

The Project Gutenberg eBook of Clash of Arms: A Romance, by John Bloundelle-Burton

This ebook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this ebook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you'll have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

Title: Clash of Arms: A Romance

Author: John Bloundelle-Burton

Release date: July 17, 2016 [EBook #52586]

Language: English

Credits: Produced by Charles Bowen from page scans provided by Google Books (University of Illinois-Urbana)

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CLASH OF ARMS: A ROMANCE ***

Transcriber's Notes:

1. Page scans provided by Google Books
<https://books.google.com/books?id=R29CAQAAMAAJ>
(University of Illinois-Urbana)

THE CLASH OF ARMS

THE CLASH OF ARMS

A ROMANCE

BY

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

**"MON ÉPÉE EST SI CARNACIÈRE QU'À CHAQUE PAS ELLE ME DONNERAIT LA PEINE DE LA TIRER
HORS DU FOURREAU."--*Brantôme.***

NEW AND CHEAPER ISSUE

**METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON**

*First Published . . . October 1897 Second Edition . . . November 1897 New
and Cheaper Issue . . . 1905*

TO MY FRIEND

J. G. J. PENDEREL-BRODHURST

I INSCRIBE THIS ROMANCE

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

- [I.](#) THE BRAVO
- [II.](#) THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE
- [III.](#) ONE SUMMER NIGHT
- [IV.](#) WHAT HAVE I STUMBLED ON?
- [V.](#) "HIS NAME IS--WHAT?"
- [VI.](#) THE VICOMTE DE BOIS-VALLÉE
- [VII.](#) THE HONOUR OF THE HOUSE
- [VIII.](#) THE FIRST MEETING
- [IX.](#) THE FURY OF DESPAIR
- [X.](#) "THE LITTLE WOOD AT ENTZHEIM"
- [XI.](#) INNOCENT
- [XII.](#) A LIKENESS AND A CLUE
- [XIII.](#) TO REMIREMONT
- [XIV.](#) ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS
- [XV.](#) "HE IS MINE. MUST BE MINE NOW"
- [XVI.](#) THE HOUSE OF THE ENEMY
- [XVII.](#) "A WOMAN IS THERE"
- [XVIII.](#) THE SLEEPERS
- [XIX.](#) WHERE IS DE BOIS-VALLÉE?
- [XX.](#) ACROSS THE CHASM
- [XXI.](#) IN THE ENEMY'S HOUSE
- [XXII.](#) MARION WYATT
- [XXIII.](#) L'ÉSPÉE CARNACIERE
- [XXIV.](#) THE WEIRD WOMAN
- [XXV.](#) THE UNEXPECTED
- [XXVI.](#) A TRAPPED WOLF
- [XXVII.](#) NEARER AND NEARER
- [XXVIII.](#) ESCAPE
- [XXIX.](#) THE LAST CHANCE
- [XXX.](#) FREE

- [XXXI.](#) THE STORY OF MARION WYATT
- [XXXII.](#) MORE LIGHT
- [XXXIII.](#) THE LAST MEETING
- [XXXIV.](#) ADIEU

THE CLASH OF ARMS

[CHAPTER I.](#)

THE BRAVO

"If," said the sick man, a little complainingly, perhaps a little peevishly, "he comes not soon, he is as like as not to see me in my coffin. Yet," he added a moment later, "he was ever used to keep his word. With all his faults he always did that. Prided himself on it, indeed, almost as much as on the broils and fights and troubles he was always in."

"If," said the other person in the room, "he said he would come, he will come. Andrew Vause ever kept his promise."

"What did he tell the messenger who found him when he rode to London?--in a tavern, be sure! Tell me again the message he sent."

"That he would come the instant he had seen the King--which it was most urgent he should do. That His Majesty had promised him an interview for to-day, and that the moment it was over he would take horse and ride here. Also he sent you this," and the old woman drew from a pouch at her girdle a bit of paper, and, adjusting her glasses, began to read what was written on it--though as she did so she could not resist a smile.

"Why do you laugh, Bridget?" the sick man queried, still peevishly. "Surely, knowing how near I am to death, Andrew has made no jest on me. We have not met for five years--it is quite that, come Christmas, since he has been roaming and fighting about the world--he could not do that."

"Nay, what he sends comes with a good heart, be sure. Yet I cannot help but laugh in spite of--of--," she was going to say the nearness to death in which the invalid stood, but changed it to "your poor health." "I cannot help but laugh. 'Tis a new-fangled recipe for lambswool, which he says you should drink frequently. Also, he writes that he fears you do not take sufficient creature comforts. Alas!" she exclaimed, her face clouding a little as she saw the look of annoyance on the other's, "he cannot surely guess how ill you are. Otherwise, he would scarce talk of lambswool--a draught, doubtless, he himself partakes of far too often."

"'Tis Andrew--that tells all! Andrew--the scapegrace, the ne'er-do-well, the joker and giber. Heavens! when was he ever serious, when did he ever apply himself to aught but ruffling and fighting and brawling! Yet--yet----"

"Yet, now you would see him! Long to see him! Philip Vause, you love your brother better than you think--leastways, better than you say."

"Nay, nay. I do not say I do not love him. Heavens! we all loved him. And who could help but love him, after all! Yet I would he had been more serious, would he were more serious now, as he scarce seems to have become, judging by his--his--paper about lambswool. Could he send me naught but that?"

"Remember he is not like you. You have ever been a scholar and a thinker--he a soldier and in many lands. He cannot be so sober as those who bend only over books all day, whose companions are books alone----"

"Hark!" the other interrupted. "Hark! Do you hear anything? The hoofs of a horse clattering along the road--it may be he, Bridget. Look to the window. See."

The old woman did as she was bid--going to the casement and gazing along a broad, dusty road, bordered by limes almost flowering in the warm May air, which led from the Downs above to the old house in which the Vauses had lived longer than even the parish records told of; and there, in the soft light of the fast-gathering twilight, she espied a horseman riding at a good pace; a man who, she could see very well, sat his horse easily, and seemed to extract a considerable speed from it without any effort of spur or rein.

"Ay," she said, "'tis a horseman sure enough--you have good ears, Master Philip, ailing though you be; better ears in truth than I have eyes, for they are dimmed somewhat with age; I cannot see if 'tis Andrew. Yet," she went on, as the rider drew nearer and came more into her view, while man and horse were suffused by the cherry glow of the setting sun, "'tis his form and figure, too; large, broad, and brawny. And, heaven preserve us! what a great, fierce sword clanks against his horse's ribs with every stride it takes, and what a beard upon his upper lip he has!"

"'Tis very certain," the invalid interrupted from the couch on which he lay, "that 'tis Andrew. Here, Bridget, help me up, let me see him."

"It is he," the old woman said; "lie there, Master Philip, no need to rise. He will be here ere many moments have passed. Ha!" she exclaimed, thrusting open the lattice in her excitement, "he sees me, waves his hand--he has not forgotten the old nurse--I will go down and greet him, then bring him to you": while, excited and nervous, she unceremoniously quitted Philip Vause and ran down the broad polished staircase as fast as her old legs would carry her to where the hall door stood open to the evening air, and thus reached the stoop as the horseman drew up in front of it.

"So, Bridget," he said, leaping from his horse and flinging the reins to a serving-man who came from out the shrubbery hard by the house, "so, Bridget, 'tis you in very truth, and not a day older than when I went away, I do protest," and he stooped down over her and kissed her grey hair where it waved across her old and wrinkled forehead. And, pleased with his greeting, the

woman smiled and cooed round the great man standing above her, and muttered:

"Why, Master Andrew, you are bigger than ever since you went away. What a man! What a man you are now! So great and stalwart--alas! that your poor brother Philip was as you."

Indeed, he at whom she gazed well merited the praise she lavished on his size and thews and sinews. Full six English feet in height stood Andrew Vause, and broad and deep in chest was he, with great muscular arms that looked as though it might be ill for any caught in their grip. And, though doubtless unconsciously so to their wearer, his garments themselves lent something to his powerful appearance. On his body he wore a brown buckskin tunic--good for riding in, or, perhaps, even for turning aside a rapier or dagger thrust--a tunic ornamented at the opening with quilted leather of the same kind, and fringed in the same manner below; his lower limbs were encased in stout hose, or, at least, so much of them as could be seen betwixt the ending of his jacket and the tops of his great riding boots of brown untanned leather that reached almost to his thighs. And the sword old Bridget had spoken of was there, its hilt reposing against one of those thighs, while its long length ran behind him. A wicked-looking, fighting rapier this, with its great *pas d'âne* and enormous quillons; a rapier that looked as though, once out of its sheath, mischief was meant and to be dreaded from it. For the rest, his handsome face was bronzed to copper hue, his brown moustache--Bridget's "beard on the upper lip"--hung down below his under jaw, his thick brown hair fell to his shoulders, and above it flapped a loose sombrero hat ornamented with a single black feather.

A vastly different-looking man this from the sickly elder brother above!

"Ay, Philip!" he said in answer to her mention of his brother's name, as he strode into the tiled hall, making it ring with the jangle of his brass spurs upon his heels. "Poor Philip! So he is sick--the messenger found me at the Duck in Westminster!--'sick unto death,' he wrote. Bridget, is this true, and if true what ails him? He was not strong--nor like to be, since he pored ever over those accursed books!--yet books need not kill a man. What ails him, Bridget?" he repeated.

"He is not well--seems to have no life nor strength in him. And--and you know, you have heard, even in those foreign lands to which he wrote you letters--he had a grievous sorrow fall upon him. Oh! he was treacherously served!"

"Ay, ay. And so he did write. Yet, fore gad! a man dies not for love of woman--not though she jilts him cruelly. Odd's faith! no woman ever jilted me--nor spoilt my rest o' nights. Yet," and he lowered his voice a little, and seemed graver as he asked, "who was she? He never told me that--seemed, indeed, in his letters to carefully refrain from writing her name."

"Let him tell you," the old woman said; "best hear it all from him."

"But will he tell? Philip was ever somewhat too silent and secret--I doubt me much if he will tell. Will hint at wrongs done--at cruel treatments--be vague, but say no more."

"I think he will tell you," she replied. "He has longed so to see you since he knew you had returned from France. And, Andrew," the old woman said, laying her hand on the sleeve of the great stalwart soldier whom, as a lad, she had dandled on her knee, "I think he cherishes hopes of revenge on her; above all, on him who did the greater wrong."

"Revenge! Why! what can he do? Unable to leave his chamber, a poor scholar who knows neither passado nor cunning fence of any kind," and the fingers of his left hand played lovingly with the hilt of his sword as he spoke, "nor has ever wandered fifty miles from this old Surrey home of ours--poor Philip! what can he do?"

But as he asked the question, there clattered down the oak staircase the high-heeled shoes worn by a waiting-maid, the wearer whereof said--though not before she had cast a glance of approval over the great sunburned man who stood before her--that her master desired to know if his brother meant not to come and see him now he had come home?

"Ay, sweetheart," that brother said, looking down on the comely girl, and winning her heart at once by that debonair manner which never failed in its effect "Ay, sweetheart, I come at once. Shall we go together, Bridget?"

"Nay," she said, "go in alone to him. There needs no witness of your meeting, and he has much to say. And, Andrew, you asked but now how he might compass revenge for the wrong done him. Can you not guess what he may hope to do--how it may come about?"

"In truth, I cannot," he answered, while his eye still glanced at the shapely waiting-maid now vanishing through a doorway to the back portion of the house, "in truth, I cannot. No thinker I, as you may remember, Bridget; 'twas ever Philip who did that for both of us. And, had he not so thought, the Puritan justices of our boyhood would have clapped me into jail often enough, and been glad of the chance to punish my old cavalier father through me. No, if he means to get vengeance he must make it clear. I will go and see him now."

He strode towards the wide staircase as he spoke, and mounted it, clattering still as he went; looking round the old hall, though, while he did so, and thinking--wanderer as he had been--that, after all, it was good to be under the old roof once more.

"Well enough and pleasant," he muttered to himself, "the life of camps and noise of brawls and battles and the sweet clash of steel 'gainst steel--yet good, too, to come home, now and again."

And, because he was not all a bravo nor free lance who lived only for such fortune as came at the sword's point, his thoughts went back to his childhood's day, when he used to come leaping down those stairs three steps at a time, or swung by his gentle mother's side, his hand in hers; also, he recalled her soft looks and words, and found himself remembering the little simple prayers she had taught him to say.

But by now he was at the head of the stairs, which made but one turn from the hall to the corridor above, and at that head was the door of the chief room of the old house, the room in which he knew his elder brother lay. Then he knocked gently, and, hearing Philip's eager tones of welcome, went in to him, bearing about him, as it seemed to the poor invalid, an atmosphere of health and strength, and a suggestion of fresh air and the wind that comes sweeping across salt seas and breezy downs and moorlands.

"And now!" Philip exclaimed, sitting up on his couch and holding out his two thin, white hands to the swart soldier, who came in and seized them in his own strong grasp, "now, Andrew, you have come back to me."

It seemed to Philip, lying there, that the voice of that younger brother was not as strong and powerful as he remembered it to have been once--seemed not, indeed, to be the fierce tones that the soldier of fortune should possess--as, stooping down on one knee so as better to bring his face on a level with his brother's, Andrew said very gently:

"Philip! Philip! how is it that I find you thus? Oh, Philip!" and he turned his face away for some reason as he spoke, "I did not know, never guessed, you were as worn and sick as this."

Then the other understood why the bronzed face had been turned from him, and why the strong masterful voice had been so gentle when he spoke. For, as Andrew turned back that face, the dark eyes were full and running over with tears that coursed each other down the brown cheeks, and a sob broke from his lips.

"Nay, nay," Philip said, laying his hand on the long locks of the other and stroking them. "Nay, Andrew, do not weep--I cannot bear that. You are so strong and big, you must not weep, and--and--tears are not for a soldier. Andrew, do not weep for me."

But the brawler and ruffler made no answer, only, bending his head still lower to his brother's shoulder, he let it lie there. And again he muttered:

"I did not understand. I did not know."

CHAPTER II.

THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE

"Tell me all, Philip," Andrew Vause said to his brother some two or three evenings later, as he sat in the sick man's room, "tell me all. I must know what has brought you to this." While, as he spoke, there came a frown upon his face that did not pass off for a while--not, indeed, until he had taken two deep draughts from a tankard that stood by his side, and which old Bridget ever brought in and placed near to his hand when he went to spend an hour or so with Philip.

Full of excitement as this man's life had been for years--since the soldier of fortune had fought at Candia, and at Choczim with Sobieski, and taken part in many other frays, to say nothing of countless skirmishes--he was now as gentle a companion as Philip could have desired. Nay, sometimes, old Bridget would almost grow jealous as she observed how softly he could turn and smooth a pillow, or sit patiently by his brother listening to many of the querulous complaints usual to some invalids, or, to while away the dreary hours of that poor invalid, would tell him of courts and camps and strange doings in other lands. So jealous, indeed, did the old woman grow--or think she had grown--that she would forbid Andrew the sick room except at stated hours, and, pretending that it was not good for him to pass his days there, bid him go off and ride upon the downs, or attend the hawking parties of a neighbouring squire, or take a rod and catch a dish of trout in the stream.

And Andrew would obey the old nurse, who had brought him and his brother up from boyhood and domineered over them, as meekly as though he had never roared orders to squadrons and troops in the face of hordes of Turks and Imperialists, or taken the word of command from Condé

and Turenne; and would wander idly forth until the hours came round when he might go and sit by Philip's side.

Yet he found those hours pass slowly and leaden-footedly along, being unable to take much pleasure from the simple country amusements he was surrounded by. His horse was his chief companion, and, since he saw always to its food and litter and its careful grooming, found him some occupation, while he had made friends with two old half-bred watchdogs who roamed about the place, and, at last, attached themselves so to him that they ever attended at his heels when he went on foot.

One day, too, he nearly frightened the sexton of the village church to death by suddenly bursting through the half-open door and tramping down the aisle to a large yawning pew beneath the pulpit, and entering therein.

