, known here to many of them, who had met his death in a noble endeavour to champion the cause of an esurient member of their afflicted order.

" The Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr said of him that he had too dangerous a gift of eloquence, and to silence his brave voice he killed him. But he has failed of his object. For I, poor Philippe de Vilmorin's friend, have assumed the mantle of his apostleship, and I speak to you with his voice to-day."

It was a statement that helped Le Chapelier at last to understand, at least in part, this bewildering change in André-Louis, which rendered him faithless to the side that employed him.

" I am not here," continued André-Louis, " merely to demand at your hands vengeance upon Philippe de Vilmorin's murderers. I am here to tell you the things he would to-day have told you had he lived."

So far at least he was frank. But he did not add that they were things he did not himself believe, things that he accounted the cant by which an ambitious bourgeoisie—speaking through the mouths of the lawyers, who were its articulate part—sought to overthrow to its own advantage the present state of things. He left his audience in the natural belief that the views he expressed were the views he held.

And now in a terrible voice, with an eloquence that amazed himself, he denounced the inertia of the royal justice where the great are the offenders. It was with bitter sarcasm that he spoke of their King's Lieutenant, M. de Lesdiguières.

" Do you wonder," he asked them, " that M. de Lesdiguières should administer the law so that it shall ever be favourable to our great nobles? Would it be just, would it be reasonable, that he should otherwise administer it? "

He paused dramatically to let his sarcasm sink in. It had the effect of reawakening Le Chapelier's doubts, and checking his dawning conviction in André-Louis's sincerity. Whither was he going now?

He was not left long in doubt. Proceeding, André-Louis spoke as he conceived that Philippe de Vilmorin would have spoken. He had so often argued with him, so often attended the discussions of the Literary Chamber, that he had all the

cant of the reformers—that was yet true in substance—at his fingers' ends.

"Consider, after all, the composition of this France of ours. A million of its inhabitants are members of the privileged classes. They compose France. They are France. For surely you cannot suppose the remainder to be anything that matters? It cannot be pretended that twenty-four million souls are of any account, that they can be representative of this great nation, or that they can exist for any purpose but that of servitude to the million elect."

Bitter laughter shook them now, as he desired it should.

"Seeing their privileges in danger of invasion by these twenty-four millions—mostly canaille; possibly created by God, it is true, but clearly so created to be the slaves of Privilege—does it surprise you that the dispensing of royal justice should be placed in the stout hands of these Lesdiguières, men without brains to think or hearts to be touched? Consider what it is that must be defended against the assault of us others—canaille. Consider a few of these feudal rights that are in danger of being swept away should the Privileged yield even to the commands of their sovereign, and admit the Third Estate to an equal vote with themselves.

"What would become of the right of terrage on the land, of parcière on the fruit-trees, of carpot on the vines? What of the corvées by which they command forced labour, of the ban de vendage, which gives them the first vintage, the banvin which enables them to control to their own advantage the sale of wine? What of their right of grinding the last liard of taxation out of the people to maintain their own opulent estate; the cens, the lods et ventes, which absorb a fifth of the value of the land, the blairée, which must be paid before herds can feed on communal lands, the pulvérage to indemnify them for the dust raised on their roads by the herds that go to market, the sextélage on everything offered for sale in the public markets, the étallonage, and all the rest? What of their rights over men and animals for field labour, of ferries over rivers, and of bridges over streams, of sinking wells, of warren, of dovecot and of fire, which last yields them a tax on every peasant hearth? What of their exclusive rights of fishing and of hunting, the violation of which is ranked as almost a capital offence?

"And what of other rights, unspeakable, abominable, over the lives and bodies of their people, rights which if rarely exercised have never been rescinded? To this day, if a noble returning from the hunt were to slay two of his serfs to bathe

and refresh his feet in their blood, he could still claim in his sufficient defence that it was his absolute feudal right to do so.

" Rough-shod, these million Privileged ride over the souls and bodies of twenty-four million contemptible canaille existing but for their own pleasure. Woe betide him who so much as raises his voice in protest in the name of humanity against an excess of these already excessive abuses. I have told you of one remorselessly slain in cold blood for doing no more than that. Your own eyes have witnessed the assassination of another here upon this plinth, of yet another over there by the Cathedral works, and the attempt upon my own life.

" Between them and the justice due to them in such cases stand these Lesdiguières, these King's Lieutenants: not instruments of justice, but walls erected for the shelter of Privilege and Abuse whenever it exceeds its grotesquely excessive rights.

" Do you wonder that they will not yield an inch; that they will resist the election of a Third Estate with the voting power to sweep all these privileges away, to compel Privilege to submit to a just equality in the eyes of the law with the meanest of the canaille it tramples underfoot, to provide that the moneys necessary to save this State from the bankruptcy into which Privilege has all but plunged it shall be raised by taxation to be borne by themselves in the same proportion as by others?

" Sooner than yield to so much they prefer to resist even the royal command."

A phrase occurred to him, used yesterday by Vilmorin, a phrase to which he had refused to attach importance when uttered then. He used it now. " In doing this they are striking at the very foundations of the throne. These fools do not perceive that if that throne falls over, it is they who stand nearest to it who will be crushed."

A terrific roar acclaimed that statement. Tense and quivering with the excitement that was flowing through him, and from him out into that great audience, he stood a moment smiling ironically. Then he waved them into silence, and saw by their ready obedience how completely he possessed them. For in the voice with which he spoke each now recognised the voice of himself, giving at last expression to the thoughts that for months and years had been inarticulately stirring in each simple mind.

Presently he resumed, speaking more quietly, that ironic smile about the corner of his mouth growing more marked.

"In taking my leave of Monsieur de Lesdiguières I gave him warning out of a page of natural history. I told him that when the wolves, roaming singly through the jungle, were weary of being hunted by the tiger, they banded themselves into packs, and went a-hunting the tiger in their turn. Monsieur de Lesdiguières contemptuously answered that he did not understand me. But your wits are better than his. You understand me, I think? Don't you?"

Again a great roar, mingled now with some approving laughter, was his answer. He had wrought them up to a pitch of dangerous passion, and they were ripe for any violence to which he urged them. If he had failed with the windmill, at least he was now master of the wind.

"To the Palais!" they shouted, waving their hands, brandishing canes, and—here and there—even a sword. "To the Palais! Down with Monsieur de Lesdiguières! Death to the King's Lieutenant!"

He was master of the wind, indeed. His dangerous gift of oratory—a gift nowhere more powerful than in France, since nowhere else are men's emotions so quick to respond to the appeal of eloquence—had given him this mastery. At his bidding now the gale would sweep away the windmill against which he had flung himself in vain. But that, as he straightforwardly revealed it, was no part of his intent.

"Ah, wait!" he bade them. "Is this miserable instrument of a corrupt system worth the attention of your noble indignation?"

He hoped his words would be reported to M. de Lesdiguières. He thought it would be good for the soul of M. de Lesdiguières to hear the undiluted truth about himself for once. "It is the system itself you must attack and overthrow; not a mere instrument—a miserable painted lath such as this. And precipitancy will spoil everything. Above all, my children, no violence!"

My children! Could his godfather have heard him!

"You have seen often already the result of premature violence elsewhere in Brittany, and you have heard of it elsewhere in France. Violence on your part will call for violence on theirs. They will welcome the chance to assert their mastery by a firmer grip than heretofore. The military will be sent for. You will be faced by the bayonets of mercenaries. Do not provoke that, I implore you. Do not put it into their power; do not afford them the pretext they would welcome, to crush you down into the mud of your own blood."

Out of the silence into which they had fallen anew broke now the cry of:

"What else, then? What else?"

"I will tell you," he answered them. "The wealth and strength of Brittany lies in Nantes—a bourgeois city, one of the most prosperous in this realm, rendered so by the energy of the bourgeoisie and the toil of the people. It was in Nantes that this movement had its beginning, and as a result of it the King issued his order dissolving the States as now constituted—an order which those who base their power on privilege and abuse do not hesitate to thwart. Let Nantes be informed of the precise situation, and let nothing be done here until Nantes shall have given us the lead. She has the power—which we in Rennes have not—to make her will prevail, as we have seen already. Let her exert that power once more, and until she does so do you keep the peace in Rennes. Thus shall you triumph. Thus shall the outrages that are being perpetrated under your eyes be fully and finally avenged."

As abruptly as he had leapt upon the plinth did he now leap down from it. He had finished. He had said all—perhaps more than all—that could have been said by the dead friend with whose voice he spoke. But it was not their will that he should thus extinguish himself. The thunder of their acclamations rose deafeningly upon the air. He had played upon their emotions—each in turn—as a skilful harpist plays upon the strings of his instrument. And they were vibrant with the passions he had aroused and the high note of hope on which he had brought his symphony to a close.

A dozen students caught him as he leapt down, and swung him to their shoulders, where again he came within view of all the acclaiming crowd.

The delicate Chapelier pressed alongside of him with flushed face and shining eyes.

"My lad," he said to him, "you have kindled a fire to-day that will sweep the face of France in a blaze of liberty." And then to the students he issued a sharp command. "To the Literary Chamber—at once! We must concert measures upon the instant, a delegate must be dispatched to Nantes forthwith, to convey to our friends there the message of the people of Rennes."

The crowd fell back, opening a lane through which the students bore the hero of the hour. Waving his hands to them, he called upon them to disperse to their homes, and await there in patience what must follow very soon.

"You have endured for centuries with a fortitude that is

a pattern to the world," he flattered them. " Endure a little longer yet. The end, my friends, is well in sight at last."

They carried him out of the square and up the Rue Royale to an old house, one of the few old houses surviving in that city that had risen from its ashes, where in an upper chamber lighted by diamond-shaped panes of yellow glass the Literary Chamber usually held its meetings. Thither in his wake the members of that Chamber came hurrying, summoned by the messages that Chapelier had issued during their progress.

Behind closed doors a flushed and excited group of some fifty men, the majority of whom were young, ardent, and afire with the illusion of liberty, hailed André-Louis as the strayed sheep who had returned to the fold, and smothered him in congratulations and thanks.

Then they settled down to deliberate upon immediate measures, whilst the doors below were kept by a guard of honour that had improvised itself from the masses. And very necessary was this. For no sooner had the Chamber assembled than the house was assailed by the gendarmerie of M. de Lesdiguières, dispatched in haste to arrest the firebrand who was inciting the people of Rennes to sedition. The force consisted of fifty men. Five hundred would have been too few. The mob broke their carbines, broke some of their heads, and would indeed have torn them into pieces had they not beaten a timely and well-advised retreat before a form of horseplay to which they were not at all accustomed.

And whilst this was taking place in the street below, in the room above-stairs the eloquent Le Chapelier was addressing his colleagues of the Literary Chamber. Here, with no bullets to fear, and no one to report his words to the authorities, Le Chapelier could permit his oratory a full, unintimidated flow. And that considerable oratory was as direct and brutal as the man himself was delicate and elegant.

He praised the vigour and the greatness of the speech they had heard from their colleague Moreau. Above all, he praised its wisdom. Moreau's words had come as a surprise to them. Hitherto they had never known him as other than a bitter critic of their projects of reform and regeneration; and quite lately they had heard, not without misgivings, of his appointment as delegate for a nobleman in the States of Brittany. But they held the explanation of his conversion. The murder of their dear colleague Vilmorin had produced this change. In that brutal deed Moreau had beheld at last in true proportions the workings of that evil spirit which they were vowed to exercise from France. And to-day he had proven himself

the stoutest apostle among them of the new faith. He had pointed out to them the only sane and useful course. The illustration he had borrowed from natural history was most apt. Above all, let them pack like the wolves, and to ensure this uniformity of action in the people of all Brittany, let a delegate at once be sent to Nantes, which had already proved itself the real seat of Brittany's power. It but remained to appoint that delegate, and Le Chapelier invited them to do so.