"Good sir," the old man quavered, looking almost in fear and trembling at the swarthy cavalier before him, "this is the pew of the Vause family from the Grange hard by; none enter it---"

"Ay, 'tis, James," the intruder answered the astonished old man. "Wherefore I am here." Then he thrust his hands through his thick matted hair and put it aside from his brow, and went on: "Because I, too, am a Vause. Hast forgotten me, James?"

"Lord sakes!" the old man piped through his toothless gums, while he regarded the brown face and noticed the scar that ran adown his cheek, "'tis Master Andrew. And so it is. I mind me I did hear that you were back from foreign lands." Then, because some cheery, pleasant memory rose to his mind, his wrinkled old face broke into a smile, and he put out a gnarled hand and placed it on the buckskin sleeve of the adventurer, and said, "You take me back a twenty year and more, Master Andrew, and I recall how, when I looked not, or was a-digging of some grave, you pelted me with mine own windfalls. And how brave you look, and great and strong. Hast none of thy great strength to spare for Master Philip?"

"I would I had," said Andrew, "in very truth I do. He is sore pressed." Then he took the old hand in his own and shook it--leaving in it a shining new silver crown--and said:

"Leave me here awhile, James. It comes not oft that I can sit beneath my mother's monument--may never come again. Leave me awhile."

The windows of the church were open this bright May day, and through them he heard the dronings of the bees, the bleat of growing lambs and all the sweet country sounds, as he gazed above upon the quaint monument which his brother had had put up to their parents, Philip and Alice Vause. And back to his memory there came again his boyish days, his own turbulent youth and the gentle boyhood of his brother, and how the latter had ever interceded 'twixt him and their father--a stern, disappointed cavalier--saving him many a welting from the paternal cane. And again he thought of the mother he had loved so dear, recalled how she, too, had protected him from many a chastisement, and, as he did so, bent his head forward to the pew rail and said some kind of prayer. Perhaps he prayed for Philip's life to be spared, perhaps---

Yet the days passed very slowly with him; he grew sick and weary of the trout stream and old Squire Giles's hawkings, and the village greens to which he would wander and take a part in quarter-staff with the yokels, or, stripping off his jacket, would, with their simple foils, show them some passes which set them gaping wide with wonder and musing on where Master Andrew had learnt such tricks of fence.

Sick and weary, yet he knew he must not go away. Not yet, at least. Philip grew weaker day by day; the warm end of May and the coming of the leafy June brought no access of strength, but rather greater lassitude. And Andrew, though used to seeing sudden death only--death dealt out by shot and fire and ball, death swift and instantaneous--knew that, when the great summer heats had come, Philip would be no more. The village churgeon had told him this, had said that the end drew very near; the lungs were growing weaker day by day, the heart-beats becoming more feeble. Yet he needed no telling--he could see for himself.

But still he did not know who it was who had treated his loved brother so cruelly--and the time was slipping by! Then, at last, on this night, when he said, "tell me all, Philip. I must know what has brought you to this pass," the other seemed disposed to begin his story; perhaps because he, too, knew the hour was near at hand when there would be no more opportunity for the telling thereof. It was so warm that the lattice was open, and Philip, lying on the couch, was opposite to his brother sitting by the open window and inhaling the perfume of the swift-flowering woodbine, and watching the laburnum branches as the soft south wind beat them gently against the casement.

Then suddenly, as though nerved all at once to confide in him he loved, the sick man began:

"I was in London when I met her first: attending the Court, seeking to get from the restored King some recognition of our father's services to his father and his cause. Enough of that--you understand the reward of the Cavalier and the Cavalier's children! A well-bred bow, acquired in courts and cities such as you have seen and know, a winning smile, a gracious greeting, and a blessing--from his lips! a promise--never fulfilled."

"Put not your trust in princes," muttered Andrew, who had not forgotten the regularity with which his mother had taken him to the village church in days gone by.

"Ay; in him least of all. But you know him, you saw him a while ago; perhaps he gave you a promise too--if so, believe it not. Unless it be for his own purpose it will not be fulfilled."

Andrew shrugged his shoulders, and the other went on.

"She was there, fresh come from Dorsetshire, attached to the Duchess of York. Andrew," and he raised himself a little on his elbow as he spoke, "even now, sometimes, by day and night, as I think of it, it seems impossible she could have been so false to me. For, that falsehood should lurk behind her pure innocent eyes, be hidden under her gentle manner, appears incredible. Yet--yet--she was as false as hell."

Andrew shifted his seat a little, crossed the other leg, and said, "Go on."

"Not much to tell. I loved her; she said that she loved me. So--we were engaged to be married. She came here on a visit--she and a friend of hers--and I was very frank with her; told her this must be her home, that our life would be easy, but not luxurious, and she answered, 'It was enough. She cared nothing for Courts, and was only in the suite of the Duchess at her father's desire.'" He paused a moment, then he repeated, "We were engaged to be married."

"Humph!" said Andrew.

"Engaged to be married--the day was fixed. Then--then--oh! Andrew, I never heard from her nor saw her again."

"What had befallen?" asked his brother, gazing, as it seemed, almost listlessly out at the laburnum branches swaying against the diamond panes. "What?"

"Treachery of the deepest, blackest kind. I could have borne very well that she should not love me, but that she should treat me thus--flout and despise me, leave me without a word of regret--that I cannot bear. It has broken my heart."

"Did it do that?" and Andrew's voice was low--thick--as he asked the question.

"Ay, it did. I learnt afterwards from the friend who came with her here, also from her father--who cursed her name as I stood before him in his Dorsetshire home, to which I had gone to seek for her--that for some time, some weeks, she had been much with a Frenchman, a man who had come over with the woman now made Duchess of Portsmouth; that soon 'twas thought they were lovers. And then, one day, they were gone--to France."

"Her name?" asked Andrew, briefly.

"Marion Wyatt."

"And his--this Frenchman's?"

"De Bois-Vallée. He was termed the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée. They said of him that he was a discarded lover of the Frenchwoman, who threw him over when she learned that she was to be the favourite of a King--also that he had fought many duels and was so good a swordsman that he might have been a *maître d'armes*."

"So, so!" muttered Andrew, nodding his head gently. Then he muttered inwardly, "Perhaps some day we will see for this. Make trial of the Vicomte's skill." Aloud he said:

"You knew that they had gone to France? For sure you knew it?"

"Beyond all doubt. De Bois-Vallée was a bully, it seems, cared for none, vaunted himself as a Frenchman. There was a scene 'twixt him and the woman, De Kéroualle--it was overheard and brought to me--they say even that Charles broke in on him--was insulted, too. And he told the Frenchwoman that, though an Englishman had deprived him of her, he was yet about to be revenged, he would not return to France alone. Tit for tat was fair play--an Englishwoman should replace her. And they say, too, that the King and the Duchess laughed at him, the former telling him he was very welcome, so that he left De Kéroualle behind."

"He kept his word?"

"Ay, he kept his word. The night he left for France she was missing. She had gone out to walk in the garden that gave on the Mall; she came back no more. And he had been seen, this Vicomte, up and down the Mall for some time ere night fell, a coach waiting for him. Seen peering over into the garden, and with some of his countrymen near at hand--ready, no doubt, to interfere if any came to prevent her going with him."

"Has he married her, think you?"

"Heaven knows! Yet almost I think it must be so. She jilted me, but, but--'tis hard to believe she was a wicked, wanton woman. She would not have gone with him unless they were married--"

or, at least, were soon to be married."

"And this was--when?"

"Three years ago, soon after the Frenchwoman came first to England, brought over in the suite of the Duchess of Orleans."

"'Tis pity you never told me all," said Andrew, "specially since I might have made my way to Paris after Candia!"

"Andrew, I was ashamed, ashamed that even you should know it. And--and--what could you have done?"

"What!" exclaimed his brother. "What! Well! tested the skill of this *maître d'armes*--perhaps avenged you."

"It might have made a widow of her, left her alone and defenceless in a strange land."

"Possibly!" Andrew replied to this, with the careless shrug of the shoulders which he had learnt unconsciously in his foreign travel. "Possibly!" And again he spoke inwardly to himself, saying, "As I shall do yet--if he has married her."

There was silence after this for some time as they sat in the now gathering darkness, a silence only interrupted by Bridget bringing in the lamps. But when she had left them alone once more, after telling Andrew he was sitting too long with his brother, who by now should be abed, and that she would be back to assist him to it, the former spoke again.

"Bridget hinted a word," he said, "when first I came here, made suggestion that you yourself nourished hopes of punishing this man--this Vicomte de Bois-Vallée," and he pronounced the name clearly, as though to make sure he had learnt it aright--"would have done so had your health been stronger, and you more fit to cope with him."

"I--I would have done so then," poor Philip said, "had I been able to discover he had wronged her as well as me. I was mad, furious, at first. Poor swordsman as I am, I would have tried to find him out; have hurled myself against him; have, even though he had run me through and through, striven to kill him."

"So, so!" said Andrew, "you would have done that had you kept well and strong?"

"God help me! I fear I should."

CHAPTER III.

ONE SUMMER NIGHT

It was so hot a July night in Paris that all who could be so were out of doors, even the commonest people bringing forth stools and chairs, and sitting on the side-paths outside their houses to get some breath of air that might blow down the streets and alleys; while, in the courtyards of the great nobles and rich merchants, the servants did the same thing. And, as they thus took the air, their thoughts all turned to memories of country lanes and fields, and of the green woods that belted the city on all sides, and of quiet inn-gardens with bowling-greens and archery grounds; turned also, perhaps, to the recollection of cool draughts of wine gurgling pleasantly from out the lips of flasks.

A hot night, even spent thus--a hotter in taverns and tripots and drinking shops where, as always, many of the Frenchmen in Paris passed their evenings imbibing Montrachet from long-necked glasses, or red Citron from big-bowled ones, or Frontignac from goblets. So hot that jackets were thrown open, and lace fal-lals untied, and even belts loosened for coolness.

In such a way, on this hot night, sat Andrew Vause in an inn off the Rue St. Honoré, known as "Le Point du Jour"--possibly because it was chiefly patronized from nightfall to dawn by the wildest of French gallants--his jacket open and his dress generally arranged to catch any whiff of air that might blow in from the open door. He was differently dressed now from the time when he arrived at his old home in Surrey--the jacket being of black velvet and the whole of his costume indicating that he was in mourning. For Philip had been in his grave some weeks, the great heat which came in the early June of that year having sapped from him the little vitality left, and Andrew, full of a set purpose which he had resolved on as he saw his brother's coffin lowered into

the vault where so many other members of the family lay, was now in Paris bent on carrying that purpose out.

Before him on a table was a flask of wine; on the other side of the table, leaning his elbows on it, sat a Frenchman who every now and again filled his glass at the other's bidding, and then went on with the recital of some narrative to which Andrew listened attentively.

"He is," this man said, "in the *garde du corps* of Turenne, his business being always to be near the Marshal with others--to prevent his master from either being insulted or assaulted in any tumult. Naturally 'tis a light duty, Turenne being too popular just now for any such *banalités* to be perpetrated"; and the Frenchman lifted his glass to his lips and again drank--this time in a meditative manner, and as though thinking far more of something else than of the wine he was sucking down his throat. After which he continued:

"He is useful to Turenne now; doubly so, indeed. Monsieur understands that he is of Lorraine, from Remiremont. Consequently knows well the neighbourhood."

"Of Lorraine! And fighting for France! Why! all Lorrainers, with their Duke at their head, are with the Imperialists in spite of King Louis claiming their country as a province."

"Not all, Monsieur. Not all," the Court spy, for such he was, answered with a bow and a shrug, as though deprecating the necessity for contradicting Andrew. "Many of the noblesse go against the Duke and throw in their lot with France--she protecting them from Charles of Lorraine's anger. *He* is one of them and has been since '70, when the King claimed the province again."

Whereon he filled his glass once more.

"And where is Turenne now?" asked Andrew, playing with his own glass, but drinking nothing.

"The last news came from Sintzheim, where he had just beaten Caprara. He is somewhere, therefore, in that neighbourhood."

"And Sintzheim is on the east bank of the Rhine, if I remember aright."

"So, so! Twixt Philipsburg on the Rhine and Heilbronn on the Neckar."

"Ay! thereabouts. And you are sure this man, this Camille de Bois-Vallée, is there with his master?"

"Where else? That is his post. Unless----"

"Unless?"

"He is killed. That may be. They are fighting always during the summer. In the winter they go into quarters. Some returning to Paris who can get leave--and, then, 'tis as though forty thousand devils more than there are already here were let loose! Some stay there. The married ones mostly. He does, I think."

It was on the tip of Andrew's tongue to say, "he is married then?" but he refrained. This man might not know that--although he knew much of what took place in the higher circles in France. Instead, therefore, he contented himself by saying: "Why so? Do their wives join them?"

"*Si! Si!* They join them. And sometimes others--but no matter."

"Therefore you think he will be there--say next winter."

"Unless he is killed."

"Always, of course, unless he is killed. That is without saying."

"He is there now," the Frenchman said, filling his glass furtively and almost in a shamefaced manner at having drunk so much of what was in the bottle, "I know that. You bade me a week ago find out, discover, where he was. I have done it. You may rely on me." Then, with a slight simper and somewhat of hesitation in his voice, he said: "I have done my share of the work, monsieur."

"That is true. I will do mine," and he produced from his breast a small roll of what were evidently gold pieces--or pieces of money of some sort--and slipped it across the table into the other's palm. "Yet," said Andrew, as he did so, "I would you could have answered the other portion of my question. I would have paid you well--will pay you well now--if you can discover anything further."

The man opposite him shrugged his shoulders, while at the same time he was slipping the rouleau into his pouch, then he said, "*Ma foi!* In such cases it is a little difficult. *Fichtre!* It is extremely difficult. This Bois-Vallée has been so much mixed up with women that----"

"Hist!" exclaimed Andrew under his breath, while he made a sign to the spy to be silent awhile. Then he turned his eyes towards a table in the corner, the other following intuitively his glance.

Doing so, they rested on a young fellow who was scarce more than a lad--but an extremely good-looking one, with a pink and white complexion, now flushed a little, as though from too deep an attention having been paid to a bottle of amber-coloured wine on the table, upon which he leant his arm. He was well dressed, too, the garb he wore showing that he belonged to the wealthy classes, if not to the noble--though his clear-cut, aristocratic features proclaimed almost indubitably that he was of good birth. His coat of russet satin was enriched with red and silver cording, his satin breeches had handsome slashed seams, also showing red and silver lace, while the bows at his knees above his brown silk stockings were of deep frilled lace. His hat lay carelessly on the table where it had been tossed, and some droppings from his bottle had somewhat soaked into the rich black beaver and soiled its lace, while, unbelted from his body and with the sash belt still attached to it, a handsome silver-hilted rapier stood against the wall by his side. He wore his own hair, a bright chestnut flecked with yellow, which, as he sat with his back against the wall, with his eyes shut, shone like a new louis d'or against the somewhat dingy background.

Andrew had thought him asleep during the time he had been holding his conversation with the informer, whom he had sent for some days since and taken into his pay, but he thought so no longer when--on that informer mentioning somewhat above his breath the name of "De Bois-Vallée"--the youth had opened a pair of dark grey eyes and fixed them on the speaker. And the manner in which he had done so gave the astute cavalier the idea that that name was not unfamiliar to him, an impression which he would have conceived earlier had he seen the lad previously open his eyes more than once when the name of the Vicomte had been mentioned.

The young man, however, closed them again directly those other glances were directed towards him, and, since Andrew Vause and his companion turned their conversation to another subject, he opened them no more, but seemed to drop of again into a sleep with his head against the wall. Then a little later he aroused himself, called the serving-man, and paying him, as well as tossing him a silver coin for his service, buckled on his rapier and left the tavern.

"Do you know the youth?" Andrew asked, as he too paid the man and arranged his jacket and neckerchief previous to leaving the place. "He was acquainted with, I will be sworn, the name of--of--the person we have been discussing."

"Nay," said the other. "Nay. Though doubtless I could discover. Shall I follow him, watch where he goes to--find out who he is?"

"No," replied Vause. "No. I have nought to do with him, and it may well be that he knows the man; by his appearance he should be one acquainted with the Court and such circles as those which De Bois-Vallée frequents. Let be! Also, he is in Paris, and he whom I go to seek is on the Rhine. And--he knows nothing."

He did not add, which was the case, that to him, soldier of fortune and free lance as he was, all kinds of espionage were distasteful, and that, having now found out the Vicomte's whereabouts, he wanted no more spyings. This fellow had put him on the track of the man whom he had taken a vow to find and stand face to face with--that was enough. He would do the rest himself, trusting only to his own manhood and to his sword.

He briefly bade the man "good-night," therefore, with some muttered word of thanks for service rendered, and, telling him that should he need him again he would send to his lodgings, went out into the night, leaving the spy draining the last dregs from the bottle. He was staying at "Le Point du Jour" for the present, having an airy, cool room at the top of the house, but there was one duty he performed nightly ere seeking that room. That was to go to the stables in the next alley to the one in which the inn was situated, and there see that all was well with his horse--a duty no man dared neglect even though his love of his animal did not prompt him to it, so valuable an adjunct to the life and safety of the soldier was his steed. But, with Andrew Vause, the attention would have been given, even though neither he nor the steed were ever likely to set forth on any journey of adventure together again.

Outside the tavern the air was cool and fresh, and, meditating much on all that lay before him ere the task was done which he had vowed to accomplish, he strolled leisurely along, reached the Rue St. Honoré, and so wended his way towards where the stables were, casting up his eyes as he went at the portals of a grim, deserted-looking palace over which the light of a new moon showed him a cardinal's hat carved in stone--the portals of the house where Richelieu breathed his last thirty years before.

"Ah! *votre eminence!*" he murmured, "you were a man, with all your faults, worth serving. An unscrupulous devil too," he mused, "yet one who knew good mettle when you found it. Better than the upstart Louvois, better even than the great King who now fights bloodless battles and leaves Turenne and Condé to fight the real ones. Ha! What is that? The clash of arms hard by. Where? Where?"

He soon discovered, for to his well-trained ear the metallic hiss of rapier against rapier was as good a guide as any call would have been, and, darting down a *ruelle* close by, found himself in the neighbourhood of the fight that was going on, on the cobble stones of the court.

"What!" he muttered, while he hastened forward, "three engaged. A strange duel this, or, by

the Lord, two against one." Then in a moment his own great sword was out, and Andrew Vause was in his element.

At the same time he recognized one of the combatants--the fair-haired youth who had sat dozing in the tavern over his wine, now hard beset by two others--brawny, common ruffians who, Andrew made no manner of doubt, had fallen upon the well-dressed young fellow with the idea of robbery, helped at first, if necessary, by assassination. The lad was making a good fight of it, however, with his back against the wall of an empty house, and seemed to be holding his own well, although the accustomed eye of the trained soldier showed him that danger menaced the young fellow in a manner unsuspected by him.

"A higher guard," he called out as he approached, "higher, my lad. That fellow with the loose cloak on his left arm will throw it on your point else, and so disarm you. Higher--so--that's better!"

Then he reached the trio, and, for a moment, there was a cessation of hostilities.

"Ha!" said Andrew grimly, as he ran his eye over the *spadassins* who had attacked the other, "I do perceive. A little duel in which Monsieur the second is so carried away by his love of swordplay that, unwittingly, he joins in the fray. Well, we can better that. Messieurs doubtless know the gracious laws of the duello. While the principals engage, the seconds may also amuse themselves. Monsieur," to the lad, "attack your man--I will be your second and engage his friend," and the long rapier was raised to the salute in irony.

"Thanks," the young man said, feeling all the better for this breathing space, "this ruffian is my man," and in an instant he had fallen on one of the others with such fury that he had to defend himself or be trussed like a woodcock on the spit.

"Now, Monsieur," exclaimed Andrew, "*À vous.*"

But whether it was the terrible appearance of the brawny Englishman who towered over him with swart complexion and fierce piercing eye, or whether it was the equally terrible appearance of that rapier with its long smooth blade and enormous quilloned hilt, there was now no fight in the fellow--not, at least, when it was man to man and even chances!

"I am no fighter," he muttered. "I did but think my friend got the worst of it--and so came to his assistance."

"No fighter," said Andrew quietly, yet appalling the man by his look, "no fighter! Yet you wear a sword, and use it--when the odds are two to one! Give it to me."

The man hesitated a moment and again muttered something--this time inaudibly--whereupon Andrew repeated his request for the other's sword, and, to prove that he meant what he said, administered such a swinging kick to the fellow that he reeled across the narrow *ruelle*. "Now. The sword!" he said again.

Then when it was in his hand he gazed at it a moment, thinking in truth it was too good to be owned by such as this craven hound, and, next, broke it across his knee, while, seeing the opening to a drain close by, into which the water ran in wet weather, he threw the two pieces down into it. Then he seized the owner by the collar of his jacket, and, kicking him into a doorway, flung him on the step, where he lay almost motionless.

"Come out of that," he said, "until this rencounter is over, and by all the saints in your knavish calendar I will thrust this through your gizzard," and the fellow saw the rapier flash before his blurred eyes as the other spoke.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHAT HAVE I STUMBLERD ON?"

"Now," said Andrew, standing a few paces off the other two, "let us see a little skilful fence," and, his own rapier in hand, though with the point resting on the stones of the court, he looked on as a *maitre d'escrime* might gaze upon two pupils practising with the foils.

"Gently, gently," he said quietly to the young fellow who was lunging furiously at his adversary, "you will lose your breath else." And, still with what seemed to that adversary, as he fought wildly, infernal calm, he added, "thrust a little lower, otherwise you may break your sword

against his breast-bone. Thus you will find a better entrance. Pass through him easier. So, so. That's better"; and he stepped back and, looking on still with an easy approval, watched the encounter.

But there was no heart left in the ruffian now; moreover, he knew he was doomed, and he uttered, therefore, a piercing shriek for mercy to which his opponent, his blood well up, answered with another angry lunge.

"Well, then," exclaimed Andrew, "make an end of it. The people above are opening their windows--the watch will be here next--prick him and have done with it. Take him in the shoulder, he is not worth killing. Good! that's it. A pretty thrust."

The lad had followed his instructions perfectly, and, beating down the other's guard, had driven his point two inches into the fellow's right deltoid, which he received with a yell, his blade clattering on to the stones as it dropped from his wounded arm.

"Well done," said Andrew, "now come along." And, picking up first the rich laced beaver, which had fallen off the young fellow's head in the encounter, he took him by the arm and led him out into the Rue Richelieu.

"A little breathless, eh?" he asked, as he heard the boy's lungs working heavily. "A little blown! No matter, you fought a good fight--though they might have beaten you in the end. I see," he added, "you know something of the science."

"Yes," the other answered, while--they being now some distance from the place where he had been attacked--he leant against the wall to recover his breath. "Yes, I know something of it. And I could have done better had I not drunk that last accursed bottle. But I was athirst, as, indeed, I am now."

"Well. Well. Come into the nearest tavern and we will have another--now is the time when a cup will do you good. Yet, arrange yourself first, you are a little dishevelled, and your hat is dirty."

"Nay," said the other with a laugh, "no more taverns for me to-night. But I live hard by, was taking a short way home when those fellows set on me; come with me. There is some good wine at our house."

"Humph!" said Andrew, "the night is late--hark! there is St. Roch striking midnight now--too late for wassailing! And--you do not know me--yet you ask me to your house!"

"Not know you! St. Denis! I do, though. I know enough to see what you are. First, an Englishman--good as you have the French your accent tells that. I wonder," he interjected, "if you are going to join Turenne? There are hundreds of your countrymen with him. Then next--"

"Ay, next?" asked Andrew, not heeding the remark about Turenne. He was going to join Turenne, or, at least, proceed to where his army was, but he had seen the boy's eyes open when the name of one was mentioned who was already with the great marshal, and, at present, he held his peace. "What next?"

"Next, you are *un brave homme*. You saved my life--certainly saved me from getting a bad wound--and prevented those vagabonds from pillaging me; they saw this, I suppose," and he touched lightly with his fingers a thick gold chain round his neck to which a medallion hung, "and wanted it. And, if you had desired, you could have slain all three of us," he continued, with another laugh that so touched Andrew's sense of humour that, scarce knowing why, he laughed too. Then the boy added, "Come, come! I must know more of you. You are a soldier, anyone can see that; well, so am I. Come, I say."

"So you are a soldier, eh?" Andrew said, taken with a liking for the young fellow and his frank open manner, and walking unresistingly now by his side towards the house he was leading him to. "A soldier. A young one, though you understand swordplay, or will later, as well as many an older man."

"We are all soldiers in our family," his companion replied. Then he looked proudly at the great form beside him, and said, "I have made two campaigns, though I am but seventeen."

"Ay," replied Andrew, "no doubt. You French gentlemen go to the wars early, I know. I have served with many such; younger, too, than you. There was, now, at Choczim--so!" he broke off as the lad halted at a great wooden door that doubtless opened into a large courtyard, "is this your house?"

"It is," the other answered, kicking meanwhile against the lower part of the huge door, as though, thereby, to summon someone from within. "The fiend take old Pierre, he is again asleep." And he kicked once more and hammered with his fist. Then, at Andrew's thoughtful suggestion that the noise might wake his father or his lady mother, he replied:

"Never fear! My lady mother, as you politely term her, sleeps at the back looking over the garden, and my lady sisters above, while as for my father--God rest his soul!--he has been dead

these twelve years. *Ciel!* Must I beat down the door!"

Even though it had been possible for him to do so, there was now, however, no necessity, since it opened a few feet at this moment, and an elderly man peering out, and seeing who was there, instantly pulled it further back to admit the young man and his companion. An elderly man who shook his head a little--perhaps from oncoming age or, maybe, from disapprobation of such hours--but who still stood aside very respectfully. Yet, from a corner of his eye, he shot a glance up at the big frame of the man who accompanied his master.

"Pierre, you sleep atrociously," that master replied. "Every night I have to hammer and bang in the same way. However, in with you and fetch a good bottle of the Muscadel from the cellar. Quick, hurry, I say. We are athirst." Then, turning to Andrew, said, "Come, sir, I am on the *rez-de-chaussée*. It suits my habits best, my mother says. We shall not have far to go."

Following his new friend, Andrew glanced at the paved stone courtyard across which they went, the old man, Pierre, preceding them with a flambeau which he took from a socket by his lodge door and ignited. Whereby the visitor saw that he was in the house of some great family, great, possibly by rank, and undoubtedly so by wealth. The old pieces of armour hanging on the courtyard walls, burgonets, coats of mail, gambesons, scaled or of chain, lances, and swords--all symmetrically arranged--seemed to prove the former, while, as they reached the door giving entrance to the house itself, the flickering light of the torch confirmed the fact that this was no home of a mushroom family of large means, or of a rich merchant, since it shone upon a great gilt coronet above the door, and, above that, upon armorial bearings which none but nobles could possess.

Pierre, changing the flambeau for a huge wax taper, led the way down a narrow passage giving off the hall, and, throwing open a polished chestnut door over which some arras hung, ushered them into a large, comfortably furnished apartment, though, like all the *entresols* of the period, low-roofed. Then, after lighting a dozen other wax candles which stood in lustres and sconces, he withdrew, saying he would fetch the wine.

"And quickly, too," said Andrew's host. "Dost hear, Pierre? Quick, quick."

"*Si, Monsieur le Marquis,*" the old fellow muttered, and so went off.

"Now," said the young man, "be at your ease. Take off, your sword, unlace your jacket, and repose. Here is a couch on which I have slept many an hour; there a fauteuil which no soldier need despise. My doting mother chose it specially. I beg you to use as much freedom as you would in your own house."

Andrew Vause accepted the gracefully proffered hospitality in the same spirit that it was offered, and sank into the luxurious fauteuil, while his eye, roaming round the room, observed with approval several of the objects in it. For they all corroborated what his new acquaintance had stated, that he was a soldier--nay, more, that he was a soldier either on active service or about very soon to proceed on such service. In one corner of the apartment was a bundle of swords of the military type--spadroons and two or three heavy broadswords; in another, hanging over a chair, was a passementé justaucorps, with military gold braid and embroidery--an almost certain sign of the owner's nobility, since scarcely any but officers of high social rank were permitted to wear this garment; also a new bridle, some horse fittings, and other things pertaining to a soldier, were strewn about.

"Now," said Andrew's host again, when Pierre had brought the wine, which, as the former held it before one of the wax lustres, sparkled like amber through its dusty, cobwebby encasing--"Now, we will drink a toast to our better acquaintance. And, first, let us know each other's names. Mine is Valentin Debrasques, commonly called the Marquis Debrasques." And as he spoke he poured out the first glass of wine, carefully following the old custom of emptying a spoonful from the top into his own glass, and passed it over to Andrew.

"And mine," replied Andrew, "is Vause. The Captain Vause late serving in the English Regiment, in Flanders and elsewhere, and to which one of our soldiers, a Lieutenant-Colonel John Churchill, has recently been appointed colonel by our King. Monsieur le Marquis, I drink your health and to our future comradeship," and he raised his glass.

Debrasques had been filling his glass as Andrew spoke, yet, by some clumsiness scarcely to have been expected from him, at the moment the latter mentioned his name, the bottle slipped in his hand, and, clinking on to the long glass beneath, broke it, while the outrunning wine deluged the tablecover. "*Peste!*" He exclaimed, his face scarlet, "I am a clumsy fellow. If I were older, one would say my hand was no longer fit to grasp a sword since it cannot hold a bottle." Then, going over to a huge buffet, on which stood several silver and parcel-gilt cups, he took down one, blew the dust out of it, and, after wiping it with his lace handkerchief, poured out some of the wine left in the flask, and, touching Andrew's glass with it, drank to him.

"So," he said, though now his face had somewhat lost its colour, and, as Andrew thought, looked white and drawn, "you belong to our auxiliary force supplied by your King, Charles. And--and--do you proceed to join The English Regiment?"

"Yes," replied the older soldier. "Yes. Charles has given me a letter to Colonel Churchill--he is

ten years younger than I, but such is fortune! Yes. I quitted the army to go home on some affairs connected with my family. Now those affairs are arranged, and I go back to serve under Turenne."

He spoke easily, yet all the time Debrasques knew that he was watching him, perhaps considering why he had been so clumsy with the bottle, and, because he himself knew what had caused him to drop it, he was far from being at ease.

"I am about to set out too," he said, after a moment's pause. "I am sent to Listenai's Dragoons. I depart on Monday next."

He still seemed, however, as he spoke, to be suffering from the nervousness which had attacked him from the time of breaking the glass and spilling some of the Muscadel; nor was that nervousness decreased by the fact that the great bronzed cavalier sitting in his fauteuil evidently perceived his state. Yet the latter, beyond keeping his dark eyes fixed on him, gave no other sign that he noticed anything.

Presently, after again filling Andrew's glass and his own goblet, which brought the contents of the flask to an end, and for which the young Marquis was profuse in apologies, offering to call Pierre and bid him fetch another bottle--which hospitality his guest declined, vowing he would drink no more that night--he said:

"I owe you a great debt, Captain Vause, for saving me from those *filous* this evening."

"Nay, nay," interrupted Andrew, with a twirl of his black moustache, though still, as the boy saw, with his eyes upon him. "Nay, comrade for comrade, that is all. I could not hear the scraping of steel without being in the fray, and two to one was foul play. 'Tis nought."

"Let me try in some way to show, at least, that I recognize the service. Now, how do you proceed to join Colonel Churchill?"

"Humph! In the soldier's way. I have a good horse, and I must find a servant and a horse also for him. 'Tis easy. Also, I know the route. From here to Metz, then through the country of Mont Tonnerre, and so on to Heidelberg. There we shall come upon Turenne's outposts, a day later reach the main army. Is it not so?"

"That is the road. Yet, Captain Vause, let me, at least, proffer this much. You speak of a servant; 'tis not necessary. I set out on Monday, as I say; to-day is Thursday. Now, with me there go six troopers from our estate by Evreux. Till they take their place in my troop in Listenai's they will act both as escort and servants. Sir, will you not ride in my company; be my guest? 'Tis but little beyond good fellowship."

Andrew reflected a moment--strange thoughts revolving in his mind as he did so; thoughts that two incidents of the evening had given birth to--then he spoke frankly, and said:

"*Mon brave gar*, I will. We go together."