André-Louis, on a bench near the window, a prey now to some measure of reaction, listened in bewilderment to that flood of eloquence.

As the applause died down, he heard a voice exclaiming: "I propose to you that we appoint our leader here, Chapelier, to be that delegate."

Le Chapelier reared his elegantly-dressed head, which had been bowed in thought, and it was seen that his countenance was pale. Nervously he fingered a gold spy-glass.

"My friends," he said slowly, "I am deeply sensible of the honour that you do me. But in accepting it I should be usurping an honour that rightly belongs elsewhere. Who could represent us better, who more deserving to be our representative, to speak to our friends of Nantes with the voice of Rennes, than the champion who once already to-day has so incomparably given utterance to the voice of this great city? Confer this honour of being your spokesman where it belongs—upon André-Louis Moreau."

Rising in response to the storm of applause that greeted the proposal, André-Louis bowed and forthwith yielded.

"Be it so," he said simply. "It is perhaps fitting that I should carry out what I have begun, though I, too, am of the opinion that Le Chapelier would have been a worthier representative. I will set out to-night."

"You will set out at once, my lad," Le Chapelier informed him, and now revealed what an uncharitable mind might account the true source of his generosity. "It is not safe after what has happened for you to linger an hour in Rennes. And you must go secretly. Let none of you allow it to be known that he has gone. I would not have you come to harm over this, André-Louis. But you must see the risks you run, and if you are to be spared to help us in this work of salvation of our afflicted motherland, you must use caution, move secretly, veil your identity even. Or else Monsieur de Lesdiguières will have you laid by the heels, and it will be good-night for you."

CHAPTER VIII

OMNES OMNIBUS

ANDRÊ-LOUIS rode forth from Rennes committed to a deeper adventure than he had dreamed of when he left the sleepy village of Gavrillac. Lying the night at a roadside inn, and setting out again early in the morning, he reached Nantes soon after noon of the following day.

Through that long and lonely ride through the dull plains of Brittany, now at their dreariest in their winter garb, he had ample leisure in which to review his actions and his position. From one who had taken hitherto a purely academic and by no means friendly interest in the new philosophies of social life, exercising his wits upon these new ideas merely as a fencer exercises his eye and wrist with the foils, without ever suffering himself to be deluded into supposing the issue a real one, he found himself suddenly converted into a revolutionary firebrand, committed to revolutionary action of the most desperate kind. The representative and delegate of a nobleman in the States of Brittany, he found himself simultaneously and incongruously the representative and delegate of the whole Third Estate of Rennes.

It is difficult to determine to what extent, in the heat of passion and swept along by the torrent of his own oratory, he might yesterday have succeeded in deceiving himself. But it is at least certain that, looking back in cold blood now, he had no single delusion on the score of what he had done. Cynically he had presented to his audience one side only of the great question that he propounded.

But since the established order of things in France was such as to make a rampart for M. de La Tour d'Azyr, affording him complete immunity for any crime that it pleased him to commit, why then the established order must take the consequences of its wrong-doing. Therein he perceived his clear justification. And so it was without misgivings that he came on his errand of sedition into that beautiful city of Nantes, rendered by its spacious streets and splendid port the rival in prosperity of Bordeaux and Marseilles.

He found an inn on the Quai La Fosse, where he put up his horse, and where he dined in the embrasure of a window that looked out over the tree-bordered quay and the broad bosom of the Loire, on which argosies of all nations rode at anchor. The sun had again broken through the clouds, and shed its pale wintry light over the yellow waters and the tall-masted shipping.

Along the quays there was a stir of life as great as that to be seen on the quays of Paris. Foreign sailors in outlandish garments and of harsh-sounding, outlandish speech, stalwart fishwives with baskets of herrings on their heads, voluminous of petticoat above bare legs and bare feet, calling their wares shrilly and almost inarticulately, watermen in woollen caps and loose trousers rolled to the knees, peasants in goatskin coats, their wooden shoes clattering on the round kidney-stones, shipwrights and labourers from the dockyards, bellows-menders, rat-catchers, water-carriers, ink-sellers, and other itinerant pedlars. And, sprinkled through this proletariat mass that came and went in constant movement, André-Louis beheld tradesmen in sober garments, merchants in long fur-lined coats; occasionally a merchant-prince rolling along in his two-horse cabriolet to the whip-crackings and shouts of "Gare!" from his coachman; occasionally a dainty lady carried past in her sedan-chair, with perhaps a mincing abbé from the episcopal court tripping along in attendance; occasionally an officer in scarlet riding disdainfully; and once the great carriage of a nobleman, with escutcheoned panels and a pair of white-stockinged, powdered footmen in gorgeous liveries hanging on behind. And there were Capuchins in brown and Benedictines in black, and secular priests in plenty —for God was well served in the sixteen parishes of Nantes— and by way of contrast there were lean-jawed, out-at-elbow adventurers, and gendarmes in blue coats and gaitered legs, sauntering guardians of the peace.

Representatives of every class that went to make up the seventy thousand inhabitants of that wealthy industrious city were to be seen in the human stream that ebbed and flowed beneath the window from which André-Louis observed it.

Of the waiter who ministered to his humble wants with soup and bouilli, and a measure of vin gris, André-Louis inquired into the state of public feeling in the city. The waiter, a staunch supporter of the privileged orders, admitted regretfully that an uneasiness prevailed. Much would depend upon what happened at Rennes. If it was true that the King had dissolved the States of Brittany, then all should be well

and the malcontents would have no pretext for further disturbances. There had been trouble and to spare in Nantes already. They wanted no repetition of it. All manner of rumours were abroad, and since early morning there had been crowds besieging the portals of the Chamber of Commerce for definite news. But definite news was yet to come. It was not even known for a fact that his Majesty actually had dissolved the States.

It was striking two, the busiest hour of the day upon the Bourse, when André-Louis reached the Place du Commerce. The square, dominated by the imposing classical building of the Exchange, was so crowded that he was compelled almost to fight his way through to the steps of the magnificent Ionic porch. A word would have sufficed to have opened a way for him at once. But guile moved him to keep silent. He would come upon that waiting multitude as a thunder-clap, precisely as yesterday he had come upon the mob at Rennes. He desired to lose nothing of the surprise effect of his entrance.

The precincts of that House of Commerce were jealously kept by a line of ushers armed with staves, a guard as hurriedly assembled by the merchants as it was evidently necessary. One of these now effectively barred the young lawyer's passage as he attempted to mount the steps.

André-Louis announced himself in a whisper.

The stave was instantly raised from the horizontal, and he passed and went up the steps in the wake of the usher. At the top, on the threshold of the chamber, he paused, and stayed his guide.

"I will wait here," he announced. "Bring the president to me."

"Your name, monsieur?"

Almost had André-Louis answered him, when he remembered Le Chapelier's warning of the danger with which his mission was fraught, and Le Chapelier's parting admonition to conceal his identity.

"My name is unknown to him; it matters nothing. I am the mouthpiece of a people, no more. Go."

The usher went, and in the shadow of that lofty, pillared portico André-Louis waited, his eyes straying out ever and anon to survey that spread of upturned faces immediately below him.

Soon the president came, others following, crowding out into the portico, jostling one another in their eagerness to hear the news.

"You are a messenger from Rennes?"

"I am the delegate sent by the Literary Chamber of that city to inform you here in Nantes of what is taking place."

"Your name?"

André-Louis paused. "The less we mention names, perhaps, the better."

The president's eyes grew big with gravity. He was a corpulent, florid man, purse-proud and self-sufficient.

He hesitated a moment. Then: "Come into the Chamber," said he.

"By your leave, monsieur, I will deliver my message from here—from these steps."

"From here?" The great merchant frowned.

"My message is for the people of Nantes, and from here I can speak at once to the greatest number of Nantais of all ranks; and it is my desire—and the desire of those whom I represent—that as great a number as possible should hear my message at first hand."

"Tell me, sir, is it true that the King has dissolved the States?"

André-Louis looked at him. He smiled apologetically, and waved a hand towards the crowd, which by now was straining for a glimpse of this slim young man who had brought forth the president and more than half the members of the Chamber, guessing already, with that curious instinct of crowds, that he was the awaited bearer of tidings.

"Summon the gentlemen of your Chamber, monsieur," said he, "and you shall hear all."

"So be it."

A word, and forth they came to crowd upon the steps, but leaving clear the topmost step and a half-moon space in the middle.

To the spot so indicated André-Louis now advanced very deliberately. He took his stand there, dominating the entire assembly. He removed his hat, and launched the opening bombshell of that address which is historic, marking as it does one of the great stages of France's progress towards revolution.

"People of this great city of Nantes, I have come to summon you to arms!"

In the amazed and rather scared silence that followed he surveyed them for a moment before resuming.

"I am a delegate of the people of Rennes, charged to announce to you what is taking place, and to invite you in this dreadful hour of our country's peril to rise and march to her defence."

"Name! Your name!" a voice shouted, and instantly the cry was taken up by others, until the multitude rang with the question.

He could not answer that excited mob as he had answered the president. It was necessary to compromise, and he did so, happily. "My name," said he, "is Omnes Omnibus—all for all. Let that suffice you now. I am a herald, a mouthpiece, a voice—no more. I come to announce to you that since the privileged orders, assembled for the States of Brittany in Rennes, resisted your will—our will—despite the King's plain hint to them, his Majesty has dissolved the States."

There was a burst of delirious applause. Men laughed and shouted, and cries of "Vive le Roi!" rolled forth like thunder. André-Louis waited, and gradually the preternatural gravity of his countenance came to be observed, and to beget the suspicion that there might be more to follow. Gradually silence was restored, and at last André-Louis was able to proceed.

"You rejoice too soon. Unfortunately the nobles, in their insolent arrogance, have elected to ignore the royal dissolution, and in despite of it persist in sitting and in conducting matters as seems good to them."

A silence of utter dismay greeted that disconcerting epilogue to the announcement that had been so rapturously received. André-Louis continued after a moment's pause:

"So that these men who were already rebels against the people, rebels against justice and equity, rebels against humanity itself, are now also rebels against their King. Sooner than yield an inch of the unconscionable privileges by which too long already they have flourished, to the misery of a whole nation, they will make a mock of royal authority, hold up the King himself to contempt. They are determined to prove that there is no real sovereignty in France but the sovereignty of their own parasitic fainéantise."

There was a faint splutter of applause, but the majority of the audience remained silent, waiting.

"This is no new thing. Always has it been the same. No minister in the last ten years, who, seeing the needs and perils of the State, counselled the measures that we now demand as the only means of arresting our motherland in its ever-quickening progress to the abyss, but found himself as a consequence cast out of office by the influence which Privilege brought to bear against him. Twice already has Monsieur Necker been called to the ministry, to be twice dismissed when his insistent counsels of reform threatened the privileges of clergy and nobility. For the third time now has

he been called to office, and at last it seems we are to have States General in spite of Privilege. But what the privileged orders can no longer prevent, they are determined to stultify. Since it is now a settled thing that these States General are to meet, at least the nobles and the clergy will see to it—unless we take measures to prevent them—by packing the Third Estate with their own creatures, and denying it all effective representation, that they convert the States General into an instrument of their own will for the perpetuation of the abuses by which they live. To achieve this end they will stop at nothing. They have flouted the authority of the King, and they are silencing by assassination those who raise their voices to condemn them. Yesterday in Rennes two young men who addressed the people as I am addressing you were done to death in the streets by assassins at the instigation of the nobility. Their blood cries out for vengeance."

Beginning in a sullen mutter, the indignation that moved his hearers swelled up to express itself in a roar of anger.

"Citizens of Nantes, the motherland is in peril. Let us march to her defence. Let us proclaim it to the world that we recognise that the measures to liberate the Third Estate from the slavery in which for centuries it has groaned find only obstacles in those orders whose phrenetic egotism sees in the tears and suffering of the unfortunate an odious tribute which they would pass on to their generations still unborn. Realising from the barbarity of the means employed by our enemies to perpetuate our oppression that we have everything to fear from the aristocracy they would set up as a constitutional principle for the governing of France, let us declare ourselves at once enfranchised from it.

"The establishment of liberty and equality should be the aim of every citizen member of the Third Estate; and to this end we should stand indivisibly united, especially the young and vigorous, especially those who have had the good fortune to be born late enough to be able to gather for themselves the precious fruits of the philosophy of this eighteenth century."

Acclamations broke out unstintedly now. He had caught them in the snare of his oratory. And he pressed his advantage instantly.

"Let us all swear," he cried in a great voice, "to raise up in the name of humanity and of liberty a rampart against our enemies, to oppose to their bloodthirsty covetousness the calm perseverance of men whose cause is just. And let us protest here and in advance against any tyrannical decrees that should declare us seditious when we have none but pure

and just intentions. Let us make oath upon the honour of our motherland that should any of us be seized by an unjust tribunal, intending against us one of those acts termed of political expediency—which are, in effect, but acts of despotism —let us swear, I say, to give a full expression to the strength that is in us and do that in self-defence which nature, courage and despair dictate to us."

Loud and long rolled the applause that greeted his conclusion, and he observed with satisfaction and even some inward grim amusement that the wealthy merchants who had been congregated upon the steps, and who now came crowding about him to shake him by the hand and to acclaim him, were not merely participants in, but the actual leaders of, this delirium of enthusiasm.

It confirmed him, had he needed confirmation, in his conviction that just as the philosophies upon which this new movement was based had their source in thinkers extracted from the bourgeoisie, so the need to adopt those philosophies to the practical purposes of life was most acutely felt at present by that same bourgeoisie which found itself debarred by Privilege from the expansion its wealth permitted. If it might be said of André-Louis that he had that day lighted the torch of the Revolution in Nantes, it might with even greater truth be said that the torch itself was supplied by the opulent bourgeoisie.

I need not dwell at any length upon the sequel. It is a matter of history how that oath which Omnes Omnibus administered to the citizens of Nantes formed the backbone of the formal protest which they drew up and signed in their thousands. Nor were the results of that powerful protest—which, after all, might already be said to harmonise with the expressed will of the sovereign himself—long delayed. Who shall say how far it may have strengthened the hand of Necker, when on the 27th of that same month of November he compelled the Council to adopt the most significant and comprehensive of all those measures to which clergy and nobility had refused their consent? On that date was published the royal decree ordaining that the deputies to be elected to the States General should number at least one thousand, and that the deputies of the Third Estate should be fully representative by numbering as many as the deputies of clergy and nobility together.

CHAPTER IX

THE AFTERMATH

DUSK of the following day was falling when the homing André-Louis approached Gavrillac. Realising fully what a hue-and-cry there would presently be for the apostle of revolution who had summoned the people of Nantes to arms, he desired as far as possible to conceal the fact that he had been in that maritime city. Therefore he made a wide détour, crossing the river at Bruz, and recrossing it a little above Chavagne, so as to approach Gavrillac from the north and create the impression that he was returning from Rennes, whither he was known to have gone two days ago.

Within a mile or so of the village, he caught in the fading light his first glimpse of a figure on horseback pacing slowly towards him. But it was not until they had come within a few yards of each other, and he observed that this cloaked figure was leaning forward to peer at him, that he took much notice of it. And then he found himself challenged almost at once by a woman's voice.

"It is you, André—at last!"

He drew rein, mildly surprised, to be assailed by another question, impatiently, anxiously asked.

"Where have you been?"

"Where have I been, Cousin Aline? Oh . . . seeing the world."

"I have been patrolling this road since noon to-day, waiting for you." She spoke breathlessly, in haste to explain. "A troop of the maréchaussée from Rennes descended upon Gavrillac this morning in quest of you. They turned the château and the village inside out, and at last discovered that you were due to return with a horse hired from the Bréton Armé. So they have taken up their quarters at the inn to wait for you. I have been here all the afternoon on the look-out, to warn you against walking into that trap."

"My dear Aline! That I should have been the cause of so much concern and trouble!"

"Never mind that. It is not important."

"On the contrary; it is the most important part of what you tell me. It is the rest that is unimportant."

"Do you realise that they have come to arrest you?" she asked him, with increasing impatience. "You are wanted for sedition, and upon a warrant from M. de Lesdiguières."

"Sedition?" quoth he, and his thoughts flew to that business at Nantes. It was impossible they could have had news of it in Rennes and acted upon it in so short a time.

"Yes, sedition. The sedition of that wicked speech of yours at Rennes on Wednesday."

"Oh, that!" said he. "Pooh!" His note of relief might have told her, had she been more attentive, that he had to fear the consequences of a greater wickedness committed since. "Why, that was nothing."

"Nothing?"

"I almost suspect that the real intentions of these gentlemen of the marèchaussée have been misunderstood. Most probably they have come to thank me on M. de Lesdiguières' behalf. I restrained the people when they would have burnt the Palais and himself inside it."

"After you had first incited them to do it. I suppose you were afraid of your work. You drew back at the last moment. But you said things of M. de Lesdiguières, if you are correctly reported, which he will never forgive."

"I see," said André-Louis, and he fell into thought.

But Mademoiselle de Kercadiou had already done what thinking was necessary, and her alert young mind had settled all that was to be done.

"You must not go into Gavrillac," she told him, "and you must get down from your horse, and let me take it. I will stable it at the château to-night. And some time to-morrow afternoon, by when you should be well away, I will return it to the Bréton Armé."

"Oh, but that is impossible."

"Impossible? Why?"

"For several reasons. One of them is that you haven't considered what will happen to you if you do such a thing."

"To me? Do you suppose I am afraid of that pack of oafs sent by M. Lesdiguières? I have committed no sedition."

"But it is almost as bad to give aid to one who is wanted for the crime. That is the law."

"What do I care for the law? Do you imagine that the law will presume to touch me?"

"Of course there is that. You are sheltered by one of the abuses I complained of at Rennes. I was forgetting."

"Complain of it as much as you please, but meanwhile profit by it. Come, André, do as I tell you. Get down from

your horse." And then, as he still hesitated, she stretched out and caught him by the arm. Her voice was vibrant with earnestness. "André, you don't realise how serious is your position. If these people take you, it is almost certain that you will be hanged. Don't you realise it? You must not go to Gavrillac. You must go away at once, and lie completely lost for a time until this blows over. Indeed, until my uncle can bring influence to bear to obtain your pardon, you must keep in hiding."

"That will be a long time, then," said André-Louis. "M. de Kercadiou has never cultivated friends at Court."

"There is M. de La Tour d'Azyr," she reminded him, to his astonishment.

"That man!" he cried, and then he laughed. "But it was chiefly against him that I aroused the resentment of the people of Rennes. I should have known that all my speech was not reported to you."

"It was, and that part of it among the rest."

"Ah! And yet you are concerned to save me, the man who seeks the life of your future husband at the hands either of the law or of the people? Or is it, perhaps, that since you have seen his true nature revealed in the murder of poor Philippe, you have changed your views on the subject of becoming Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr?"

"You often show yourself without any faculty of deductive reasoning."

"Perhaps. But hardly to the extent of imagining that M. de La Tour d'Azyr will ever lift a finger to do as you suggest."

"In which, as usual, you are wrong. He will certainly do so if I ask him."

"If you ask him?" Sheer horror rang in his voice.

"Why, yes. You see, I have not yet said that I will be Marquise de La Tour d'Azyr. I am still considering. It is a position that has its advantages. One of them is that it ensures a suitor's complete obedience."

"So, so. I see the crooked logic of your mind. You might go so far as to say to him: 'Refuse me this, and I shall refuse to be your marquise.' You would go so far as that?"

"At need, I might."

"And do you not see the converse implication? Do you not see that your hands would then be tied, that you would be wanting in honour if afterwards you refused him? And do you think that I would consent to anything that could so tie your hands? Do you think I want to see you damned, Aline?"

Her hand fell away from his arm.

"Oh, you are mad!" she exclaimed, quite out of patience.

"Possibly. But I like my madness. There is a thrill in it unknown to such sanity as yours. By your leave, Aline, I think I will ride on to Gavrillac."

"André, you must not! It is death to you!" In her alarm she backed her horse, and pulled it across the road to bar his way.

It was almost completely night by now; but from behind the wrack of clouds overhead a crescent moon sailed out to alleviate the darkness.

"Come, now," she enjoined him. "Be reasonable. Do as I bid you. See, there is a carriage coming up behind you. Do not let us be found here together thus."

He made up his mind quickly. He was not the man to be actuated by false heroics about dying, and he had no fancy whatever for the gallows of M. de Lesdiguières' providing. The immediate task that he had set himself might be accomplished. He had made heard—and ringingly—the voice that M. de La Tour d'Azyr imagined he had silenced. But he was very far from having done with life.

"Aline, on one condition only."

"And that?"

"That you swear to me you will never seek the aid of M. de La Tour d'Azyr on my behalf."

"Since you insist, and as time presses, I consent. And now ride on with me as far as the lane. There is that carriage coming up."

The lane to which she referred was one that branched off the road some three hundred yards nearer the village and led straight up the hill to the château itself. In silence they rode together towards it, and together they turned into that thickly hedged and narrow bypath. At a depth of fifty yards she halted him.

"Now!" she bade him.

Obediently he swung down from his horse and surrendered the reins to her.

"Aline," he said, "I haven't words in which to thank you."

"It isn't necessary," said she.

"But I shall hope to repay you some day."

"Nor is that necessary. Could I do less than I am doing? I do not want to hear of you hanged, André, nor does my uncle, though he is very angry with you."

"I suppose he is."

"And you can hardly be surprised. You were his delegate,

his representative. He depended upon you, and you have turned your coat. He is rightly indignant, calls you a traitor and swears that he will never speak to you again. But he doesn't want you hanged, André."

"Then we are agreed on that at least; for I don't want it myself."

"I'll make your peace with him. And now—good-bye, André. Send me a word when you are safe."

She held out a hand that looked ghostly in the faint light. He took it and bore it to his lips.

"God bless you, Aline."

She was gone, and he stood listening to the receding clopper-clop of hooves until it grew faint in the distance. Then slowly, with shoulders hunched and head sunk on his breast, he retraced his steps to the main road, cogitating whither he should go. Quite suddenly he checked, remembering with dismay that he was almost entirely without money. In Brittany itself he knew of no dependable hiding-place, and as long as he was in Brittany his peril must remain imminent. Yet to leave the province, and to leave it as quickly as prudence dictated, horses would be necessary. And how was he to procure horses, having no money beyond a single louis d'or and a few pieces of silver?