"Good!" exclaimed Debrasques, "good! I thank you." And at last he looked once more like himself, the colour returning to his cheeks and his eyes sparkling. "Good!" Then, speaking very earnestly as Andrew rose to go--for, borne on the soft air of the night as it came through the open windows, were heard the chimes of St. Roch ringing out one o'clock--he said:

"And we are comrades--sworn? Is it not so? Whatever may--can--befall in the future, friends and comrades?"

"Why not, Monsieur Debrasques?" asked Andrew, looking down at the slight young figure before him.

"Oh! I know not. But say it, say it. Comrades and friends, no matter what befall."

"I say it," the other answered. "Comrades and friends," and he put out his great sunburned hand and took the lad's delicate one in his, while he saw the latter's fair complexion suffuse again, this time with pleasure.

The Marquis did not summon Pierre to escort his visitor to the courtyard door, but, instead, conducted him out himself, carrying in his hand a candelabra of three branches from which the candles therein threw forth a bright light. And by that light Andrew saw far better than he had seen by the taper the serving-man had earlier exchanged for the smoking flambeau, how the great square hall, with its staircase on either side, was filled with paintings of men of various periods--armed and looking, as the boy had said, as if all had been soldiers in their day--and also with pictures of many well-favoured women in whom he seemed to trace something of a likeness to the bright grey eyes and soft complexion of Debrasques. Also he saw a nearly new full-length portrait of a man--the oils were quite fresh, he noticed, and not laid on the canvas many months--a man young and good-looking, though the hair inclined to red, while the eyes, a bright blue, had a steely, menacing glance in them, that gave to their owner a forbidding look which seemed to warn those who gazed at the portrait to take heed how they trusted him whom it depicted.

"Who is that, if I may be so bold as to ask?" inquired Andrew, pausing a moment before this painting. "One of your house, I should suppose, from its being honoured here."

"That!" said the Marquis, "that! Oh! 'tis a cousin of mine on my mother's side. She cared for him--that is why he hangs here."

And, looking down at his host, Andrew saw by the light of the candles that once more the young man's face was deathly pale.

* * * * *

"What have I stumbled on?" he mused as he sought at last his inn, after having paid the postponed visit to his horse and seen that all was well with it. "What? What? Let me reflect. In the tavern this young Marquis was startled at hearing the name of De Bois-Vallée--that beyond all doubt; in his own house he was even more startled at hearing mine--in his agitation his hand shook so that the glass was broken by the bottle he held in it. There is some connection here! Then the picture of that crafty-looking, blue-eyed cousin whom his mother cared for--cared for! Is he then dead? And if not, who is he? Well, we will see. Time will show. 'Twixt here and Heidelberg is a long ride."

And musing still, and trying to piece one thing with another, Andrew went at last to bed.

CHAPTER V.

"HIS NAME IS--WHAT?"

"Sound! Sound!" said the Marquis Debrasques, addressing two of his troopers who carried long, slim trumpets over their shoulders, "Sound, I say, and let these slumberers know that two gentlemen set forth to join the army and fight the King's enemies. Sound to let them know that, in spite of Brandenburg and Zell, Swabia and Franconia, and a dozen other petty principalities under their chief, Austria, France is not afraid!"

He spoke vauntingly this fine summer morning as, it being almost four o'clock, the sun sent a thin slanting ray down the narrow street and illuminated the great carved coat of arms that stood out over the doorway of the Debrasques' house, while it lit up the archways and *ruelles* hard by; and, perhaps, the vaunt was pardonable. For above, at a heavily grilled window, his mother--who had folded him to her arms again and again through the greater part of the night, which they had spent together--looked forth, and by her side stood his two child-sisters. Also, he was going to maintain as best he might the honour of all the dead and gone Debrasques who had followed their kings and generals for centuries, and had either returned victoriously to this old house or left their bones to whiten where they fell.

Close by, his hat in hand, because of the presence of the Marquise at the window above, and with a quiet smile upon his dark, handsome features, sat Andrew upon his great horse; himself ready to set out. Once more he had donned the buckskin tunic now, putting off for the time being his suit of velvet mourning; but, since active service would soon be near at hand, he wore his gorget. Otherwise, he carried no body armour, though in his necessaries borne by one of the pack horses which was to accompany them, was his steel back-and-breast, and also his headpiece. The fighting would not begin till the Rhine and Neckar were in sight--no need yet to encumber himself with superfluous weight!

Ringling down the length of the street, waking sleepers in their beds and causing many to leap from them and run to the windows to see what brave show was taking place beneath, was heard the blare of the two trumpets, and so, amidst their noise, the little cavalcade set forth, the young Marquis waving and kissing his hand until a turn in the narrow winding road between the houses hid those he loved from his view, while Andrew bowed again and again to the ladies.

And, still, they woke the echoes as they went on and on till the East Gate was reached and passed, and more people left their beds to peer at them and point with approval to the two cavaliers who rode ahead of the troop--the one so young and fair and debonair, the other so large and bronzed, and looking like some paladin of old, without his armour--and at the pennons which

fluttered from the lances of the two foremost dragons.

Behind them came the led horses, extra chargers for the Marquis and for Andrew, each suited to the weight of their riders--Andrew had had a difficulty to purchase one suitable to his requirements!--with other animals carrying the baggage necessary for all--changes of raiment and accoutrements for the backs and breasts of gentlemen and troopers alike, as well as spare arms and powder and ball that might--who knew!--be wanted in the enemies' neighbourhood if they missed Turenne's army. Also--this principally owing to the forethought of Madame la Marquise and an antique housekeeper who had served the Debrasques since she was a child--two other animals carried great wicker panniers in which were many things that the poor and overtaxed inns on the road (for from all parts of France reinforcements were marching to Turenne's army, sometimes, even, in whole regiments) were not likely to be able to provide. Flasks of good wine, carefully preserved meats, fine chibbread, pressed poultry and conserved fruits; all were there, as well as many other things in the way of medicines and styptics and balms for wounds. Likewise there was much provision for the animals--which Andrew had superintended--and which was perhaps the most necessary of all, for on every one of the principal roads leading to the seat of the great war now raging in the Palatinate there was scarcely any forage to be obtained, the passage of battalions and regiments having swept bare the country round.

* * * * *

"*Peste!*" exclaimed the Marquis as, on the tenth day, they found themselves more than half-way between Metz and Spire, and knew now that they were within measurable distance of the army, "*Peste!* there is nothing left, not so much as a drop of wine in the bottles nor a drumstick of a fowl. *Madame ma mère* should have had one more pannier packed, whereby we should have done well enough, or, better still, we might have economized our resources. And the country is as clean swept of everything as this high road. What is to become of the animals?"

"Have patience," replied Andrew, "we are now part of Turenne's force. Therefore, we must take what we can. And we have already passed baggage vans going and coming for provisions; the next must be requisitioned. That is, unless at to-night's halt we find the wherewithal."

They had by now become fast friends, sworn comrades, as they had agreed to be, and Andrew had told Debrasques much of his early days of campaigning, and how he had first joined the French army with James, Duke of York, then an exile with his brother Charles. Never once, however, had he referred to Philip and the blight that had fallen on his life, nor the reason why he was now with Debrasques on the road to join Churchill's regiment under Turenne.

"For," he pondered to himself over and over again in those ten days, "silence is best. Also, why tell him that until I had learnt of the whereabouts of this rogue, De Bois-Vallée, it had not been my intention to repair here--but only to seek him high and low until he was found, and then stand face to face with him?"

Yet there was one thing that troubled him even as he went to seek his quarry; the recollection of one thing that might step in between him and De Bois-Vallée and rob him of that which he had come to consider would be a righteous vengeance.

"Suppose," he had mused to himself more than once, "suppose that, when he is at last before me, I discover that he never knew of Philip's existence, knew nothing of the wrong he had done him. It might be so, might well be. Although Philip was at court sometimes they seem never to have met and, if the woman he loved was a giddy, wanton thing, whose fancy turned lightly from one to another, she may never have told this Frenchman of the man she had betrayed."

Yet, even as he so meditated he put resolutely away from him the thought that this could be the case; refused to believe, or to let the belief creep into his mind, that the crafty, discarded lover of De Kéroualle did not know of the robbery he was committing. "And," he meditated also, "even should that be the case, there is still the woman to make my account with. She, at least, knew the wrong she was doing. I must find her." But, when he arrived at this point, he had to cease his self-communing, for he knew not in what way vengeance could be wreaked on her. The rapier by his side was powerless against a woman--some other form of punishment must be sought for!

Once on their long ride--nay, more than once, indeed half a dozen times--he had turned over and over again in his mind the Marquis's strange agitation in connection with all that was of so much importance to him--the manner in which he had opened his eyes in the tavern, the startled look in them when the spy had mentioned De Bois-Vallée's name; also he recalled again and again the lad's start when he told his own name; his pallor and nervousness before the picture of that cousin whom he spoke of as having been "cared" for by his mother. "Cared for," Andrew Vause mused again, "cared for. In the past, not now!" And he asked himself: "What had that red-haired, blue-eyed cousin done to cease to be cared for by his kinswoman any longer? Unless he were dead!"

At last he could refrain no more, and as, one day, they were passing through the soft rolling country between Verdun and Metz he spoke to Debrasques, saying:

"The cousin whose portrait I saw in your hall in Paris on the night when first you welcomed me, and, afterwards, when Madame la Marquise made me an honoured guest, ere we set forth on this journey--is he dead, Debrasques? You spoke of him as one for whom her ladyship had cared. Was it death that put an end to that care? It must be so, I should suppose," and as he uttered the question he turned his eyes on the boy by his side.

Yet only to see again the look he had seen before--half terror, half supplication!--in the other's face; to note also that the bright boyish colour, beneath the brown which had come on his cheeks during their long march, paled and disappeared at once as on that night. Wherefore Andrew cursed himself for his ill-bred curiosity as he witnessed its effect.

"No," Valentin Debrasques said, after a moment's pause, during which he leant forward and busied himself about something with his charger's bridle. "No. He is not dead."

"Forgive me," said Andrew gently. "Forgive me. I have pained you."

"Nay. Nay. Never! But--but--he is a villain, and that picture should not be there, would not be there, an I had my way. But my mother still believes, hopes--tries to believe he is not so; therefore it has not been removed."

"I am sorry," Andrew answered. "Sorry my impertinent curiosity----"

"Nay," Debrasques said. "Surely you--but--no matter." Then he exclaimed, "How good you are!"

"Good!" said Andrew, looking at him again, and wondering what he meant; pondering, indeed, whether some stroke of the sun that had beaten fiercely on them since they left Paris had not touched his brain. "Good! Good!"

"For--for--your forbearance, I mean." Yet, as he spoke, there was a look of bewilderment on the young and troubled face that mystified the other. And doubly mystified him because he had seen it there before, on the night when first the portrait met his view; also he had seen it on the face of the Marquise as he had spoken in courteous, easy tones to her during the intermediate days ere they set out. A look of bewilderment on both their faces, as though expressing surprise that he should be invariably so much at his ease and so gentle with them. At least that was how he had read those looks, and, reading them thus, had found further proof for wonderment.

"My forbearance!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," the other stammered, evidently much distressed, though still with the perplexity growing greater in his face. "Yes, I mean to refrain from questioning further. We--I--never mention him. I hate him and despise him. I wonder you----"

"I will never," said Andrew, "wound you on that score again, at least. Henceforth I am dumb." And, to his surprise, as he spoke Debrasques put out his gauntleted hand and grasped his own with a glance of unspeakable gratitude.

Which only added further to Andrew Vause's mystification and caused him to ride on still more deeply wrapped in meditation.

And now as they drew near Neustadt at nightfall and began to speculate on what accommodation might be obtained at the inns, if any--since they knew that two regiments of Dragoons, "the King's" and "The Queen's" were marching ahead of them to reinforce Turenne, who had suffered heavily at Sintzheim--they observed that the whole heavens appeared on fire and were suffused with a bright red colour. Also, into the vast vault thus tinged, there shot up great flecks of flame of a deeper, more crimson hue, with sometimes amid them saffron-coloured ones, while, plain against the still lingering remnants of daylight, great masses of dun-coloured smoke arose.

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed Debrasques, while all, including dragoons and those who attended to the led horses, looked on amazed. "It must be the city of Spires in flames. Who has done it--Turenne or De Bournonville, who commands against him?"

"Nay," said Andrew, "no city that, in flames, my lad. Rather a dozen--if there were so many around! No city, I say. See where the flames themselves fly up to the reddened sky; observe. They rise from all points ahead of us, and, in some cases, are miles apart. Debrasques," he added solemnly, "I have seen such as this before. It has been done here before, too, I know; Tilly did it fifty years ago, and----"

"What--what--what is it?" the boy asked, the two campaigns he had followed never having shown him aught of this nature.

"This. One of the two armies has withdrawn--it must be the Imperialists, since Turenne beat them at Sintzheim--the other is destroying the land, so that no more shall his enemy find shelter nor food enough for a grasshopper. That is what it means. Yet," he exclaimed, as now the flames

and the dun-coloured smoke mounted more fiercely still into the crimsoned vault above, "it is horrible, awful! My God it is awful!"

As he spoke, there soon followed confirmation of his words. Down the poplar-fringed road along which they were proceeding, there came towards them in the night the sound of many horses' hoofs rushing madly, swiftly; and in an instant Andrew had warned Debrasques to draw aside his dragoons and followers. "We know not yet who or what they are," he said; "best stand aside and see."

On came the others even as the suggestion was followed, and--although in the gloom of the night that had closed in under the trees--they knew at once by the voice of the leader that they were of their own side. Then an officer, followed by two dozen soldiers, would almost have passed them when, beneath the poplars, he saw the headpieces of the dragoons and the glisten of their trappings, and, as he did so, he roared an order to his own men to halt, after which, amidst the rattle and clang of bridles and of scabbards against spurs and horses' flanks, he called out in French:

"Speak--what troops are those?" while, as he did so, Andrew felt Debrasques' hand clutch his arm convulsively--felt, too, that hand tremble on his sleeve.

"Answer him, answer him," he said, "or he may charge us. They are treble our number."

And from the Marquis's lips there came, in response to the demand, the words:

"A detachment of Listenai's dragoons and an English officer about to join the Marshal."

"Whose voice is that?" called back the other in a tone of astonishment.

"The voice of Valentin, Marquis Debrasques."

"Ha! I thought so. So you are here, are you? Well, I have no time to waste on you. Where are the dragoons of the 'King's' and 'Queen's' regiments?"

"Ahead of us," answered the deep voice of Andrew, he noticing that Debrasques seemed more and more agitated--indeed, almost now unable to speak.

"Then they have missed their way. They should have joined by now. Have, perhaps, branched off at Kaiserslautern." Then he gave an order to the Marquis. "Ride forward at once with your party and endeavour to find them, and, if you succeed, send them on at once to Spires. There is the devil's work doing to-night."

"What work?" asked Andrew.

"Our men have lost all control of themselves and are burning the villages for miles round, while the country people are massacring all those whom they can catch alone, or in twos and threes. There is one of our soldiers hanging head downwards on a tree not half a league from here, riddled with a score of bullets, and, they say, some are being burnt if surprised when by themselves. Forward at once and find the Dragoons--they are not, at least, heated to boiling point!" and, as he spoke, Andrew heard the thud of his heels against his horse's flank and saw him rush on, followed by his men. And in the last rays of daylight, aided by the glow of countless fires, he observed that he was hatless and wigless, and that, behind him, streamed a mass of long, red-brown hair.

"Devil's work indeed!" said Andrew, turning to his companion, and in that same light observing that the young man was pallid and his face twitching.

"Heart up, heart up, my boy!" he exclaimed. "The horrors of war must not unseat a soldier thus"--but the other interrupted him, muttering huskily:

"You did not see--not recognize?" and as he spoke the astonishment on his face was accompanied by a look of almost awestruck unbelief.

"Not see--not recognize! Why, whom should I see, or recognize? 'Fore heaven! what I heard was enough for me."

"That man," Debrasques stammered. "The leader. You did not recognize him?"

"Not I. Debrasques," turning his gaze upon him swiftly, "who is he?"