There was also the fact that he was very weary. He had had little sleep since Tuesday night, and not very much then; and much of the time had been spent in the saddle, a wearing thing to one so little accustomed to long rides. Worn as he was, it was unthinkable that he should go far to-night. He might get as far as Chavagne, perhaps. But there he must sup and sleep; and what, then, of to-morrow?

Had he but thought of it before, perhaps Aline might have been able to assist him with the loan of a few louis. His first impulse now was to follow her to the château. But prudence dismissed the notion. Before he could reach her, he must be seen by servants, and word of his presence would go forth.

There was no choice for him; he must tramp as far as Chavagne, find a bed there, and leave to-morrow until it dawned. On the resolve he set his face in the direction whence he had come. But again he paused. Chavagne lay on the road to Rennes. To go that way was to plunge further into danger. He would strike south again. At the foot of some meadows on this side of the village there was a ferry that would put him across the river. Thus he would avoid the village, and by placing the river between himself and the immediate danger, he would obtain an added sense of security.

A lane, turning out of the high road, a quarter of a mile this side of Gavrillac, led down to that ferry. By this lane some twenty minutes later came André-Louis with dragging feet. He avoided the little cottage of the ferryman, whose window was alight, and in the dark crept down to the boat, intending if possible to put himself across. He felt for the chain by which the boat was moored, and ran his fingers along this to the point where it was fastened. Here to his dismay he found a padlock.

He stood up in the gloom and laughed silently. Of course, he might have known it. The ferry was the property of M. de La Tour d'Azyr, and not likely to be left unfastened so that poor devils might cheat him of seigneurial dues.

There being no possible alternative, he walked back to the cottage and rapped on the door. When it opened he stood well back, and aside, out of the shaft of light that issued thence.

"Ferry!" he rapped out, laconically.

The ferryman, a burly scoundrel well known to him, turned aside to pick up a lantern, and came forth as he was bidden. As he stepped from the little porch, he raised the lantern so that the light fell on the face of this traveller.

"My God!" he ejaculated.

"You realise, I see, that I am pressed," said André-Louis, his eyes on the fellow's startled countenance.

"And well you may be with the gallows waiting for you at Rennes," growled the ferryman. "Since you've been so foolish as to come back to Gavrillac, you had better go again as quickly as you can. I will say nothing of having seen you."

"I thank you, Fresnel. Your advice accords with my intention. That is why I need the boat."

"Ah, that no," said Fresnel, with determination. "I'll hold my peace, but it's as much as my skin is worth to help you."

"You need not have seen my face. Forget that you have seen it."

"I'll do that, monsieur. But that is all I will do. I cannot put you across the river."

"Then give me the key of the boat, and I will put myself across."

"That is the same thing. I cannot. I'll hold my tongue, but I will not—I dare not—help you."

André-Louis looked a moment into that sullen, resolute

face, and understood. This man, living under the shadow of La Tour d'Azyr, dared exercise no will that might be in conflict with the will of his dread lord.

"Fresnel," he said quietly, "if, as you say, the gallows claim me, the thing that has brought me to this extremity arises out of the shooting of Mabey. Had not Mabey been murdered there would have been no need for me to have raised my voice as I have done. Mabey was your friend, I think. Will you for his sake lend me the little help I need to save my neck?"

The man kept his glance averted, and the cloud of sullenness deepened on his face.

"I would if I dared, but I dare not." Then quite suddenly he became angry. It was as if in anger he sought support. "Don't you understand that I dare not? Would you have a poor man risk his life for you? What have you or yours ever done for me that you should ask that? You do not cross to-night in my ferry. Understand that, monsieur, and go at once—go before I remember that it may be dangerous even to have talked to you and not give information. Go!"

He turned on his heel to re-enter his cottage, and a wave of hopelessness swept over André-Louis.

But in a second it was gone. The man must be compelled, and he had the means. He bethought him of a pistol pressed upon him by Le Chapelier at the moment of his leaving Rennes, a gift which at the time he had almost disdained. True, it was not loaded, and he had no ammunition. But how was Fresnel to know that?

He acted quickly. As with his right hand he pulled it from his pocket, with his left he caught the ferryman by the shoulder, and swung him round.

"What do you want now?" Fresnel demanded angrily. "Haven't I told you that I . . ."

He broke off short. The nozzle of the pistol was within a foot of his eyes.

"I want the key of the boat. That is all, Fresnel. And you can either give it me at once, or I'll take it after I have burnt your brains. I should regret to kill you, but I shall not hesitate. It is your life against mine, Fresnel; and you'll not find it strange that if one of us must die I prefer it shall be you."

Fresnel dipped a hand into his pocket and fetched thence a key. He held it out to André-Louis in fingers that shook—more in anger than in fear.

"I yield to violence," he said, showing his teeth like a

snarling dog. "But don't imagine that it will greatly profit you."

André-Louis took the key. His pistol remained levelled.

"You threaten me, I think," he said. "It is not difficult to read your threat. The moment I am gone, you will run to inform against me. You will set the maréchaussée on my heels to overtake me."

"No, no!" cried the other. He perceived his peril. He read his doom in the cold, sinister note on which André-Louis addressed him, and grew afraid. "I swear to you, monsieur, that I have no such intention."

"I think I had better make quite sure of you."

"Oh, my God! Have mercy, monsieur!" The knave was in a palsy of terror. "I mean you no harm—I swear to Heaven I mean you no harm. I will not say a word. I will not . . ."

"I would rather depend upon your silence than your assurances. Still, you shall have your chance. I am a fool, perhaps, but I have a reluctance to shed blood. Go into the house, Fresnel. Go, man. I follow you."

In the shabby main room of that dwelling, André-Louis halted him again. "Get me a length of rope," he commanded and was readily obeyed.

Five minutes later Fresnel was securely bound to a chair, and effectively silenced by a very uncomfortable gag improvised out of a block of wood and a muffler.

On the threshold the departing André-Louis turned.

"Good-night, Fresnel," he said. Fierce eyes glared mute hatred at him. "It is unlikely that your ferry will be required again to-night. But someone is sure to come to your relief quite early in the morning. Until then bear your discomfort with what fortitude you can, remembering that you have brought it entirely upon yourself by your uncharitableness. If you spend the night considering that, the lesson should not be lost upon you. By morning you may even have grown so charitable as not to know who it was that tied you up. Good-night."

He stepped out and closed the door.

To unlock the ferry and pull himself across the swift-running waters, on which the faint moonlight was making a silver ripple, were matters that engaged not more than six or seven minutes. He drove the nose of the boat through the decaying sedges that fringed the southern bank of the stream, sprang ashore, and made the little craft secure. Then, missing the footpath in the dark, he struck out across a sodden meadow in quest of the road.

BOOK II

THE BUSKIN

CHAPTER I

THE TRESPASSERS

COMING presently upon the Rédon road, André-Louis, obeying instinct rather than reason, turned his face to the south and plodded wearily and mechanically forward. He had no clear idea of whither he was going or of whither he should go. All that imported at the moment was to put as great a distance as possible between Gavrillac and himself.

He had a vague, half-formed notion of returning to Nantes; and there, by employing the newly-found weapon of his oratory, excite the people into sheltering him as the first victim of the persecution he had foreseen, and against which he had sworn them to take up arms. But the idea was one which he entertained merely as an indefinite possibility upon which he felt no real impulse to act.

Meanwhile he chuckled at the thought of Fresnel as he had last seen him, with his muffled face and glaring eyeballs. "For one who was anything but a man of action," he writes, "I felt that I had acquitted myself none so badly." It is a phrase that recurs at intervals in his sketchy *Confessions*. Constantly is he reminding you that he is a man of mental and not physical activities, and apologising when dire necessity drives him into acts of violence. I suspect this insistence upon his philosophic detachment—for which I confess he had justification enough—to betray his besetting vanity.

With increasing fatigue came depression and self-criticism. He had stupidly overshot his mark in insultingly denouncing M. de Lesdiguières. "It is much better," he says somewhere, "to be wicked than to be stupid. Most of this world's misery is the fruit, not as priests tell us, of wickedness, but of stupidity." And we know that of all stupidities he considered anger the most deplorable. Yet he had permitted himself to be angry with a creature like M. de Lesdiguières—a lackey, a fribble, a nothing, despite his potentialities for evil. He could perfectly have discharged his self-imposed mission without arousing the vindictive resentment of the King's Lieutenant.

He beheld himself vaguely launched upon life with the riding-suit in which he stood, a single louis d'or and a few pieces of silver for all capital, and a knowledge of law which had been inadequate to preserve him from the consequences of infringing it.

He had, in addition—but these things that were to be the real salvation of him he did not reckon—his gift of laughter, sadly repressed of late, and the philosophic outlook and mercurial temperament which are the stock-in-trade of your adventurer in all ages.

Meanwhile he tramped mechanically on through the night, until he felt that he could tramp no more. He had skirted the little township of Guichen, and now within a half-mile of Guignen, and with Gavrillac a good seven miles behind him. his legs refused to carry him any further.

He was midway across the vast common to the north of Guignen when he came to a halt. He had left the road, and taken heedlessly to the footpath that struck across the waste of indifferent pasture interspersed with clumps of gorse. A stone's throw away on his right the common was bordered by a thorn hedge. Beyond this loomed a tall building which he knew to be an open barn, standing on the edge of a long stretch of meadowland. That dark, silent shadow it may have been that had brought him to a standstill, suggesting shelter to his subconsciousness. A moment he hesitated; then he struck across towards the spot where a gap in the hedge was closed by a five-barred gate. He pushed the gate open, went through the gap, and stood now before the barn. It was as big as a house, yet consisted of no more than a roof carried upon half a dozen tall brick pillars. But densely packed under that roof was a great stack of hay that promised a warm couch on so cold a night. Stout timbers had been built into the brick pillars, with projecting ends to serve as ladders by which the labourer might climb to pack or withdraw hay. With what little strength remained him, André-Louis climbed by one of these and landed safely at the top, where he was forced to kneel for lack of room to stand upright. Arrived there, he removed his coat and neckcloth, his sodden boots and stockings. Next he cleared a trough for his body, and, lying down in it, covered himself to the neck with the hay he had removed. Within five minutes he was lost to all worldly cares and soundly asleep.

When next he awakened, the sun was already high in the heavens, from which he concluded that the morning was well advanced: and this before he realised quite where he was or

how he came there. Then to his awakening senses came a drone of voices close at hand, to which at first he paid little heed. He was deliciously refreshed, luxuriously drowsy and luxuriously warm.

But as consciousness and memory grew more full, he raised his head clear of the hay that he might free both ears to listen, his pulses faintly quickened by the nascent fear that those voices might bode him no good. Then he caught the reassuring accents of a woman, musical and silvery, though laden with alarm.

"Ah, mon Dieu, Léandre, let us separate at once. If it should be my father . . ."

And upon this a man's voice broke in, calm and reassuring:

"No, no, Climène, you are mistaken. There is no one coming. We are quite safe. Why do you start at shadows?"

"Ah, Léandre, if he should find us here together! I tremble at the very thought."