"Your--your--I mean, my cousin. The man whose picture hangs in our hall----"

"And his name is--what?"

CHAPTER VI.

THE VICOMTE DE BOIS-VALLÉE.

"Did he hear my question, or not?" asked Andrew of himself, as, leaving the baggage and its caretakers behind under the charge of two of the dragoons, they rode on swiftly in search of the "King's" and "Queen's" regiments which had been ahead of them all the way from Epernay, and which, since they had not kept in advance, must have branched off, as Debrasques' cousin had surmised, on the road to Kaiserslautern. "Did he hear it?"

It was impossible he should be able to answer his own question, for, even as he had asked that other one, "And his name is--what?" the Marquis had given his order to advance as well as another to those who were to remain with the baggage, and it was most probable that, in the rattle and clatter of their steeds' hoofs and their accoutrements, it had escaped the other's ears.

And now, as they again went forward--more swiftly than they had done as yet since quitting Paris--he knew that this was not the time for repeating his question. Moreover, had he not solemnly promised, all unasked though the promise had been by the Marquis, that never again would he mention his cousin? And, man of honour as he was, he knew that the promise bound him; that, even though his suspicions were growing hot and furious within him, he must be as dumb as he had vowed to be.

"Yet," he thought, "that cousin is evidently a man of mark and position in the army; soon I shall know if what my suspicions point to is the case. And then--well, there is time enough. At present our surroundings demand more than that which I seek to know and to unravel."

They did indeed! Since, as they advanced kilometre by kilometre, those surroundings became more awful. The sky was now one vast pall of fiery red stretching from horizon to horizon, yet spotted and blurred beneath in twenty different directions by dense, compact masses of flames enveloped in clouds of smoke--the flames and smoke of burning villages, homesteads, and châteaux. Also, the air rang with the sound of musket discharges, while shrieks were now and again borne to their ears by the soft wind that blew in their faces; rang with shouts and cries in French and German, and sometimes in English, and with the horribly piteous yells of horses shut in burning stables and forgotten.

Ere they had ridden a quarter of a league from where the officer who was Debrasques' cousin had passed them, they came across the body of the man he had spoken of, hanging, as he had described, head downwards from the branch of a tree, his body perforated by bullets that had evidently been fired into him after he had been strung up. That was undoubted, for beneath his head, which almost touched the ground, was a pool of blood that must have dripped from his wounds as he swung there, and which would not have been beneath him had he been shot ere hung; nor, it was certain, would he have been hung at all if already dead and no use as a living target.

"Your countryman," said Andrew to the Marquis, as they paused a moment to regard this awful spectacle. "See to his uniform--what it is I know not, except that it is not that which we wore in the old days, and I doubt if Jack Churchill has changed it."

"I know it," said Debrasques--who had recovered somewhat his calm, as well as his colour, since he was no longer in the vicinity of his cousin--peering down from his horse at the unfortunate body on which the rays of the rising moon now shone clear. "He is of Du Plessis' corps. Observe the boar stamped on his shoulder-piece. 'Tis Du Plessis' own cognizance."

As he spoke there rose upon their ears more shouting and roaring of voices than they had observed for some time--harsh voices close by bawling in German, then shouts of approval--once they heard a raucous, guttural laugh as from some deep, full throat--next an exclamation of rage in English, and a loud call in the same tongue. "Help, help!" they heard that voice cry--though Andrew alone understood it. "Help me, save me from these bloodthirsty dogs!" After which the cries were smothered with the German roars once more, and again that savage laugh rolled forth.

"A countryman!" exclaimed Andrew, "and in dire peril. And the voices are close by. Debrasques, as I helped you, help me, help him, now," and he gave the reins to his horse and clutched his sword firmly, while he headed for where the noise and that piteous call had come from. And, guided by him, Debrasques and the four remaining dragoons rode for the spot, being assisted to find it by a bright light that burned amongst a copse of young oaks.

Soon they reached it, crushing through saplings and great ferns and brushwood to do so, guided always by the roars of German throats, the shrieks of the Englishman, above all, by that wild, savage laugh. Reached an open spot, a grassy glade, some sixty feet square, in the middle of which stood a sturdy oak that had obtained perhaps one-half of what its full growth would be in days to come--and with, beneath its branches and piled against its trunk, a freshly-lighted fire

already burning brightly; a fire composed of dry brushwood and two or three young trees hastily chopped into fagots and billets.

But it was above that fire that the real horror was, for there, swinging from the lowest branch of the young oak by a cord, head downwards, and perilously near the flames as they leaped up, was the body of the Englishman whose cries they had heard--that body being swung backwards and forwards by his struggles and convulsions, the arms thrown wildly about, and the hands clutching at space.

With a shout, Andrew, who led the way, was amongst some twenty wild Rhenish Bavarian peasants, the bright sword flashing now like a streak of phosphorus in the moonlight as it darted here and there--through one man's throat and another's breast--while the horse he bestrode flung the boors asunder as a ship's forefoot throws off the waves, and while behind him came Debrasques and the dragoons, themselves dealing blows right and left, and their steeds trampling down those who had fallen. Then, dropping the reins upon his horse's neck, Andrew's great left hand seized the swinging man by the belt and dragged him to one side of the flames, one touch of the rapier sundered the rope, and, a moment later, the Bavarians' would-be victim was lifted up in front of him and thrown across the animal's shoulder--he was saved.

Meanwhile, those of the avengers--for such, indeed they were--men driven to madness by the destruction of their homes and crops--who were not already on the ground and dead, or senseless from their wounds, had fled into the darkness of the surrounding woods, and Andrew and his party were left in possession of the glade.

"Speak, man," said he to the Englishman he had saved, while he cut away from his feet the end of the rope that bound them together, and Debrasques held to his lips a dram from a flask, carried by one of his followers, "speak! How came you to this pass; how fell into the hands of these crazed fiends?"

"I--I"--the soldier murmured, looking round wildly, and gazing up fearfully at the great cavalier--who now towered above him since he had been laid on the grass--as though he did not recognize him as his saviour, "I--I--Oh! save me, save me!"

"You are safe, my man. Yet speak, let us know what else is doing. Are there more being served as they nearly served you?"

"Worse," the man muttered, "if worse can be. There were two of us caught by them, we were sent out to seek for the incoming cavalry--oh! the other. The other! My comrade, Roger Bates!" And he raised his hands to his eyes, all smarting and burning with the smoke that had got into them, and rubbed the lids from which the flames of the fire had singed the lashes, as it had his eyebrows and hair. "My comrade!"

"What of him?" asked Andrew solemnly, knowing that some more fearful atrocity was to meet their ears, more fearful even than this their eyes had seen. "What of him?"

"They took us together, and he--he," turning his glance to the body of an enormous peasant lying close by, with his glassy eyes turned up to the sky, while in his throat was the great stab Andrew's rapier had made, "he who laughed so at our shrieks--directed our tortures. Listen. They dug his eyes out with their knives--they are lying somewhere about--then, blinded, they turned him into that wood to find his way back to the army as best he might, or stumble in the river, or fall down and die."

Swiftly Andrew translated to Debrasques this last horror--shuddering as he did so, and causing his hearers to shudder too, all soldiers as they were!--and soon the wood re-echoed with the cries of two of the troopers as they went forth to seek the mutilated man, and, haply, to find him if still alive.

But as they so went forth they heard from afar off more shouts and cries mingling with the humane calls of the dragoons--loud yells of triumph from some large body of men coming their way--and, not knowing what this might mean--perhaps more maddened inhabitants of the Palatinate with fresh victims!--they stood ready to either attack them or defend themselves. Yet, in an instant, Andrew Vause exclaimed, "More of my countrymen--some of Churchill's, or the Duke of Monmouth's, men--what brings them here?"

"Our countrymen are gone mad," the rescued soldier said, "mad! These Germans have illtreated us the worst of any when caught, they are all mad. Oh! if they can but catch those who blinded Roger! If they can."

As he spoke there burst into the grassy glade, directed thereto doubtless by the glimmering of the still burning fire, a score of English soldiers all in the trappings of "The English Regiment," some with their jackets torn, some with their heads bandaged up, each armed, and with their weapons bare, and some with torches in their hands. Then, seeing the group before them they rushed forward, though, on observing their comrade, they paused, astonished.

"Who are these?" one of the soldiers shouted, rolling his eyes over Andrew and Debrasques and the dragoons. "These are no Germans!"

"Nay," said Andrew, "no Germans. These are a French officer and some of his men, and I am about to join you under Colonel Churchill. What seek you?" Intuitively they all saluted him and the Marquis, then the foremost man said, "the lives of all those devils we can find, sir. They are killing, mutilating, burning all they can come across alone--they cut the throats of the wounded after Sintzheim as they lay on the ground. We seek revenge. God!" He exclaimed, starting back as he saw the bodies of the three Germans on the ground, "What is this?"

Briefly their comrade told them all that had happened to him and Roger Bates, and how, even now, two of the French dragoons were searching for the unhappy man, and as he did so their fury became terrible. They cursed aloud the Palatinate and its inhabitants, the Imperialists and the war itself; and then, suddenly from their midst, there were thrust forth into the open two peasants, whom they had captured and dragged along with them.

"An eye for an eye," roared the leader, "life for life. We will have vengeance--none shall stay us. Roger Bates has had his eyes dug out, therefore so shall this man have his," and he pointed to one of the shivering prisoners. "You were burnt head downwards, therefore so shall this man be," and he indicated the other. "My lads, to work. Out with the eyes, some of you, some blow up the fire."

"Stop," said Andrew, "not that. There shall be no more horrors of this sort. Take all men prisoners whom you find and bring them before Marshal Turenne, but not such revenge as this."

"Who shall prevent it?" the leader asked, forgetting all respect in his fury.

"We shall," Andrew said, nodding his head to those with him, "we shall," and at the same time he whispered to Debrasques to cause his dragoons who were searching for Bates to be recalled.

But at that moment the two troopers came back unsummoned, and between them they bore the dead body of Bates. They had found him in a brook in the wood, into which he had evidently stumbled, and from which, in his blindness, and being possibly weakened by other wounds, he had been unable to extricate himself.

Then his furious comrades, seeing the body, lost their last glimmer of reason--they were, in truth, maniacs now in their thirst for vengeance. And Andrew knew it. He whispered therefore a few hasty words to Debrasques, who divined, without knowing one word of their language, all that was occurring. After which he addressed the foremost soldier, saying:

"As I have told you, this shall not happen," and he leaped on to his horse's back as he spoke. "If you want vengeance seek it in a fitting manner from Turenne. Here it shall not be gratified. Attempt to mutilate that man or burn this one, and by the Heaven above us we will ride at and cut you down although most of us are fellow-countrymen. Now reflect." And looking at him in the moon's rays, the soldiers saw that this was one against whom they could not stand.

But at that moment there came an interruption which caused them to pause, even more than did the appearance of the fierce cavalier before them and the dragoons by his side.

Above the sound of swift-coming horses' feet there was heard a somewhat shrill, though musical, English voice, saying:

"At all hazards it must cease. Heavens! Turenne will string them up in dozens when he hears of it, as it is." And a moment later two English officers had ridden into the glade, though not before the soldiers had had time to cast dubious glances at each other, even while their fury still burnt within them, and to mutter, "the Colonel."

"Some of my men, fore gad!" the speaker said, as now the two officers were amongst the others; and he rode forward into the moonlight, his slight, active young form standing out plainly in its rays, and his handsome, youthful features being quite visible. Then, in the shrill-pitched, refined tones that had just before broken on their ears, he said:

"So you are marauding again, are you?" and, turning to his companion, he bade him take all their names. After which he ran his eyes over Vause and the Marquis, and, seeing that they were gentlemen, raised his laced hat most courteously while, bowing low over his horse's neck, he asked them in French if they were attached to the Army, and, if so, to whom he had the honour of speaking?

"I am," said Valentin with equal courtesy, "the Marquis Debrasques, on my way to join Listenai's dragoons, and have journeyed from Paris to do so. May I beg the honour of knowing to whom I am accounting for myself?"

Again the laced hat was doffed, while the speaker said:

"I am Lieutenant-Colonel John Churchill of King Charles's forces, and Colonel of 'The English Regiment,' under King Louis, forming part of the auxiliary forces sent from England. And you, sir?" turning to Andrew. "May I, too, beg your name by right of the position I hold in this campaign?"

"My name, sir, is Vause; Captain Vause, once of the regiment which you now command. I am

on my way to present myself to you with a view of serving once more with my comrades, and am the bearer of a letter to you from King Charles himself."

"Sir, you shall be very welcome," Churchill said, "as all soldiers are here." And, after the exchange of a few more courtesies, he asked for some explanation of all that had taken place in the glade--the conversation on account of the Marquis being carried on in French. A few rapid sentences from both Debrasques and Andrew served, however, to explain what had happened since they arrived on the spot, while ever, as he heard of how the batch of English soldiers had forced their way to it with their two prisoners, Churchill's eyes turned to them.

Then he addressed his men, and, speaking in so quiet a tone that none could know what he was meditating, he bade them fall in and march back to their quarters, taking the Bavarians with them, but without doing them any injury.

"And you," he said, addressing the man who had been saved from burning, "can you march, too?"

"I think so, sir. Thank God I am little hurt."

"So be it. March all." Then, while he was informing Debrasques that the "King's" and "Queen's" Dragoons had found their proper route and that he would conduct him to where his own regiment lay, a thought seemed to strike him, and, turning to the rescued soldier, he said, "how came you here? Alone with Bates or in a party?"

"In a party, sir, before the French officer; but we missed them, and so those Germans caught us."

"What French officer?"

"I know not his name, sir." Then the man paused and hesitated, while Churchill looked calmly down at him; but after a moment he stammered, "the officer with the red hair, sir."

"Humph!" said the colonel, while in the now bright moonlight the others could see a gentle smile appear on his handsome face. "The French officer with red hair. True, he is scouting to-night." And, turning to the other who accompanied him, he said, "Without doubt, the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HONOUR OF THE HOUSE.

The next morning about mid-day Valentin Debrasques was making his way slowly through all the numerous impediments that encumbered the ground between the spot where the dragoons of Listenai were encamped on one side of Gross-Saxen, and the town of Ladenburg where Turenne's headquarters were. It was difficult enough to progress quickly since, first, he would encounter a regiment or a battalion passing from one point to another, or next, be stopped upon his journey by a long string of baggage waggons, or the artillery with their heavy guns moving in the direction of where the Imperialists were under the command of the Duke de Bournonville--nor, indeed, was he particularly anxious to progress much more rapidly than at present he was doing.

He was engaged upon the most hateful journey which he had ever yet undertaken; was about to pay a visit to the cousin whom, not a year before, he had requested never to speak to him again. Yet, now, because he deemed it was for the honour of his house to do so, he was going to that cousin's quarters to seek an interview with him--to demand that he should receive his visit.

When Churchill had said overnight that, without doubt, the red-haired officer was the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée, the young marquis knew that further concealment was impossible, and that the gallant soldier whose name was Vause must ere long come into contact with him--and he dreaded that contact, not for his cousin's sake, but for Vause's. For he had learnt a year ago (not from Bois-Vallée himself, but from a joint friend of theirs who had been in England at the same time as the Vicomte) of what he had done there--he had learnt, also, that the man who had been so cruelly injured was called Vause. And he remembered the name well enough--better, perhaps, than he might have remembered it had it been an ordinary English one, from the simple fact that there were many of the same name in France. He thought, therefore, that, like so many of his countrymen, this Englishman inherited his name from some French ancestor who had originally passed over to England. But, be this how it might, he did remember it as being the name of him who had been so vilely injured, and, when the man sitting in his room in Paris had said he was so

called, it had agitated him to such an extent that the broken glass and the spilt wine had been the result.

Yet, still, there was one thing he could not understand--Andrew Vause showed no sign of recognition when he saw the picture hanging in his hall, nor when he saw the man himself. Had they, therefore, never met? It might be so. He knew the Englishman was a soldier who, by his own showing, had roamed about Europe fighting in one campaign and another; the wrong might have been done when his back was turned--when he was away.

It seemed, indeed, that such must be the case from the first words Andrew spoke when, Churchill and the other officer having ridden slowly ahead, they, with the dragoons as well as the baggage train, which had been sent back for, followed.