More was not needed to reassure André-Louis. He had overheard enough to know that this was but the case of a pair of lovers who, with less to fear of life, were yet—after the manner of their kind—more timid of heart than he. Curiosity drew him from his warm trough to the edge of the hay. Lying prone, he advanced his head and peered down.

In the space of cropped meadow between the barn and the hedge stood a man and a woman, both young. The man was a well-set-up, comely fellow, with a fine head of chestnut hair tied in a queue by a broad bow of black satin. He was dressed with certain tawdry attempts at ostentatious embellishments, which did not prepossess one at first glance in his favour. His coat of a fashionable cut was of faded plum-coloured velvet edged with silver lace, whose glory had long since departed. He affected ruffles, but for want of starch they hung like weeping willows over hands that were fine and delicate. His breeches were of plain black cloth, and his black stockings were of cotton—matters entirely out of harmony with his magnificent coat. His shoes, stout and serviceable, were decked with buckles of cheap, lack-lustre paste. But for his engaging and ingenuous countenance, André-Louis must have set him down as a knight of that order which lives dishonestly by its wits. As it was, he suspended judgment whilst pushing investigation further by a study of the girl. At the outset, be it confessed that it was a study that attracted him prodigiously. And this notwithstanding the fact that, bookish and studious as were his ways, and in despite of his years, it was far from his habit to waste consideration on femininity.

The child—she was no more than that, perhaps twenty at the most—possessed in addition to the allurements of face and shape that went very near perfection, a sparkling vivacity and a grace of movement the like of which André-Louis did not remember ever before to have beheld assembled in one person. And her voice too—that musical, silvery voice that had awakened him, possessed in its exquisite modulations an allurement of its own that must have been irresistible, he thought, in the ugliest of her sex. She wore a hooded mantle of green cloth, and the hood being thrown back, her dainty head was all revealed to him. There were glints of gold struck by the morning sun from her light nut-brown hair that hung in a cluster of curls about her oval face. Her complexion was of a delicacy that he could compare only with a rose petal. He could not at that distance discern the colour of her eyes, but he guessed them blue, as he admired the sparkle of them under the fine, dark line of eyebrows.

He could not have told you why, but he was conscious that it aggrieved him to find her so intimate with this pretty young fellow, who was partly clad, as it appeared, in the cast-offs of a nobleman. He could not guess her station, but the speech that reached him was cultured in tone and word. He strained to listen.

"I shall know no peace, Léandre, until we are safely wedded," she was saying. "Not until then shall I count myself beyond his reach. And yet if we marry without his consent, we but make trouble for ourselves, and of gaining his consent I almost despair."

Evidently, thought André-Louis, her father was a man of sense, who saw through the shabby finery of Monsieur Léandre, and was not to be dazzled by cheap paste buckles.

"My dear Climène," the young man was answering her, standing squarely before her, and holding both her hands, "you are wrong to despond. If I do not reveal to you all the stratagem that I have prepared to win the consent of your unnatural parent, it is because I am loth to rob you of the pleasure of the surprise that is in store. But place your faith in me, and in that ingenious friend of whom I have spoken, and who should be here at any moment."

The stilted ass! Had he learnt that speech by heart in advance or was he by nature a pedantic idiot who expressed himself in this set and formal manner? How came so sweet a blossom to waste her perfumes on such a prig? And what a ridiculous name the creature owned!

Thus André-Louis to himself from his observatory. Meanwhile, she was speaking.

"That is what my heart desires, Léandre, but I am beset by fears lest your stratagem should be too late. I am to marry this horrible Marquis of Sbrufadelli this very day. He arrives by noon. He comes to sign the contract—to make me the Marchioness of Sbrufadelli. Oh!" It was a cry of pain from that tender young heart. "The very name burns my lips. If it were mine I could never utter it—never! The man is so detestable. Save me, Léandre! Save me! You are my only hope."

André-Louis was conscious of a pang of disappointment. She failed to soar to the heights he had expected of her. She was evidently infected by the stilted manner of her ridiculous lover. There was an atrocious lack of sincerity about her words. They touched his mind, but left his heart unmoved. Perhaps this was because of his antipathy to Monsieur Léandre and to the issue involved.

So her father was marrying her to a marquis! That implied birth on her side. And yet she was content to pair off with this dull young adventurer in the tarnished lace! It was, he supposed, the sort of thing to be expected of a sex that all philosophy had taught him to regard as the maddest part of a mad species.

"It shall never be!" Monsieur Léandre was storming passionately. "Never! I swear it!" He shook his puny fist at the blue vault of heaven—Ajax defying Jupiter. "Ah, but here comes our subtle friend . . ." (André-Louis did not catch the name, Monsieur Léandre having at that moment turned to face the gap in the hedge). "He will bring us news, I know."

André-Louis looked also in the direction of the gap. Through it emerged a lean, slight man in a rusty cloak and a three-cornered hat worn well down over his nose so as to shade his face. And when presently he doffed this hat, and made a sweeping bow to the young lovers, André-Louis confessed to himself that had he been cursed with such a hang-dog countenance he would have worn his hat in precisely such a manner, so as to conceal as much of it as possible. If Monsieur Léandre appeared to be wearing, in part at least, the cast-offs of a nobleman, the newcomer appeared to be wearing the cast-offs of Monsieur Léandre. Yet despite his vile clothes and viler face, with its three days' growth of beard, the fellow carried himself with a certain air; he positively strutted as he advanced, and he made a leg in a manner that was courtly and practised.

"Monsieur," said he, with the air of a conspirator, "the time for action has arrived, and so has the Marquis. That is why."

The young lovers sprang apart in consternation; Climène with clasped hands, parted lips and a bosom that raced distractingly under its white fichu-menteur; Monsieur Léandre agape, the very picture of foolishness and dismay.

Meanwhile the newcomer rattled on. "I was at the inn an hour ago when he descended there, and I studied him attentively whilst he was at breakfast. Having done so, not a single doubt remains me of our success. As for what he looks like, I could entertain you at length upon the fashion in which Nature has designed his gross fatuity. But that is no matter. We are concerned with what he is, with the wit of him. And I tell you confidently that I find him so dull and stupid that you may be sure he will tumble headlong into each and all of the traps I have so cunningly prepared for him."

"Tell me, tell me! Speak!" Climène implored him, holding out her hands in a supplication no man of sensibility could have resisted. And then on the instant she caught her breath on a faint scream. "My father!" she exclaimed, turning distractedly from one to the other of those two. "He is coming! We are lost!"

"You must fly, Climène!" said Monsieur Léandre.

"Too late!" she sobbed. "Too late! He is here."

"Calm, mademoiselle, calm!" the subtle friend was urging her. "Keep calm and trust to me. I promise you that all shall be well."

"Oh!" cried Monsieur Léandre limply. "Say what you will, my friend, this is ruin—the end of all our hopes. Your wits will never extricate us from this. Never!"

Through the gap strode now an enormous man with an inflamed moon face and a great nose, decently dressed after the fashion of a solid bourgeois. There was no mistaking his anger, but the expression that it found was an amazement to André-Louis.

"Léandre, you're an imbecile! Too much phlegm, too much phlegm! Your words wouldn't convince a ploughboy! Have you considered what they mean at all? Thus," he cried, and casting his round hat from him in a broad gesture, he took his stand at Monsieur Léandre's side, and repeated the very words that Léandre had lately uttered, what time the three observed him coolly and attentively.

"Oh, say what you will, my friend, this is ruin—the end of all our hopes. Your wits will never extricate us from this. Never!"

A frenzy of despair vibrated in his accents. He swung again to face Monsieur Léandre. "Thus," he bade him contemptuously. "Let the passion of your hopelessness express itself in your voice. Consider that you are not asking Scaramouche here whether he has put a patch in your breeches. You are a despairing lover expressing . . ."

He checked abruptly, startled. André-Louis, suddenly realising what was afoot, and how duped he had been, had loosed his laughter. The sound of it pealing and booming uncannily under the great roof that so immediately confined him was startling to those below.

The fat man was the first to recover, and he announced it after his own fashion in one of the ready sarcasms in which he habitually dealt.

"Hark!" he cried, "the very gods laugh at you, Léandre." Then he addressed the roof of the barn and its invisible tenant. "Hi! You there!"

André-Louis revealed himself by a further protrusion of his touzled head.

"Good-morning," said he pleasantly. Rising now on his knees, his horizon was suddenly extended to include the broad common beyond the hedge. He beheld there an enormous and very battered travelling chaise, a cart piled up with timbers partly visible under the sheet of oiled canvas that covered them, and a sort of house on wheels equipped with a tin chimney from which the smoke was slowly curling. Three heavy Flemish horses and a couple of donkeys—all of them hobbled—were contentedly cropping the grass in the neighbourhood of these vehicles. These, had he perceived them sooner, must have given him the clue to the queer scene that had been played under his eyes. Beyond the hedge, other figures were moving. Three at that moment came crowding into the gap—a saucy-faced girl with a tip-tilted nose, whom he supposed to be Columbine, the soubrette; a lean, active youngster, who must be the lackey Harlequin; and another rather loutish youth who might be a zany or an apothecary.

All this he took in at a comprehensive glance that consumed no more time than it had taken him to say good-morning. To that good-morning Pantaloon replied in a bellow:

"What the devil are you doing up there?"

"Precisely the same thing that you are doing down there," was the answer. "I am trespassing."

"Eh!" said Pantaloon, and looked at his companions, some of the assurance beaten out of his big red face. Although

the thing was one that they did habitually, to hear it called by its proper name was disconcerting.

"Whose land is this?" he asked, with diminishing assurance.

André-Louis answered whilst drawing on his stockings. "I believe it to be the property of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr.'

"That's a high-sounding name. Is the gentleman severe?"

"The gentleman," said André-Louis, "is the devil; or rather, I should prefer to say, upon reflection, that the devil is a gentleman by comparison."

"And yet," interposed the villainous-looking fellow who played Scaramouche, "by your own confessing you don't hesitate, yourself, to trespass upon his property."

"Ah, but then, you see, I am a lawyer. And lawyers are notoriously unable to observe the law, just as actors are notoriously unable to act. Moreover, sir, nature imposes her limits upon us; and nature conquers respect for law as she conquers all else. Nature conquered me last night when I had got as far as this. And so I slept here without regard for the very high and puissant Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. At the same time, Monsieur Scaramouche, you'll observe that I did not flaunt my trespass quite as openly as you and your companions."

Having donned his boots, André-Louis came nimbly to the ground in his shirt-sleeves, his riding-coat over his arm. As he stood there to don it, the little cunning eyes of the heavy father conned him in detail. Observing that his clothes, if plain, were of a good fashion, that his shirt was of fine cambric, and that he expressed himself like a man of culture, such as he claimed to be, Monsieur Pantaloon was disposed to be civil.

"I am very grateful to you for the warning, sir," he was beginning.

"Act upon it, my friend. The gardes champêtres of Monsieur d'Azyr have orders to fire on trespassers. Imitate me, and decamp."

They followed him upon the instant through that gap in the hedge to the encampment on the common. There André-Louis took his leave of them. But as he was turning away, he perceived a young man of the company performing his morning toilet at a bucket placed upon one of the wooden steps at the tail of the house on wheels. A moment he hesitated, then he turned frankly to Monsieur Pantaloon, who was still at his elbow.

"If it were not unconscionable to encroach so far upon your

hospitality, monsieur," said he, "I would beg leave to imitate that very excellent young gentleman before I leave you."