"Therefore," Andrew said, "that is De Bois-Vallée. And your cousin. So, so! A pity."

"I hoped you would never have met," the marquis said; "that you would never have known that he was here in this campaign. Never, never! We have grown firm friends--sworn comrades--and, God! it is a shame! It is from our house that the offence has come."

"Never have met!" Andrew repeated. "Never have met!" Then, after a moment's pause, he said: "Debrasques, there must be no concealment between us, come what may. It is to meet him that I am here. I have one thing to do--you need no telling what that thing is."

"I can guess. To slay the man who stole your promised wife."

"My promised wife!" looking down at him. "My promised wife!"

"Why, yes! Was she not? I had a friend in England who knew something of his villainy."

"Had she been my promised wife and fled with him thus, she might have gone hang, and, for the matter of that, so might he. No woman who could do as that woman did would have been worth a pair of crossed swords. But, unhappily for him--for this cousin of yours--the treachery was committed by them both against one whom I loved better than myself--the gentlest soul on earth, and unable to avenge himself."

"Another Vause! Had I known that, my trepidation would not have been so great when you saw his picture--when he passed us two hours ago."

"Ay! Another Vause, my elder brother. But it makes no matter, except that, as I tell you, I shall avenge him far more than I should avenge myself. Debrasques," and he put his hand on the neck of the boy's horse as it trotted side by side with his own, "Debrasques, there is no need of concealment nor of lies and deception on my part. Listen! We stand on the threshold of a new friendship, yet, though that friendship will perforce wither and die through my future actions, I must perform them. My friend until to-morrow, at least--I am here in the Palatinate to slay your cousin."

"Yet--yet," the lad stammered, scarce knowing what to say, "that was not your intent when first we met. You said then you had returned to France to join the army."

"I returned to France to find him. But, ere I knew of the evil he had done my brother, I had procured from King Charles letters to Turenne commanding here, to Condé commanding in Flanders, one even to King Louis in command of his army in Franche-Comté, and another to Colonel Churchill now with us, for I had to be a soldier again. But, when I learnt from my brother's dying lips of what this Vicomte had done, I knew that, with those letters in my possession, I could make my way to wherever he might be. I had heard," and Andrew looked terribly grim as he uttered these last words, "that this man had the skill of a *maître d'armes*, therefore I supposed him a soldier. In Paris, on the night I met you, I learnt that he was one. Then my resolve was taken."

"Will nothing shake it?"

"Nothing--or only one thing. Let me find out that he was absolutely without knowledge that he was injuring my brother--let it be proved to me that he did not know the woman he took away with him was an affianced wife, and I cease my quest; his death may come to him how it will. I shall not seek it. Nay, if you, Debrasques, who appear to know much of what has happened, can assure me such was the case, I cease to seek for him from this moment."

"Alas!" murmured the other, "I have no such assurance to give."

"Did he know?" asked Andrew, pressing him, "had he ever heard of the name of Vause? But, why ask? You knew my name; therefore, he knew it too."

And his companion's silence and wistful look told him that he had suspected aright.

And now, on this the following morning, the young man was winding his way through all the bustle and confusion of a great army taking breathing time between one battle and another that was imminent. And, as he pursued that way, he whispered to himself:

"If I can work on his fears so much as to force him--even in the teeth of the enemy--to quit the field, to exchange either to the King's or Condé's army, disgrace and misery may be avoided. But, can I? Can I? Villain as he is, he is yet no coward."

It was still two hours ere the Marquis Debrasques stood face to face with his kinsman, he having been away with Turenne and several of his generals on the road to Mannheim; but, at last, the weary time passed, and the Marquis de Bois-Vallée entered the room in the farmhouse which was allotted to him for quarters, and stood before his cousin, saying as he did so:

"*Eh bien!* Monsieur le Marquis, this is an overwhelming honour and not to have been expected, in spite of my having recognized you last night. Well!" and he unbuckled his *porte-épée* and flung that and the weapon it bore into the corner of the room as he spoke, while also he removed his wig and showed thereby the auburn, red-tinged hair that was so noticeable, "to what am I to attribute that honour? Scarcely, I should imagine, to the desire to pay a visit of courtesy, since, when last we met, you forbade me ever to address you again."

Standing there before Debrasques, his lean figure (which was set off well enough by the handsome blue coat he wore, with its red facings and gold galloonings, and with, across his breast, beneath the silver gorget, the aiguillettes which showed that he was attached to the staff of the Marshal) and his light blue eyes, which he never took off his cousin, seemed to proclaim him a man of tenacious disposition. For the tall, wiry form looked as though it were capable of almost any endurance or exercise of strength, while the steely eyes spoke of an invincible determination within.

"No visit of courtesy would have brought me here to you," replied Debrasques, who retained the common wooden chair in which he had been seated for those two hours, and from which he had not risen on his cousin's entrance. "Instead, something of a totally different nature. For the reputation of the family of which I have the honour to be the head, and of which you are a member, I desire that you shall remove yourself from this camp."

For a moment those blue eyes shot out a rapid glance at the young man seated there; then their owner said, speaking in an extraordinarily calm manner:

"Have you, *par hazard*, Monsieur le Marquis, taken leave of your senses? Are you aware of what you have asked?"

"Perfectly. I have asked you, a soldier in the face of the enemy and of the *garde du corps* of the Marshal Turenne, to quit the camp. That is what I have demanded in my senses, and is what I am anxious you should do."

Still gazing at him steadily, the Vicomte drew up another common wooden chair in front of the other, and, sitting in it and facing him, said, always in the same self-contained voice:

"There is naturally some explanation of this--I will not honour it by saying 'insulting'--request. Be good enough to give it, and then, head of our family as you are, to take yourself back to your own lines. Quick; I am much occupied with my duties, and shall be until I relinquish them at your desire."

"The explanation is, to begin with, that Captain Vause has arrived in this camp with the full determination of calling you to account for your proceedings in England some three years ago, in connection with a certain lady of that country."

"Indeed!" and now the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée allowed a smile to appear faintly on his features. "*Et après!* When he has done so, what next?"

"When he has done so," repeated Debrasques, who was as calm as the other, if not, perhaps, as skilled in word-fence. "Well, I have no doubt that, having called you to account, he will kill you."

"*Si?*" and again the other smiled. "Doubtless, therefore, he is a fire-eater. But, permit me to say once more--what next?"

"Your death will bring a scandal on our family. This I desire to prevent. The Debrasques have had their faults, probably some of their kinsmen before you have even brought scandal on that family, but no such mean action as you committed----"

"Monsieur le Marquis," the other interrupted quickly, and with no smile on his face now, "I would suggest to you a more temperate tone. Otherwise this man Vause, of whom you speak, may lose his opportunity of, as you say, killing me. It may be necessary for me to offer you the first chance."

"Which would not be accepted. I should not cross swords with you. You will remember that your flight with the lady in question was brought to the ears of the King himself--in spite of the English King's indifference--by our ambassador to England, on the complaint of her father. Also, that his Majesty demanded an explanation from me for the outrage that you, an accredited member of the suite sent over by him, had committed, and that it was only on being able to state that you had married the lady that you were allowed to retain your position with the Marshal. But

I have since found that that statement, made on your authority, was a lie. You have not married the lady."

"*Mon Dieu!*" the other exclaimed, roused now. "No, I have not--though there is a strange explanation of----"

"Stop. I will hear no explanation. You deceived me once, and you will doubtless deceive me again. But, as I have said, you must leave this camp."

"I will not leave it. Bah! It would be ruin, ignominy. What! leave the army with another engagement at hand, and--and--which is greater ignominy if possible, run away from this man who has sought me out. Sought me! Sought me the best master of fence in all Turenne's forces. It is impossible."

"Still, it must be done. Otherwise I shall inform the King of the falsehood told him. Then--if he chooses to pardon you--I cannot help it, and Andrew Vause may kill you."

"Andrew Vause!" the other exclaimed. "Andrew Vause! Of whom are you speaking? That is not the man to whom she was affianced. His name was Philip."

"And he is his brother."

"Ha! So! I hope he is not so much of a weakling as report would have that brother to be, otherwise he will scarce enjoy a quarter of an hour with me, nor----"

"I tell you he is no weakling, and he has come here with the determination of killing you----"

"Which would grieve you--my cousin, and his friend?"

"It would not grieve me in the least. But, as I say, it would lead to scandal, and might prevent my search for the unhappy lady whom you have vilely deceived. Also----"

"Your search for the unhappy lady, as you term her--your search! You intend that? Monsieur le Marquis, what do you mean by this intrusion in my affairs? Answer me!" And now he had risen from his chair and stood before his young cousin, his eyes fixed piercingly on the boy's face. "Quick. Answer."

"I mean that the instant this campaign is over, be it long or short--and if I live through it--I intend to find the woman you have betrayed, inveigled from her own country to ours, and to return her to her father, if he will take her back. And in my search for her I intend to procure, if possible, the services of Captain Vause."

"So. You intend to do that--if you live. Valentin Debrasques, you will not live. Therefore, be warned in time. If Montecuculi's or Caprara's soldiers do not put an end to your viperish young career--why, as you say--the campaign will be over, and then you will have to make your account with me. Now," he continued, and as he spoke he threw open the door and pointed to it, "go. And, remember, when the campaign is over, I shall demand an interview with you."

"I will remember," Debrasques said, also rising now from his chair. "Fear not. But, previously, there are other things which you had best not forget. First, that the King will be informed of the lie about your marriage with the lady, and, next----"

"Yes? Next?"

"That Montecuculi's or Caprara's soldiers may be as like to put an end to your career as to mine, and, even if they do not, why, then----"

"Yes?" De Bois-Vallée said again interrogatively. "Yes? And then?"

"Why, then--if you are not previously sent away in disgrace from Turenne's service--Andrew Vause will kill you himself."

"Go!" the Vicomte said once more, and pointing still with his finger to the door, while Debrasques, watching it, thought it shook somewhat now. "Go, before it is too late."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST MEETING.

A day or two after the interview between Debrasques and his cousin, Andrew Vause sat in his tent, for the four English-speaking regiments--namely, those under Churchill and Colonel Littleton, who commanded the Duke of Monmouth's Foot, and those commanded respectively by Hamilton and Lord Douglas--were not cantoned in the villages which had escaped destruction by the flames, but were under canvas around Ladenburg and Gross-Saxen. Indeed, so furious were the members of the auxiliary forces, which Charles had sent to help his brother monarch, at the manner in which scores of their comrades had been treated by the people of the Palatinate in their mad revenge, that Turenne wisely billeted them where there was no more property to be destroyed. Already this wanton destruction had led to much outcry against the Marshal, and also to a challenge to him to fight a duel from Charles Louis, the Elector-Palatine; and, hampered and annoyed as he was by shortness of men and continued reproaches from Louvois, the Minister of War in Paris, he was desirous now that, outside actual warfare with the Imperialists, there should be no more horrors perpetrated than necessary.

Before Andrew, on a common wooden table at which he sat, there lay a sheet of paper on which he had written at the bottom, with as great legibility as possible, his name in large clear characters, and this paper he was now perusing for the second or third time ere folding it and affixing a seal thereto.

"Yes," he murmured to himself. "Yes; it should suffice. The disguise is flimsy, 'tis true, but the name tells all. If he is not a cur 'twill do very well," and again he read it over. It ran as follows:--

"To Monsieur le Vicomte de Bois-Vallée, of the bodyguard of the Vicomte de Turenne, Marshal-General of the King's Armies.

"Sir,--Your fame as a swordsman is so widespread that it has reached my ears and inspired me with a desire to have evidence thereof, being myself considered no mean wielder of the blade. As brother officers in the same army may I, therefore, humbly beg that you will give me proof of your cleverness. The weapon I usually carry is in length forty inches, but in Paris, ere joining my present regiment, I purchased two others, one being of the length in blade of thirty-six inches, and the other of thirty-eight. As I do not doubt that, in your courtesy, you will not refuse this favour to a brother swordsman, I will await you, sir, at either sunrise or sunset at any retired spot you may honour me by naming, and will attend either alone or with a second as you may direct. And I have the honour to subscribe myself, Monsieur le Vicomte,

"Your most humble servitor,

"ANDREW VAUSE,

"Attached as volunteer to the Royal English Regiment, commanded by Colonel John Churchill."

Then, having sent the document off by what he knew was a sure hand, Andrew sat down and waited for the reply of De Bois-Vallée.

But several days passed, yet none came, and, at last, Andrew growing impatient (for now it was rumoured that there must be another battle ere long, and he knew that the chance of war might rob him of his vengeance by removing him or the Vicomte from each other's path), he set about inditing another epistle. This time it was more laconic.

"Sir," he now wrote, "owing doubtless to the attention demanded from you by your duty, I have received no answer to my request for a trial of our skill at swordplay. With much respect I still await that answer," and he concluded his letter with the usual ceremonial flourishes.

Yet still some days passed by and no answer came, so that Andrew thought he would once more be forced to take up his quill, while all the time his great hand was itching to grasp one of the weapons on which his eyes lovingly reposed as they stood in a bundle in a corner of the room. Then, one night, as he returned to his tent after going the rounds, and after also stopping to drink a glass or so of ratafia with some of his brother officers, many of whom were old comrades, he found lying on his table a letter--a letter with a great seal upon it, on which was a vicomte's coronet and a coat-of-arms, and which he tore open eagerly.

Yet it was unsatisfactory, as he saw in a moment, though such was not the description that the soldier applied to the writer of the document while he perused it, but rather such words as "Cur" and "Craven."

The communication was prefaced and concluded as Andrew's own challenges had been, with all necessary politeness and ceremony, yet it simply conveyed to him the fact that De Bois-Vallée refused to meet him.

"As you are aware," it said, "duelling is forbidden to officers on active service; even the Marshal himself was forced to refuse to meet the Elector-Palatine. Nor, since I cannot think, sir, that it is simply a trial of skill which you desire, can I consent to meet you at this present moment. Later on I hope I may be accorded that honour."

Then, hot with passion, Andrew, before seeking his bed from which his duties would necessitate his rising ere the dawn, sat down and scratched off one more letter.

"Sir," he wrote, "if you do not meet me within forty-eight hours, I will affront you so publicly before some of your own officers that you shall be forced to draw on the instant. And, if that suffice not, I will there and then bodily chastise you, while, for justification, I will publicly proclaim your conduct in England to my late brother, Philip Vause, and the lady to whom he was betrothed. To-morrow night I shall attend at seven o'clock in the glade a few minutes' walk west of the burnt church, and also on the following night. Each night for an hour. I counsel you to come."

"Wait," he said in the morning to the soldier-servant who attended on him, and who was about to proceed to Turenne's quarters with the letter half an hour after daybreak, "wait for an answer by word of mouth. Yes or No. Those who take the letter from your hand can bring you back the reply. Remember, by word of mouth."

Then he went forth to a hard day's duty with the regiment, which was under orders to be ready at any moment to strike its tents and march in all probability towards the defile of Rhinzabern, and did not return again until the evening.

By that time he knew that the opportunity for the Vicomte to avoid him no longer existed; the order had gone forth that day that the remainder of the army would possibly not move till the following week. De Bois-Vallée could not, therefore, escape thus, as Andrew had feared he would be able to do if the rout had been set for that night.

"He is mine. Mine," he said to himself as he strode to his tent. "Mine if only I have pricked him into consent. He cannot avoid me now. I will have him somehow, even though he should again refuse to meet me."

For that De Bois-Vallée could emerge triumphant from this "trial of skill" he never believed; nay, gave no thought to. *Maître d'armes* or not, as he might be, Andrew Vause felt sure that, once point to point with him, he would avenge his brother.

His man met him at the door, and, in answer to the hasty question, "Well, what reply?" said, "the reply, sir, is 'Yes. To-night,'" and, as a glow of satisfaction rose to his master's bosom, the servant continued, "Also, there is this for you, sir," and produced a letter with, again, the great seal on it.

"You force this upon me," it ran, "therefore the outcome is on your own head. I choose swords of the length of thirty-eight inches. I shall come alone, as I do not desire to be punished for your death."

Andrew had smiled but little since he saw Philip's coffin lowered into the grave by the side of his mother and father, nor had he made many of the jokes he loved since that day, yet he smiled now so pleasantly that his servant, who strongly suspected a duel to be lurking beneath all this fetching and carrying of letters and messages, began to think he was mistaken, and went to his night quarters quite cheerfully. Yet, ere he departed, he asked his master if he desired to be awakened as usual half an hour before daybreak--the question being put as much with a desire to see if it would be answered with any shadow of doubt attached to it, as to know his duty.

"Ay," said Andrew quietly, "or maybe a little earlier. And have all my necessaries ready for our departure. We shall most like strike tent to-morrow."

After which reply the man went away, thinking what a fool he had been to suppose that people would be killing each other when there was an enemy of twice their own force close at hand to do it for them.

Left alone, Andrew picked out the rapier--a deep cup-hilted one--whose size De Bois-Vallée had suggested, and tested it severely against the floor and wall, bending it against each until it must have broken had it not been of the finest-tempered steel; also he examined carefully its hilt and quillon to see that all was secure and firm.

"I must give my friend no chance," he thought; "a broken blade, a loosened hilt, and--poof!--good-night to Andrew Vause!"

So, satisfied that all was well with the weapon, he rubbed it carefully on his sleeve, and, returning it to its black leather scabbard, went forth with it behind his back.

The glade near the burnt church which some of Hamilton's men had fired a week ago--wherefore two were now hanging by Turenne's orders to a yew tree outside it--was very peaceful in the glow of the summer sunset, and here, at least, except for the view of the ruined church through the trees that bordered the grassy space, there were no signs of the devastation of the land. Above, the rooks were cawing as though no such thing as powder and ball had ever disturbed them, and now and again a rabbit or two, which had escaped the general pillage and search for food, ran away at the sound of Andrew's footsteps on the soft springy turf, whisking the underwhite of their tails before his eyes.

"A better spot for love-making than for killing," he thought to himself; "for an arm to fold itself around a maiden's waist, than to press down a scoundrel's guard--ah! here comes the scoundrel himself," and he took off his hat with great courtesy to the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée, who strode towards him.

The latter seemed, however, to have exhausted his politeness in the letters he had written, and, without deigning any reply to the other's salutation, instantly divested himself of his coat, while he unlooped the sheath from which he had already drawn his weapon, and threw it down on top of the garment. Yet, as he did so, he gave an astonished glance at the form of the man before him, and at his great sinewy limbs. Perhaps he had heard from the woman who had betrayed Philip how slight and delicate a man he was, and wondered that this other, who was of the same flesh and blood, should be so strong and powerful!

"I have but one question to ask," he said, as he stood now before Andrew, "a usual one in our country when one honours a stranger by crossing swords with him. You are, I presume, of gentle blood?"

"I am Philip Vause's brother. And he was of sufficiently gentle blood for you to steal his future wife from him like a thief."

"Enough," the Vicomte said, while his face became suffused. "Enough. I am at your service."

"And," continued Andrew, "had we been of the commonest clay our country owns, I should still carry out my determination of punishing such a thief."

Without another word their swords crossed, and as they did so Andrew was surprised at the reckless fury of the man before him. Was this the *maître d'armes*, the renowned *escrimeur*; this man who fought more like a hot-headed boy than a practical swordsman, cool and wary! Yet, Andrew reflected--as he parried thrust after thrust with his wrist of steel, and waited his turn, which would come soon if the Vicomte spent himself thus--doubtless the epithet of "thief" had roused him--precisely as he had meant that it should do.

Gradually, too, he edged his opponent round so that the rays of the setting sun, which had been in his own eyes when the conflict began, would, in another moment, be in those of his adversary; but this advantage he could not obtain altogether, since the Frenchman perceived his intention in an instant and endeavoured to drive Andrew back to his original position. As well might he, however, have endeavoured to drive back a rock from the earth it was set in! Andrew's feet were firm upon the turf, and, henceforth, they fought with the sun's rays athwart them, and not favouring one more than the other.

Watching De Bois-Vallée with an eye like a hawk's and parrying thrust after thrust, he saw upon the other's forehead the moisture coming and the drops gathering, and then, for the first time, he let his own weapon shoot out, after thrusting the Vicomte's last lunge away from him with another twist of his wrist. He missed his mark, it was true, since the sword's point tore but an inch out of the cambric of the other's shirt above his left shoulder, but the rip of the material under his ear told De Bois-Vallée the danger he was in. The cool Englishman before him was deadly, he recognized, otherwise how had the point reached to where it did? He had calculated the other could not come within half a foot of him.

"I will take it a little lower next time, monsieur," Andrew said quietly. "It is a charming pass when properly made!"

But at his words the furious thrusts of his opponent ceased. The Vicomte was a different man. Softly his blade now glided up and down the other's, and Andrew knew that he was going to experience a real taste of his antagonist's skill--he would learn a new pass in a moment.

And in a moment he did learn it. High up near his own hilt crept the other's sword, then he disengaged, feinted once, and--a second later--his rapier had slit the Englishman's waistcoat outside his left ribs, had passed within four inches of his heart. But, since it was four inches, it might as well have been a mile!

"Ha!" said Andrew as the other recovered himself, and, jumping back out of reach, glared at him, "a pretty *botte*. And worth knowing--as I know it now. But, monsieur, you should have been sure of it, or made no attempt. It will serve you no more." And with great suavity he said, "Monsieur is perhaps ready to recommence?"

"He is implacable," De Bois-Vallée thought to himself. "Curse him, he knows as much as I!" and he felt creeping over him a horrible dread. He began to fear he had fought his last duel--that in a few moments more he would be stretched gasping on the grass with his life ebbing away. Yet he nerved himself--such qualms and apprehensions as these, he knew, were fatal--and again their swords crossed.

There was no recklessness now in either combatant, no thrust made heedlessly or thrown away; instead a devilish, cruel determination in each man to strike firm and sure when next he struck at all, through heart or lung. Their weapons clashed no longer, but hissed and scraped softly against each other; once the Frenchman tried his *botte* again, failing utterly this time, and once Andrew's blade darted forth like an adder's tongue, failing in its turn, but ripping an inch of

flesh from his opponent's side.

He saw, though, that De Bois-Vallée's lips were flaky with slight streaks of foam now; he saw the smallest bead of that foam fall from his nether lip and drop upon his shirt, making a damp spot--a bead that, when there, looked darker than the white cambric--just above where his heart was.

"A target," he said to himself, "a mark. I will take him on that spot."

And, henceforth, his eye never left that mark, and his rapier's point sought it alone. Suddenly he thought he had found it! Nerved to desperation, De Bois-Vallée thrust in tierce, disengaged, and thrust again, and a moment afterwards, with a hoarse cry, staggered forward against Andrew, letting his weapon fall to the ground, and clutching at the grass with his hands as he dropped face downwards.

"Humph!" said Andrew, bending over him, after plucking a long wisp of grass from a tussock growing near, and wiping his rapier with it. "I have missed after all. It will have to be done over again." And as he rolled his late opponent on to his back, he muttered, "My eyes are failing me, or is't the evening light? I could have sworn I was through his heart, and I have but taken him in the shoulder. The hilt of my sword banging up against him has hurt him as much as the passage of the sword itself. Yet, 'twas a good blow, too! Clean through bone and muscle from point to haft."

"This will not kill him," he reflected, almost savagely for him, as he loosened his enemy's lace neckerchief, "though the night air may--if I leave him here. If--I leave him here!" And, as he so thought, he knew he could not do that--could not leave him there to bleed to death, or stiffen in the night dews.

"I must fetch someone," he reflected, "even some of these poor boors whom we have desolated, and send him back to quarters. I have a gold piece or two--they will serve."

And full of this resolve he turned to leave the glade and seek for assistance. Yet, ere he went, he threw the wounded man's rich laced coat over him, leaving his face free so that he might inhale the air, and bent over him to make sure that he was not in truth dead. Doing so, he saw that the eyes were open, staring up to the heavens, but with no glassiness about them, and that his lips moved. Moved and uttered something, too; something that seemed like the word "Marion."

"Ay, Marion," repeated Andrew. "Marion. After you, I have next to make my account with her. But how? How to do that? 'Twill be the harder task."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FURY OF DESPAIR.

He went swiftly towards the end of the glade, bent on finding some assistance for his enemy ere night was full upon him--for now there was little daylight left. Yet, as he did so, he paused in the great strides he was taking--paused, and looked back.

In that glade, at the end furthest from where he had quitted it, he heard voices and a confused jumble of sounds--coarse voices speaking in the Rhenish *patois*. And, thinking that here might be the aid he sought, he turned back once more to where he had left the Vicomte.

Yet, swiftly as he returned, he hurried his steps still further, bursting indeed into a run, and lugging forth his rapier once again as he did so, on observing what was now taking place in the opening. For, surrounding De Bois-Vallée were three or four rough-looking peasants, one of whom had already wrenched the coat of the prostrate man from off his body, while another was rapidly stripping him of his remaining clothes, and still another stood with the Vicomte's weapon in his hand, and with its point in murderous proximity to his throat.

Bursting in amongst them--for he recognized that, in the power of those maddened natives who had suffered so much at the hands of the invaders, his fallen foe's life was not worth a moment's purchase after they had despoiled him of his clothes and valuables--he proceeded at once to summarily prevent them from carrying out their intentions. The man holding the sword he dealt with first, by striking him such a buffet as sent him reeling backwards until, his foot catching in one of the tussocks, he fell heavily to the ground, after which Andrew administered some sound kicks to two of the others, while the fourth of the party ran roaring away. Nor,

indeed, was it extremely surprising that he should do so, since the appearance of Andrew Vause, large, fierce, and terrible, and with a drawn weapon in his hand, was enough to scare any German boor. Yet he recognized that he had still a task before him, and that the rapier with which, but half an hour before, he had sought his enemy's life, would now have to stand him in good stead to protect both that life and his own. For, from the outskirts of the glade, he could hear the man who had run away, bawling in his Rhineland *patois* to others who were undoubtedly in the neighbourhood, and yelling, "the English. The English are here. *Zur Hülfe! Zur Hülfe! Zur Hülfe!*" and presently the assistance he sought for came.

"Oh! that this vagabond, whose life I am doomed to save as well as take, could be of some assistance," thought Andrew, as he gazed down on De Bois-Vallée, who lay quite unconscious of what was passing above him. "But that is hopeless. So be it; I must trust to myself or to the patrol being out. Ha! here they come!"

This last exclamation referred unhappily, however, to the succour which the peasant had shrieked for, and not to the patrol, for at that moment there burst into the opening four or five more men, some of whom bore torches, and the others weapons--one of them being armed with what looked like a pole-axe.

And now Andrew knew that the task before him was a terrible one, and that he alone, and with only a duelling rapier to his hand, had to face nearly a dozen men, all of whom were almost insane with the wrongs and cruelties they had suffered. But at that moment he could not think of this; his own life was at stake; he must defend it. And, fiercely as some wounded tiger at bay, he set about doing so.

"You cravens," he called to them in German--for Andrew's roving life had taught him more than one tongue beside his own--"you cravens, come on! Here lies a dying man, also one living for you to attack. Come on, I say, come on!" and in a moment he was amongst them all, his rapier flashing like lightning in and out and under the guard of the rude weapons they carried.

But, unequal as the combat was in point of numbers, it was more than balanced by the skill of Andrew, who saw that he had but one opponent to really fear--the man with the pole-axe, which weapon he was already swinging ominously. Twice, indeed, that pole-axe had descended, yet each time it had missed its mark, burying itself in the ground once and once alighting on the shoulder of one of its owner's countrymen, who, at the moment it fell, had been thrust under it by Andrew. But he knew that such luck as this could not last; it would be swung on high again, and then--or the next time--it would not miss; his skull would be cracked like a walnut shell.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, as another peasant now seized his rapier with a view to holding him while the wielder of the axe despatched him. "Ha! so! Look to your fingers, my friend," and, as again that wielder prepared to swing his weapon on high, the long sharp blade was drawn swiftly from between those fingers, tearing them to ribbons in its passage. And then, while the wounded peasant fled shrieking in agony, with his mutilated hands held in horror before him, the rapier was rapidly raised to guard its owner's head from the downward crash of the huge hatchet. But it was a well-calculated blow that was now dealt by its owner, so well calculated, indeed, that, had Andrew not been able to free his sword at the moment he did, his brains would have been dashed out by the axe as certainly as had been the brains of countless slaughtered oxen previously. Yet, the sword was released in time from the other's clutching fingers; in time to meet the falling blow--though not in time to entirely prevent its effect. For, under that stroke, the rapier was shattered like crystal, the hilt and an inch or two of the blade alone remaining in Andrew's hand, while the force of the axe's descent, as the handle struck him heavily, bore him to the ground and on to one knee.

With a roar the owner of that fearful weapon raised and swung it again, this time to end his work effectively--yet that work was never accomplished!

Upward, with a rush like a wild cat springing at its prey, leaped Andrew, half paralyzed as his shoulder was with the concussion, the hilt and jagged broken blade in his uninjured hand, and full at the other's face he plunged, dashing into it with all his remaining force the broken weapon. And as he did so he knew he had won this fight. Down on to the grass with a thud fell the pole-axe--with a terrible cry its owner buried his wounded and disfigured face in his hands, and then, moaning feebly, staggered away after the others who had already fled as they saw their champion vanquished. And as he disappeared, Andrew, staggering too, let himself drop on to the earth near where De Bois-Vallée lay still unconscious, his features lit up by the light of a smouldering torch which one of the peasants had thrown down in his flight.

For some moments he could not think nor collect his thoughts; could, indeed, only sit on the grass, his head between his knees, his breath coming in labouring gasps from his lungs, his left side feeling numb and dead. But, as the cool night wind blew on his cheeks and forehead and revived him somewhat, he put his uninjured right hand to the earth, and, raising himself, tottered to his feet again.

"I have won two fights to-night," he muttered, "two fights, but--God!--this last one has been a terrible encounter. Yet--yet--they are won! Enough!"

Not without pain he moved towards the torch, picked it up and went over to where De Bois-

Vallée lay, and looked at him, seeing that his wound had long ceased bleeding, and feeling that his pulse was beating strongly. Also, he seemed now to be asleep and free from pain, no moan coming from his lips.

"After all," he thought, looking down at his enemy, "this night--as it begins--must end our feud. Spent here, as you will spend it, wounded, and with the cold of the early hours of morning to strike to that wound, you will soon be dead--though, in the hands of the surgeon and in a warm bed, you would recover in a week. Yet, what to do? I can scarce drag myself back to my tent--and, all said, you are a villain. So be it, lie there and die--there is nought else for you. Still," he added, "I would save you an I could. An I could. I must have vengeance for Philip; must see you dead. Yet it should be at my hands, not thus like a maimed dog."

But, knowing there was no hope of removing De Bois-Vallée, he turned away, after once more covering him with his coat. To the last he was merciful to his prostrate foe!

The events of the night were not yet over, however, for even as Andrew turned his footsteps towards where "the Royal English Regiment" was cantoned he heard afar off the sound of three guns fired, and he understood well enough their import. They were the signal that all in Turenne's army were to be ready to march at a moment's notice, as six guns were to be the signal from Maulevrier at Philipsburg that the enemy had recrossed the river, and four the signal that they were known to be advancing. And, a moment later, he heard something else, as familiar to his ears as any sound in the world. The tramp of a vast number of hoofs on the road a hundred yards away, the jangle of bridles and chains, of sabres and accoutrements.

"They are marching," he cried, "marching! And I am here!" and as fast as his stiffness and bruises would permit he made his way through the brushwood to the road.

Then he knew at once what was taking place, that the Baron de Montclar's five hundred dragoons were on their way to Rhinzabern. Where, then, was the infantry to support them?--where was his own regiment?

"Has," he asked of a troop-sergeant who rode on the side of the road where he was, "'the Royal English Regiment' got the order to march? Tell me at once; I am attached to it."

The man, a swarthy Burgundian, looked down at him, and then answered, "To-morrow morning, Monsieur, at daybreak. But Monsieur seems unwell," he added, seeing some blood on Andrew's hand.