"But, my dear sir!" Good-nature oozed out of every pore of the fat body of the master-player. "It is nothing at all. But, by all means. Rhodomont will provide what you require. He is the dandy of the company in real life, though a fire-eater on the stage. Hi, Rhodomont!"

The young ablutionist straightened his long body from the right angle in which it had been bent over the bucket, and looked out through a foam of soap-suds. Pantaloon issued an order, and Rhodomont, who was indeed as gentle and amiable off the stage as he was formidable and terrible upon it, made the stranger free of the bucket in the friendliest manner.

So André-Louis once more removed his neckcloth and his coat, and rolled up the sleeves of his fine shirt, whilst Rhodomont procured him soap, a towel, and presently a broken comb, and even a greasy hair-ribbon, in case the gentleman should have lost his own. This last André-Louis declined, but the comb he gratefully accepted, and having presently washed himself clean, stood, with the towel flung over his left shoulder, restoring order to his dishevelled locks before a broken piece of mirror affixed to the door of the travelling house.

He was standing thus, what time the gentle Rhodomont babbled aimlessly at his side, when his ears caught the sound of hooves. He looked over his shoulder carelessly, and then stood frozen, with uplifted comb and loosened mouth. Away across the common, on the road that bordered it, he beheld a party of seven horsemen in the blue coats with red facings of the maréchaussée.

Not for a moment did he doubt what was the quarry of this prowling gendarmerie. It was as if the chill shadow of the gallows had fallen suddenly upon him.

And then the troop halted, abreast with them, and the sergeant leading it sent his bawling voice across the common.

"Hi, there! Hi!" His tone rang with menace.

Every member of the company—and there were some twelve in all—stood at gaze. Pantaloon advanced a step or two, stalking, his head thrown back, his manner that of a King's Lieutenant.

"Now what the devil's this?" quoth he, but whether of Fate or Heaven or the sergeant was not clear. Then, raising his voice to shout, he asked again: "What is it?"

There was a brief colloquy among the horsemen, then they came trotting across the common straight towards the players' encampment.

André-Louis still remained standing at the tail of the travelling house. He was still passing the comb through his straggling hair, but mechanically and unconsciously. His mind was all intent upon the advancing troop, his wits alert and gathered together for a leap in whatever direction should be indicated.

Still in the distance, but evidently impatient, the sergeant bawled a question.

"Who gave you leave to encamp here?"

It was a question that reassured André-Louis not at all. He was not deceived by it into supposing, or even hoping, that the business of these men was merely to round up vagrants and trespassers. That was no part of their real duty; it was something done in passing—done, perhaps, in the hope of levying a tax of their own. It was very long odds that they were from Rennes, and that their real business was the hunting down of a young lawyer charged with sedition. Meanwhile Pantaloon was shouting back:

"Who gave us leave, do you say? What leave? This is communal land, free to all."

The sergeant laughed unpleasantly, and came on, his troop following.

"There is," said a voice at Pantaloon's elbow, "no such thing as communal land in the proper sense in all Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr's vast domain. This is a terre censive, and his bailiffs collect his dues from all who send their beasts to graze here."

Pantaloon turned to behold at his side André-Louis in his shirt-sleeves, and without a neckcloth, the towel still trailing over his left shoulder, a comb in his hand, his hair half dressed.

"God of God!" swore Pantaloon, "but it is an ogre, this Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr."

"I have told you already what I think of him," said André-Louis. "As for these fellows, you had better let me deal with them. I have experience of their kind." And without waiting for Pantaloon's consent, André-Louis stepped forward to meet the advancing men of the maréchaussée. He had realised that here boldness alone could save him.

When a moment later the sergeant pulled up his horse alongside of this half-dressed young man, André-Louis combed his hair what time he looked up with a half-smile, intended to be ingenuous, friendly and disarming.

In spite of it the sergeant hailed him gruffly:

"Are you the leader of this troupe of vagabonds?"

"Yes . . . that is to say, my father, there, is really the leader." And he jerked a thumb in the direction of Monsieur

Pantaloon, who stood at gaze, out of earshot, in the background. "What is your pleasure, captain?"

"My pleasure is to tell you that you are very likely to be gaoled for this, all the pack of you." His voice was loud and bullying. It carried across the common to the ears of every member of the company, and brought them all to stricken attention where they stood. The lot of strolling players was hard enough without the addition of gaolings.

"But how so, my captain? This is communal land—free to all."

"It is nothing of the kind."

"Where are the fences?" quoth André-Louis, waving the hand that held the comb, as if to indicate the openness of the place.

"Fences!" snorted the sergeant. "What have fences to do with the matter? This is terre censive. There is no grazing here save by payment of dues to the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr."

"But we are not grazing," quoth the innocent André-Louis.

"To the devil with you, zany! You are not grazing! But your beasts are grazing!"

"They eat so little," André-Louis apologised, and again essayed his ingratiating smile.

The sergeant grew more terrible than ever. "That is not the point. The point is that you are committing what amounts to a theft, and there's the gaol for thieves."

"Technically, I suppose you are right," sighed André-Louis, and fell to combing his hair again, still looking up into the sergeant's face "But we have sinned in ignorance. We are grateful to you for the warning." He passed the comb into his left hand, and with his right fumbled in his breeches' pocket, whence there came a faint jingle of coins. "We are desolated to have brought you out of your way. Perhaps for their trouble your men would honour us by stopping at the next inn to drink the health of . . . of . . . this Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr, or any other health that they think proper."

Some of the clouds lifted from the sergeant's brow. But not yet all.

"Well, well," said he, gruffly. "But you must decamp, you understand." He leaned from the saddle to bring his recipient hand to a convenient distance. André-Louis placed in it a three-livre piece.

"In half an hour," said André-Louis.

"Why in half an hour? Why not at once?"

"Oh, but time to break our fast."

They looked at each other. The sergeant next considered the broad piece of silver in his palm. Then at last his features relaxed from their sternness.

"After all," said he, "it is none of our business to play the tipstaves for Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr. We are of the maréchaussée from Rennes." André-Louis's eyelids played him false by flickering. "But if you linger, look out for the gardes champêtres of the Marquis. You'll find them not at all accommodating. Well, well—a good appetite to you, monsieur," said he in valediction.

"A pleasant ride, my captain," answered André-Louis.

The sergeant wheeled his horse about, his troop wheeled with him. They were starting off, when he reined up again.

"You, monsieur!" he called over his shoulder. In a bound André-Louis was beside his stirrup. "We are in quest of a scoundrel named André-Louis Moreau, from Gavrillac, a fugitive from justice wanted for the gallows on a matter of sedition. You've seen nothing, I suppose, of a man whose movements seemed to you suspicious?"

"Indeed we have," said André-Louis, very boldly, his face eager with consciousness of the ability to oblige.

"You have?" cried the sergeant, in a ringing voice. "Where? When?"

"Yesterday evening in the neighbourhood of Guignen . . .

"Yes, yes!" the sergeant felt himself hot upon the trail.

"There was a fellow who seemed very fearful of being recognised . . . a man of fifty or thereabouts . . ."

"Fifty!" cried the sergeant, and his face fell. "Bah! This man of ours is no older than yourself, a thin wisp of a fellow of about your own height and of black hair, just like your own, by the description. Keep a look-out on your travels, master player. The King's Lieutenant in Rennes has sent us word this morning that he will pay ten louis to anyone giving information that will lead to this scoundrel's arrest. So there's ten louis to be earned by keeping your eye open and sending word to the nearest justices. It would be a fine windfall for you, that."

"A fine windfall indeed, captain," answered André-Louis, laughing. But the sergeant had touched his horse with the spur, and was already trotting off in the wake of his men. André-Louis continued to laugh, quite silently, as he sometimes did when the humour of a jest was peculiarly keen.

Then he turned slowly about, and came back towards Pantaloon and the rest of the company, who were now all grouped together, at gaze.

Pantaloon advanced to meet him with both hands outheld. For a moment André-Louis thought he was about to be embraced.

"We hail you our saviour!" the big man declaimed. "Already the shadow of the gaol was creeping over us, chilling us to the very marrow. For though we be poor, yet are we all honest folk and not one of us has ever suffered the indignity of prison. Nor is there one of us would survive it. But for you, my friend, it might have happened. What magic did you work?"

"The magic that is to be worked in France with a King's portrait. The French are a very loyal nation, as you will have observed. They love their King—and his portrait even better than himself, especially when it is wrought in gold. But even in silver it is respected. The sergeant was so overcome by the sight of that noble visage—on a three-livre piece—that his anger vanished, and he has gone his ways leaving us to depart in peace."

"Ah, true! He said we must decamp. About it, my lads! Come, come . . ."

"But not until after breakfast," said André-Louis. "A half-hour for breakfast was conceded us by that loyal fellow, so deeply was he touched. True, he spoke of possible gardes champêtres. But he knows as well as I do that they are not seriously to be feared, and that if they came, again the King's portrait—wrought in copper this time—would produce the same melting effect upon them. So, my dear Monsieur Pantaloon, break your fast at your ease. I can smell your cooking from here, and from the smell I argue that there is no need to wish you a good appetite."

"My friend, my saviour!" Pantaloon flung a great arm about the young man's shoulders. "You shall stay to breakfast with us."

"I confess to a hope that you would ask me," said André-Louis.

CHAPTER II

THE SERVICE OF THESPIS

THEY were, thought André-Louis, as he sat down to breakfast with them behind the itinerant house, in the bright sunshine that tempered the cold breath of that November morning, an odd and yet an attractive crew. An air of gaiety pervaded them. They affected to have no cares, and made merry over the trials and tribulations of their nomadic life. They were curiously, yet amiably, artificial; histrionic in their manner of discharging the most commonplace of functions; exaggerated in their gestures; stilted and affected in their speech. They seemed indeed to belong to a world apart, a world of unreality which became real only on the planks of their stage, in the glare of their footlights. Good-fellowship bound them one to another; and André-Louis reflected cynically that this harmony amongst them might be the cause of their apparent unreality. In the real world, greedy striving and the emulation of acquisitiveness preclude such amity as was present here.

They numbered exactly eleven, three women and eight men; and they addressed each other by their stage names: names which denoted their several types, and never—or only very slightly—varied, no matter what might be the play that they performed.

"We are," Pantaloon informed him, "one of those few remaining staunch bands of real players, who uphold the traditions of the old Italian Commedia dell'Arte. Not for us to vex our memories and stultify our wit with the stilted phrases that are the fruit of a wretched author's lucubrations. Each of us is in detail his own author in a measure as he develops the part assigned to him. We are improvisers—improvisers of the old and noble Italian school."

"I had guessed as much," said André-Louis, "when I discovered you rehearsing your improvisations."

Pantaloon frowned.

"I have observed, young sir, that your humour inclines to the pungent, not to say the acrid. It is very well. It is, I suppose, the humour that should go with such a countenance. But it may lead you astray, as in this instance. That

rehearsal—a most unusual thing with us—was necessitated by the histrionic rawness of our Léandre. We are seeking to inculcate into him by training an art with which Nature neglected to endow him against his present needs. Should he continue to fail in doing justice to our schooling . . . . But we will not disturb our present harmony with the unpleasant anticipation of misfortunes which we still hope to avert. We love our Léandre, for all his faults. Let me make you acquainted with our company."

And he proceeded to introduction in detail. He pointed out the long and amiable Rhodomont, whom André-Louis already knew.

"His length of limb and hooked nose were his superficial qualifications to play roaring captains," Pantaloon explained. "His lungs have justified our choice. You should hear him roar. At first we called him Spavento or Épouvante. But that was unworthy of so great an artist. Not since the superb Mondor amazed the world has so thrasonical a bully been seen upon the stage. So we conferred upon him the name of Rhodomont that Mondor made famous; and I give you my word, as an actor and a gentleman—for I am a gentleman, monsieur, or was—that he has justified us."

His little eyes beamed in his great swollen face as he turned their gaze upon the object of his encomium. The terrible Rhodomont, confused by so much praise, blushed like a schoolgirl as he met the solemn scrutiny of André-Louis.

"Then here we have Scaramouche, whom also you already know. Sometimes he is Scapin and sometimes Coviello, but in the main Scaramouche, to which, let me tell you, he is best suited—sometimes too well suited, I think. For he is Scaramouche not only on the stage, but also in the world. He has a gift of sly intrigue, an art of setting folk by the ears, combined with an impudent aggressiveness upon occasion when he considers himself safe from reprisals. He is Scaramouche, the little skirmisher, to the very life. I could say more. But I am by disposition charitable, and loving to all mankind."

"As the priest said when he kissed the serving-wench," snarled Scaramouche, and went on eating.

"His humour, like your own, you will observe is acrid," said Pantaloon. He passed on. "Then that rascal with the lumpy nose and the grinning bucolic countenance is, of course. Pierrot. Could he be aught else?"

"I could play lovers a deal better," said the rustic cherub.

"That is the delusion proper to Pierrot," said Pantaloon contemptuously. "This heavy, beetle-browed ruffian, who

has grown old in sin, and whose appetite increases with his years, is Polichinelle. Each one, as you perceive, is designed by Nature for the part he plays. This nimble, freckled jackanapes is Harlequin; not your spangled Harlequin into which modern degeneracy has debased that first-born of Momus, but the genuine original zany of the Commedia, ragged and patched, an impudent, cowardly, blackguardly clown."

"Each one of us, as you perceive," said Harlequin, mimicking the leader of the troupe, "is designed by Nature for the part he plays."

"Physically, my friend—physically only, else we should not have so much trouble in teaching this beautiful Léandre to become a lover. Then we have Pasquariel here, who is sometimes an apothecary, sometimes a notary, sometimes a lackey—an amiable, accommodating fellow. He is also an excellent cook, being a child of Italy, that land of gluttons. And, finally, you have myself, who as the father of the company very properly play, as Pantaloon, the rôles of father. Sometimes, it is true, I am a deluded husband, and sometimes an ignorant, self-sufficient doctor. But it is rarely that I find it necessary to call myself other than Pantaloon. For the rest, I am the only one who has a name—a real name. It is Binet, monsieur.

"And now for the ladies. First in order of seniority we have Madame there." He waved one of his great hands towards a buxom, smiling blonde of five-and-forty, who was seated on the lowest step of the travelling house. "She is our Duègne, or Mother, or Nurse, as the case requires. She is known quite simply and royally as Madame. If she ever had a name in the world, she has long since forgotten it, which is perhaps as well. Then we have this pert jade with the tip-tilted nose and the wide mouth, who is of course our soubrette Columbine, and lastly, my daughter Climène, an amoureuse of talents not to be matched outside of the Comédie Française, of which she has the bad taste to aspire to become a member."

The lovely Climène—and lovely indeed she was—tossed her nut-brown curls and laughed as she looked across at André-Louis. Her eyes, he had perceived by now, were not blue, but hazel.

"Do not believe him, monsieur. Here I am queen, and I prefer to be queen here rather than a slave in Paris."

"Mademoiselle," said André-Louis, quite solemnly, "will be queen wherever she condescends to reign."

Her only answer was a timid—timid and yet alluring—

glance from under fluttering lids. Meanwhile her father was bawling at the comely young man who played lovers:

"You hear, Léandre! That is the sort of speech you should practise."

Léandre raised languid eyebrows. "That?" quoth he, and shrugged. "The merest commonplace."

André-Louis laughed approval "Monsieur Léandre is of a readier wit than you concede. There is subtlety in pronouncing it a commonplace to call Mademoiselle Climène a queen."

Some laughed, Monsieur Binet amongst them, with good-humoured mockery.

"You think he has the wit to mean it thus? Bah! His subtleties are all unconscious."

The conversation becoming general, André-Louis soon learnt what yet there was to learn of this strolling band. They were on their way to Guichen, where they hoped to prosper at the fair that was to open on Monday next. They would make their triumphal entry into the town at noon, and setting up their stage in the old market, they would give their first performance that same Saturday night, in a new canevas—or scenario—of Monsieur Binet's own, which should set the rustics gaping. And then Monsieur Binet fetched a sigh, and addressed himself to the elderly, swarthy, beetle-browed Polichinelle, who sat on his left.

"But we shall miss Félicien," said he. "Indeed, I do not know what we shall do without him."

"Oh, we shall contrive," said Polichinelle, with his mouth full.

"So you always say, whatever happens, knowing that in any case the contriving will not fall upon yourself.'

"He would not be difficult to replace," said Harlequin.

"True, if we were in a civilised land. But where among the rustics of Brittany are we to find a fellow of even his poor parts? Monsieur Binet turned to André-Louis. "He was our property-man, our machinist, our stage-carpenter, our man of affairs, and occasionally he acted."

"The part of Figaro, I presume," said André-Louis, which elicited a laugh.

"So you are acquainted with Beaumarchais!" Binet eyed the young man with fresh interest.

"He is tolerably well known, I think."

"In Paris, to be sure. But I had not dreamt his fame had reached the wilds of Brittany."

"But then I was some years in Paris—at the Lycée of Louis

le Grand. It was there I made acquaintance with his work."

"A dangerous man," said Polichinelle sententiously.

"Indeed, and you are right," Pantaloon agreed. "Clever—I do not deny him that, although myself I find little use for authors. But of a sinister cleverness responsible for the dissemination of many of these subversive new ideas. I think such writers should be suppressed."

"Monsieur de La Tour d'Azyr would probably agree with you—the gentleman who by the simple exertion of his will turns this communal land into his own property." And André-Louis drained his cup, which had been filled with the poor vin gris that was the players' drink.

It was a remark that might have precipitated an argument, had it not also reminded Monsieur Binet of the terms on which they were encamped there, and of the fact that the half-hour was more than past. In a moment he was on his feet, leaping up with an agility surprising in so corpulent a man, issuing his commands like a marshal on a field of battle.

"Come, come, my lads! Are we to sit guzzling here all day? Time flees, and there's a deal to be done if we are to make our entry into Guichen at noon. Go, get you dressed. We strike camp in twenty minutes. Bestir ladies! To your chaise, and see that you contrive to look your best. Soon the eyes of Guichen will be upon you, and the condition of your interior to-morrow will depend upon the impression made by your exterior to-day. Away! Away!"

The implicit obedience this autocrat commanded set them in a whirl. Baskets and boxes were dragged forth to receive the platters and remains of their meagre feast. In an instant the ground was cleared, and the three ladies had taken their departure to the chaise, which was set apart for their use. The men were already climbing into the house on wheels when Binet turned to André-Louis.

"We part here, sir," said he, dramatically, "the richer by your acquaintance; your debtors and your friends." He put forth his podgy hand.

Slowly André-Louis took it in his own. He had been thinking swiftly in the last few moments. And remembering the safety he had found from his pursuers in the bosom of this company, it occurred to him that nowhere could he be better hidden for the present, until the quest for him should have died down.

"Sir," he said, "the indebtedness is on my side. It is not every day one has the felicity to sit down with so illustrious and engaging a company."

Binet's little eyes peered suspiciously at the young man, in quest of irony. He found nothing but candour and simple good faith.

"I part from you reluctantly," André-Louis continued. "The more reluctantly since I do not perceive the absolute necessity for parting."

"How?" quoth Binet, frowning, and slowly withdrawing the hand which the other had already retained rather longer than was necessary.

"Thus." André-Louis explained himself. "You may set me down as a sort of knight of rueful countenance in quest of adventure, with no fixed purpose in life at present. You will not marvel that what I have seen of yourself and your distinguished troupe should inspire me to desire your better acquaintance. On your side, you tell me that you are in need of someone to replace your Figaro—Félicien, I think you called him. Whilst it may be presumptuous of me to hope that I could discharge an office so varied and so onerous . . ."

"You are indulging that acrid humour of yours again, my friend," Binet interrupted him. "Excepting for that," he added slowly, meditatively, his little eyes screwed up, "we might discuss this proposal that you seem to be making."

"Alas! we can except nothing. If you take me, you take me as I am. What else is possible? As for this humour—such as it is—which you decry, you might turn it to profitable account."

"How so?"

"In several ways. I might, for instance, teach Léandre to make love."

Pantaloon burst into laughter. "You do not lack confidence in your powers. Modesty does not afflict you."

"Therefore I evince the first quality necessary in an actor."

"Can you act?"

"Upon occasion, I think," said André-Louis, his thought upon his performance at Rennes and Nantes, and wondering when in all his histrionic career Pantaloon's improvisations had so rent the heart of mobs.

Monsieur Binet was musing. "Do you know much of the theatre?" quoth he.

"Everything," said André-Louis.

"I said that modesty will prove no obstacle in your career."

"But consider. I know the work of Beaumarchais, Églantine, Mercier, Chenier, and many other of our contemporaries. Then I have read, of course, Molière, Racine, Corneille,

besides many lesser French writers. Of foreign authors, I am intimate with the works of Gozzi, Goldoni, Guarini, Bibbiena, Machiavelli, Secchi, Tasso, Ariosto and Fedini Whilst of those of antiquity I know most of the work of Euripides, Aristophanes, Terence, Plautus . . . "

" Enough ! " roared Pantaloon.

" I am not nearly through with my list," said André-Louis.

" You may keep the rest for another day. In Heaven's name, what can have induced you to read so many dramatic authors ? "

" In my humble way I am a student of man, and some years ago I made the discovery that he is most intimately to be studied in the reflections of him provided for the theatre."

" That is a very original and profound discovery," said Pantaloon, quite seriously. " It had never occurred to me. Yet it is true. Sir, it is a truth that dignifies our art. You are a man of parts, that is clear to me. It has been clear since first I met you. I can read a man. I knew you from the moment that you said 'good-morning.' Tell me, now, do you think you could assist me upon occasion in the preparation of a scenario ? My mind, fully engaged as it is with a thousand details of organisation, is not always as clear as I would have it for such work. Could you assist me there, do you think ? "

" I am quite sure I could."

" Hum, yes. I was sure you would be. The other duties that were Félicien's you would soon learn. Well, well, if you are willing, you may come along with us. You'd want some salary, I suppose ? "

" If it is usual," said André-Louis.

" What should you say to ten livres a month ? "

" I should say that it isn't exactly the riches of Peru."

" I might go as far as fifteen," said Binet reluctantly. " But times are bad."

" I'll make them better for you."

" I've no doubt you believe it. Then we understand each other ? "

" Perfectly," said André-Louis dryly, and was thus committed to the service of Thespis.

CHAPTER III

THE COMIC MUSE

THE company's entrance into the township of Guichen, if not exactly triumphal, as Binet had expressed the desire that it should be, was at least sufficiently startling and cacophonous to set the rustics gaping. To them these fantastic creatures appeared—as indeed they were—beings from another world.

First went the great travelling chaise, creaking and groaning on its way, drawn by two of the Flemish horses. It was Pantaloon who drove it, an obese and massive Pantaloon in a tight-fitting suit of scarlet under a long brown bedgown, his countenance adorned by a colossal cardboard nose. Beside him on the box sat Pierrot in a white smock, with sleeves that completely covered his hands, loose white trousers and a black skull-cap. He had whitened his face with flour, and he made hideous noises with a trumpet.

On the roof of the coach were assembled Polichinelle, Scaramouche, Harlequin and Pasquariel. Polichinelle in black and white, his doublet cut in the fashion of a century ago, with humps before and behind, a white frill round his neck and a black mask upon the upper half of his face, stood in the middle, his feet planted wide to steady him, solemnly and viciously banging a big drum. The other three were seated each at one of the corners of the roof, their legs dangling over. Scaramouche all in black in the Spanish fashion of the seventeenth century, his face adorned with a pair of moustachios, jangled a guitar discordantly. Harlequin, ragged and patched in every colour of the rainbow, with his leather girdle and sword of lath, the upper half of his face smeared in soot, clashed a pair of cymbals intermittently. Pasquariel, as an apothecary in skull-cap and white apron, excited the hilarity of the onlookers by his enormous tin clyster, which emitted when pumped a dolorous squeak.

Within the chaise itself, but showing themselves freely at the windows, and exchanging quips with the townsfolk, sat the three ladies of the company. Climène, the amoureuse, beautifully gowned in flowered satin, her own clustering

ringlets concealed under a pumpkin-shaped wig, looked so much the lady of fashion that you might have wondered what she was doing in that fantastic rabble. Madame, as the mother, was also dressed with splendour, but exaggerated to achieve the ridiculous. Her head-dress was a monstrous structure adorned with flowers, and superimposed by little ostrich plumes. Columbine sat facing them, her back to the horses, falsely demure, in milkmaid bonnet of white muslin and a striped gown of green and blue.

The marvel was that the old chaise, which in its halcyon days may have served to carry some dignitary of the church, did not founder instead of merely groaning under that excessive and ribald load.

Next came the house on wheels, led by the long, lean Rhodomont, who had daubed his face red, and increased the terror of it by a pair of formidable moustachios. He was in long thigh-boots and leather jerkin, trailing an enormous sword from a crimson baldrick. He wore a broad felt hat with a draggled feather, and as he advanced he raised his great voice and roared out defiance, and threats of blood-curdling butchery to be performed upon all and sundry. On the roof of this vehicle sat Léandre alone. He was in blue satin, with ruffles, small-sword, powdered hair, patches and spy-glass, and red-heeled shoes: the complete courtier, looking very handsome. The women of Guichen ogled him coquettishly. He took the ogling as a proper tribute to his personal endowments, and returned it with interest. Like Climène, he looked out of place amid the bandits who composed the remainder of the company.

Bringing up the rear came André-Louis leading the two donkeys that dragged the property-cart. He had insisted upon assuming a false nose, representing as for embellishment that which he intended for disguise. For the rest, he had retained his own garments. No one paid any attention to him as he trudged along beside his donkeys, an insignificant rearguard, which he was well content to be.

They made the tour of the town, in which the activity was already above the normal in preparation for next week's fair. At intervals they halted, the cacophony would cease abruptly, and Polichinelle would announce in a stentorian voice that at five o'clock that evening in the old market Monsieur Binet's famous company of improvisors would perform a new comedy in four acts entitled, 'The Heartless Father.'

Thus at last they came to the old market, which was the ground floor of the town hall, and open to the four winds by two

archways on each side of its length and one archway on each side of its breadth. These archways, with two exceptions, had been boarded up. Through those two, which gave admission to what presently would be the the theatre, ragamuffins of the town, and the niggards who were reluctant to spend the necessary sous to obtain proper admission, might catch furtive glimpses of the performance.

That afternoon was the most strenuous of André-Louis's life, unaccustomed as he was to any sort of manual labour. It was spent in erecting and preparing the stage at the end of the market-hall; and he began to realise how hard-earned were to be his monthly fifteen livres. At first there were four of them to the task—or really three, for Pantaloon did no more than bawl directions. Stripped of their finery, Rhodomont and Léandre assisted André-Louis in that carpentering. Meanwhile the other four were at dinner with the ladies. When a half-hour or so later they came to carry on the work, André-Louis and his companions went to dine in their turn, leaving Polichinelle to direct the operations as well as assist in them.

They crossed the square to the cheap little inn where they had taken up their quarters. In the narrow passage, André-Louis came face to face with Climène, her fine feathers cast, and restored by now to her normal appearance.

"And how do you like it?" she asked him pertly.

He looked her in the eyes. "It has its compensations," quoth he, in that curious cold tone of his that left one wondering whether he meant or not what he seemed to mean.

She knit her brows. "You . . . you feel the need of compensations already?"

"Faith, I felt it from the beginning," said he. "It was the perception of them allured me."

They were quite alone, the others having gone on into the room set apart for them, where food was spread. André-Louis, who was as unlearned in Woman as he was learned in Man, was not to know, upon feeling himself suddenly extraordinarily aware of her femininity, that it was she who in some subtle, imperceptible manner so rendered him.

"What," she asked him, with demurest innocence, "are these compensations?"

He caught himself upon the brink of the abyss.

"Fifteen livres a month," said he, abruptly.

A moment she stared at him bewildered. He was very disconcerting. Then she recovered.

"Oh, and bed and board," said she. "Don't be leaving

that from the reckoning, as you seem to be doing; for your dinner will be going cold. Aren't you coming?"

"Haven't you dined?" he cried, and she wondered had she caught a note of eagerness.

"No," she answered over her shoulder. "I waited."

"What for?" quoth his innocence hopefully.

"I had to change, of course, zany," she answered rudely. Having dragged him, as she imagined, to the chopping-block, she could not refrain from chopping. But then he was of those who must be chopping back.

"And you left your manners upstairs with your grand-lady clothes, mademoiselle. I understand."

A scarlet flame suffused her face. "You are very insolent," she said lamely.

"I've often been told so. But I don't believe it." He thrust open the door for her, and bowing with an air which imposed upon her, although it was merely copied from Fleury of the Comédie Française, so often visited in the Louis Le Grand days, he waved her in. "After you, ma demoiselle." For greater emphasis he deliberately broke the word into its two component parts.

"I thank you, monsieur," she answered frostily, as nearly sneering as was possible to so charming a person, and went in, nor addressed him again throughout the meal. Instead, she devoted herself with an unusual and devastating assiduity to the suspiring Léandre, that poor devil who could not successfully play the lover with her on the stage because of his longing to play it in reality.

André-Louis ate his herrings and black bread with a good appetite nevertheless. It was poor fare, but then poor fare was the common lot of poor people in that winter of starvation, and since he had cast in his fortunes with a company whose affairs were not flourishing, he must accept the evils of the situation philosophically.

"Have you a name?" Binet asked him once in the course of that repast, and during a pause in the conversation.

"It happens that I have," said he. "I think it is Parvissimus."

"Parvissimus?" quoth Binet. "Is that a family name?"

"In such a company, where only the leader enjoys the privilege of a family name, the like would be unbecoming in its least member. So I take the name that best becomes me. And I think it is Parvissimus—the very least."

Binet was amused. It was droll; it showed a ready fancy.

Oh, to be sure, they must get to work together on those scenarios!

"I shall prefer it to carpentering," André-Louis confessed.

Nevertheless, he had to go back to it that afternoon, and to labour strenuously until four o'clock, when at last the autocratic Binet announced himself satisfied with the preparations, and proceeded, again with the help of André-Louis, to prepare the lights, which were supplied partly by tallow candles and partly by lamps burning fish-oil.

At five o'clock that evening the three knocks were sounded, and the curtain rose on 'The Heartless Father.'

Among the duties inherited by André-Louis from the departed Félicien whom he replaced was that of doorkeeper. This duty he discharged dressed in a Polichinelle costume and wearing a cardboard nose. It was an arrangement mutually agreeable to M. Binet and himself. M. Binet—who had taken the further precaution of retaining André-Louis's own garments—was thereby protected against the risk of his latest recruit absconding with the takings. André-Louis, without illusions on the score of Pantaloon's real object, agreed to it willingly enough, since it protected him from the chance of recognition by any acquaintance who might possibly be in Guichen.

The performance was in every sense unexciting; the audience meagre and unenthusiastic. The benches provided in the front half of the market contained some twenty-seven persons: eleven at twenty sous a head and sixteen at twelve. Behind these stood a rabble of some thirty others at six sous apiece. Thus the gross takings were two louis, ten livres, and two sous. By the time M. Binet had paid for the use of the market, his lights, and the expenses of his company at the inn over Sunday, there was not likely to be very much left towards the wages of his players. It is not surprising, therefore, that M. Binet's bonhomie should have been a trifle overcast that evening.

"And what do you think of it?" he asked André Louis, as they were walking back to the inn after the performance.

"Possibly it could have been worse; probably it could not," said he.

In sheer amazement, M. Binet checked in his stride, and turned to look at his companion.

"Huh!" said he. "Dieu de Dieu! But you are frank."

"A unpopular form of service among fools, I know."

"Well, I am not a fool," said Binet.

"That is why I am frank. I pay you the compliment of assuming intelligence in you, M. Binet."

"Oh, you do?" quoth M. Binet. "And who the devil are you

to assume anything? Your assumptions are presumptuous, sir." And with that he lapsed into silence and the gloomy business of mentally casting up his accounts.

But at table over supper a half-hour later he revived the topic.

"Our latest recruit, this excellent M. Parvissimus," he announced, "has the impudence to tell me that possibly our comedy could have been worse, but that probably it could not." And he blew out his great round cheeks to invite a laugh at the expense of that foolish critic.

"That's bad," said the swarthy and sardonic Polichinelle. He was as grave as Rhadamanthus pronouncing judgment. "That's bad. But what is infinitely worse is that the audience had the impudence to be of the same mind."

"An ignorant pack of clods," sneered Léandre, with a toss of his handsome head.

"You are wrong," quoth Harlequin. "You were born for love, my dear, not criticism."

Léandre—a dull dog, as you will have conceived—looked contemptuously down upon the little man. "And you, what were you born for?" he wondered.

"Nobody knows," was the candid admission. "Nor yet why. It is the case of many of us, my dear, believe me."

"But why," M. Binet took him up, and thus spoilt the beginnings of a very pretty quarrel, "why do you say that Léandre is wrong?"

"To be general, because he is always wrong. To be particular, because I judge the audience of Guichen to be too sophisticated for 'The Heartless Father.'"

"You would put it more happily," interposed André-Louis—who was the cause of this discussion—"if you said that 'The Heartless Father' is too unsophisticated for the audience of Guichen."

"Why, what's the difference?" asked Léandre.

"I didn't imply a difference. I merely suggested that it is a happier way to express the fact."

"The gentleman is being subtle," sneered Binet.

"Why happier?" Harlequin demanded.

"Because it is easier to bring 'The Heartless Father' to the sophistication of the Guichen audience, than the Guichen audience to the unsophistication of 'The Heartless Father.'"

"Let me think it out," groaned Polichinelle, and he took his head in his hands.

But from the tail of the table André-Louis was challenged by Climène, who sat there between Columbine and Madame.