"Ay," he replied, "yet, 'tis nothing. I have been attacked again by the peasants." While, seeing the glittering of some more corselets coming on farther behind, he asked, "Who are these who come now? Your baggage guard?"

"Nay, sir. 'Tis the patrol--formed to-night from Listenai's."

"So! Who is the officer in charge? Do you know?"

"No, sir." Then, with an apology and a salute, and also a muttered word that he must not fall out from the ranks, the sergeant rode on with his regiment, while Andrew stood in the road to stop the patrol. "De Bois-Vallée is saved," he said to himself, "they will remove him to shelter."

"Who goes there?" a clear voice rang out a few moments later, and as he heard it Andrew's heart leapt within him. The voice that greeted his ears was Debrasques'; he it was who headed the patrol, and, a moment later, he rode up to the other.

"Andrew Vause," was the answer to him as he came forward, followed immediately by the words, "Send your men into yonder opening. De Bois-Vallée lies there."

"Dead?" asked the Marquis, bending down low over his horse's mane, as though to peer into Andrew's face. "Dead? Have you slain him?"

"Nay. Not yet! But--I have been attacked by the peasants--you will see--fetch him forth and convey him to his quarters."

"Stay here," said Debrasques, "I will go myself." And, calling to some of his men he plunged into the glade, while the remaining soldiers of the patrol sat their horses as still as statues, wondering whether they were to keep the great Englishman before them under their eyes or not.

Presently, those who had followed the Marquis came back--following him still--but now four of them were dismounted, and between them they bore the wounded man, while the others, who had gone also, led their horses for them.

"Return to quarters with this gentleman," Debrasques ordered them, "and carry him as gently as possible, while, if you can find a door, make use of it. Thus, 'twill be easier for him and you. And carry him to the Marshal's quarters--he is of the *garde du corps*. He and this other officer have been attacked by peasants."

"A brave weapon this to be attacked with," said one of the dragoons, showing the pole-axe, which he had brought away by Debrasques' orders, to his comrades. "A fair weapon, is't not?"

Yet," and he lowered his voice and glanced at Andrew as he spoke, "it was not with this that the other was wounded--but a clear, clean thrust from a sword."

"Away!" exclaimed Debrasques, interrupting his whisperings, "and lose no time. March!"

Then he took Andrew by the arm, wondering why he winced as he did so, and led him some distance off from where the rest of the patrol were halted.

"I understand," he said; "understand very well. You overcame him ere you were attacked by the countrymen, then you stayed by to protect him. Is it not so?" And without waiting for an answer, he said, glancing up at his great friend, "I think you are very noble. Too noble for him to cross swords with. Captain Vause, he is my cousin, but, alas!--I must say it--he is unworthy to be your foe."

"Nay," said Andrew, "make no mistake. If I did not let him lie here to die of the night air, or be murdered by those unhappy men, 'twas from no feeling of mercy. Debrasques, he is mine, I have vowed it. Mine, unless the Imperialists rob me of him. And afterwards----"

"Yes, afterwards?" seeing that the other paused.

"Afterwards--the woman."

"The woman," exclaimed the lad, recoiling a little from him, as Andrew could see in the starlight. "The woman! Does your vengeance claim her, too?"

"Ay"

"But how? How? You cannot kill her."

"No. I cannot kill her. But----" and again he paused.

"Yes--but?" and there was a quiver in the young man's voice as he spoke.

"There are other things than death." After which enigmatical answer Andrew refused to say another word, but, changing the subject, asked Debrasques if he knew that he marched to-morrow to Rhinzabern.

"Yes," he said, "I know. And we remain with the main army!"

"No matter, we shall meet again. Meanwhile, grant me one request. On no account let your cousin know that I stayed by to--to protect him. I will not have him know that."

"You mean that it is war to the death, that----"

"Yes, I mean that."

CHAPTER X.

"THE LITTLE WOOD AT ENTZHEIM."

The summer had almost passed and the early autumn come ere that other battle which had been so long impending between the French and the Imperialists seemed at last about to take place. For the Duke de Bournonville had crossed the Rhine once more and was known to be meditating the siege of Philipsburg, while Turenne, who had been watching every movement of the enemy, at last made up his mind that he would try conclusions with him, although the other was twenty thousand men stronger than he. For he knew that, while this enemy was thus double his own force of about twenty-two thousand men, it must soon be treble, since now the Elector of Brandenburg was marching to join the Austrian general with still another twenty thousand men.

The time had come! He must prevent that coalition or see Franche-Comté and Lorraine torn away from Louis' grasp almost ere it had tightened on them; Champagne devastated, even as he himself had devastated the Palatinate; see Philipsburg lost. For if Brandenburg joined De Bournonville all this and worse would happen, while the Electress and other princesses who accompanied the Elector--saying in their bitterness that they did so with a view to making the acquaintance of the French aristocracy, and thereby acquiring their good breeding--would, without doubt, have good opportunity for gratifying their desire.

But it was October now, and at last--for Brandenburg was perilously near with his twenty

thousand men and his Electress and princesses--on the second of the month the French army advanced. The night march which was to bring the contending forces face to face had begun; through a stormy, rainy night, over roads deep with pools of rain and mud, the departure was made.

Ahead of the Marshal there marched the "King's" and "Queen's" dragoons and those of Listenai, with, riding by the side of the third troop of these, Debrasques, his corselet on now, and, above his fair but troubled face, his helmet; behind Turenne came the infantry commanded by Mont-Georges, with, amongst it, Churchill's regiment, which had just joined from Rhinzabern, then the artillery under St. Hilaire--all marching in three columns. And, riding near Turenne ahead of the man who had sworn to kill him, was De Bois-Vallée, with his left arm in a sling, but not otherwise much incommoded by the sword-thrust he had received six weeks before.

Of those three men round whom this narrative revolves, perhaps Debrasques was the most unhappy; unhappy because, turn his eyes which way he might, he saw nothing but misery ahead. It was borne in on him that his cousin would inevitably fall by Andrew's hand unless the impending battle removed him from the other's path--which, in truth, would not grieve him much!--he was doubly unhappy because of those last words which Andrew had uttered ere he set out for the defile of Rhinzabern; the words: "Afterwards--the woman."

For he knew what Andrew had not the least thought of, namely, that, base as had been De Bois-Vallée's treachery to Philip Vause, it was nothing to the treachery which he had practised towards the woman Philip had loved, towards Marion Wyatt.

Yet, knowing what Debrasques did, he himself did not know all.

* * * * *

Splashing through the miry roads, the rain beating down upon their cloaks, their horses stumbling into ruts a foot deep, wheels of gun carriages getting stuck fast in the mud and shoes being torn from of the feet of the infantry, that night-march was continued until at last a river called the Breusch was reached at four on the next afternoon, and there, on the other side of it, in a half-moon position, the Imperial army was seen. And all through that night-march one question had troubled the lad far more than any inconvenience which he shared with thousands of others, the question: "Shall I tell him all I know? To-morrow, when the battle is over and if we three are all left alive, or to-day, ere the fight begins and while there is still time?" And he decided that it should be to-day; to-morrow might be too late. He himself might be dead, and then the light he could throw on all that had happened--a light which, at least, might shield Marion Wyatt from Andrew Vause's vengeance--would never be cast. Yes, he must reach Andrew somehow before the conflict began, if possible; must say one word to him that would save the woman. As for his cousin, he was a villain; he must take his chance. He had done his best for him because his own mother's blood ran in his veins, had tried to frighten him away from the neighbourhood of Andrew, and the other had refused to go. Nay, had he not threatened to expose him to the King so as to drive him away? but even as he made the threat he knew he would never carry it out. Base as De Bois-Vallée was, he was a soldier; it was his career, and he had won golden opinions from Turenne by his conduct in this campaign and others. He could not be equally base and shut that career against him. In spite of all, he was his kinsman.

But the chance had not come for him to communicate with Andrew, when, at nightfall, and with the whole French army sheltered from the Imperialists, not only by the darkness, but also by the incessant rain and mist, the passage of the Breusch was commenced, and when gradually the distance between the enemy and the river--a plain of about a mile and a half in extent, which had foolishly been left unoccupied by De Bournonville--was filled with Turenne's army. Thus, when the day broke, foggy and wet as ever, the two enemies were facing each other--the French with the river at their backs, and the Germans with a large wood serving as cover on their right and a smaller wood on their left, and with the village of Entzheim between them and the foe.

But if, by the time the filthy day had dawned, the Imperialists had not found out that they were face to face with France once more, and that the Elector of Brandenburg would be of no service to them here, they discovered it soon, for from their enemy's position there rose now the cheering of twenty thousand voices as Turenne rode along in front of his first line, and, with an air of gaiety which he always possessed on the day of battle, waved his hand and hat to them, and gave the order to advance, the Little Wood being the spot principally subjected to attack. And among those who first reached that wood was Debrasques, the "King's" dragoons and those of Listenai being sent forward to clear it of the enemy. Shortly the battle became general.

Meanwhile Turenne, who was everywhere, saw that his cavalry was driven back by numbers of the other side who were in possession of the wood, and instantly gave the order for the infantry of the left to advance, amongst those who went forward being the regiments of Churchill and Monmouth.

The chance Debrasques desired so much of communication with Andrew was coming near!

Avoiding the interior or middle part of the "Little Wood"--where were three battalions of the enemy with two pieces of cannon--there went forward the regiments of Burgundy and Orleans, the "King's" dragoons and Monmouth's foot, after which followed Debrasques' regiment, it being separated only from Churchill's by the men of Languedoc. And, sweeping round to the left to prevent the enemy's troops from coming to the assistance of those who were already in possession of the wood, the whole of Turenne's right line advanced, while the left was engaged with Caprara's right.

And now the fight in the "Little Wood," as it was ever afterwards called, became a scene of terrible slaughter, a scene made doubly so by the downpour of rain which fell incessantly all that day, by the fog and mist which surrounded and hid Austrians from French, and by the vomiting of the cannons. Twice the French obtained possession of the wood, and twice were driven out--for half an hour the battle ceased, so thick did the fog become; then, at last, when once more the whole of the left went at the wood again, the possession of it became assured for the attackers.

Amidst the scene of carnage, none fought more bravely on that day than two Englishmen, Churchill and Andrew Vause. From the first, in that high-pitched, aristocratic voice, which, later on in his life, was to give the orders that should for ever crush the might of the French king under whom he now fought as an auxiliary, was issued command after command. From the other, tall, stalwart, grim, his big sword grasped as easily as, not long before, his rapier had been, was dealt forth blow after blow against Austrian, Bavarian, Luneburger, and Holsteiner; while over their prostrate bodies he, in company with others, leapt to find fresh foes. And in a pause, as still he and his comrades swept their way into the fringe of the wood, he heard above him a quiet voice exclaim, "Well done, my handsome Englishmen. Well done," and looking up at the horseman above him--a broad-shouldered, short-necked man, whose morose countenance belied his words--Andrew recognized Turenne. But a moment later he was gone, riding all along the advancing line to utter encouragement to other regiments.

And now the charge was ordered for what was to be, happily, the last time, when rushing down through the open ranks of the infantry went the dragoons, while amongst them Andrew recognized the fair hair of Debrasques, as, without covering to his head, he flew by.

"Bravo, Debrasques! Bravo!" shouted Andrew, and the boy, turning his face, saw his friend. Then he waved his sword and vanished into the gloom around.

The darkness was growing more intense, there was something more than fog and mist enveloping them, they knew that the October evening was at hand by the time the fight was done, and when, from neither little nor great wood, nor from where the village of Entzheim lay, came aught but desultory firing.

"The battle is over," said Churchill as he passed Andrew; "they say we have lost two thousand men, and the enemy double."

"They are still firing," muttered the other, leaning against a tree to take breath.

"Nay, 'tis our side firing their own cannon at them. They are in full retreat and have left their big guns behind. Hark! there is the recall!" and he went on to muster his men together.

"I must find the boy," Andrew said to himself. "Find how he has worn through this day," and making his way over heaps of slain he went towards where Listenai's dragoons had plunged into the wood for the last time.

And at last he found him, when there was but a little light left; when, indeed, there would have been none had not the fog cleared away suddenly and the rain ceased, leaving what remained of daylight clear.

He found him amidst a heap of his own dragoons, who lay where they had fallen, some above and some across their dead horses, some beneath them, and some kicked to death by the animals in their agonized struggles. Found him with his back against his own horse, which lay dead on the ground with half its head blown away by a cannon ball, and with his eyes staring wildly in front of him, though, as Andrew thought, seeing nothing.

Of others of that regiment there were none about, except the dead and the dying--'twas evident that they had made their way through the wood, driving before them the Imperialists who had earlier had possession of it; perhaps, indeed, had followed them in their flight.

"My boy," said Andrew, going up to him, and kneeling down by his side, "this is a sad sight. Debrasques, what ails you? Are you sorely wounded?" And, as he spoke, he slung a small canteen round that he carried on his back, and, uncorking it, moistened the Marquis's lips with some drops of spirit which he produced.

At first the other could not answer, and, meanwhile, Andrew was looking him all over to see where any wound might be, but finding none--when, at last, after he had decided that the Marquis must be hurt inwardly by some tremendous blow--perhaps from one of the horses--the other spoke in a faint voice and said--

"Captain Vause--I--think--my back is broken by the fall. The horse fell on me."

"Nay, not so bad as that," whispered Andrew, "not so bad as that, pray God. Yet, courage, *mon ami*, there will soon be some coming this way. And if not, why I will carry you," and he set about undoing the other's back and breast piece so as to give him more freedom.

"I cannot move," the boy replied feebly. "I think I am dying. Oh! my mother."

"Nay, nay," repeated Andrew. "Nay. Heart up."

But still the young man's voice grew more and more feeble, and now he seemed wandering in his speech.

"I--I--meant to tell you much if I had lived. I must speak now. The--she--the woman we know of was----"

"What?" asked Andrew quickly, catching his breath. He knew, something told him, that the woman to whom the other referred could be one only--Marion Wyatt. "What was she?"

"She was--ah, God! Look there!" and, with a strange glance of agitation in his eyes, he glared towards the wood. Following that glance, Andrew saw what had so unnerved the other.

For, coming from out the wood, urging his horse to its greatest pace, though it was sadly blown, there rode swiftly De Bois-Vallée, hatless and the sling from his wounded arm hanging loose, while as he left the wood he was calling back orders to some whom doubtless he imagined were still there. And Andrew knew that, as one of Turenne's *aides-de-camp*, he had been sent out with instructions to the various scattered regiments.

At first he evidently recognized neither Debrasques nor Vause, and was going as swiftly by as he could, and as all the impediments of dead men and animals would permit, but as Andrew sprang to his feet, intent, not on renewing his feud with him at such a moment as this, but on summoning him to the assistance of his dying cousin, he saw him plainly in the now clear evening light. And, even as he observed who was before him, the Marquis, with his brain becoming evidently more and more disordered, shouted out in a voice that seemed to have acquired unnatural strength at this crisis--

"Traitor! scoundrel! I have told him all," and then sank back, either dead or senseless, against his horse's side.

CHAPTER XI.

INNOCENT.

When the roll was called that night in the French army it was seen how hardly the victory had been bought, if victory it was! A doubtful one, indeed, since Turenne had not been able to pursue the enemy for long with his weakened army, and, as he fell back upon the position which he had previously occupied, so De Bournonville did the same. The enemy was, therefore, still in Alsace, and Brandenburg was drawing nearer day by day. Over France there yet hovered the impending shadow of further invasion and defeat.

Amongst those who were wiped off for ever from the roll were the bearers of such noble names as De Pizieux, De Reveillon, and the Comte d'Auvergne; whilst among the English the Earl of Hamilton was wounded--mortally, it was thought. Also, there were many missing whose absence could only be accounted for by the supposition that they had been slain in the short pursuit made of some portion of the enemy.

Amongst these was the Vicomte De Bois-Vallée, whose disappearance was not explained by the time Turenne fell back on Hagenau and Saverne; and was not, indeed, generally known until the French army was once more quartered in that neighbourhood.

It was there that the news of this disappearance reached Andrew Vause's ears, as he watched over Debrasques and tried to nurse him back to life. It seemed, however, that there was little enough hope he would succeed in this; the brain had received some injury which the surgeons who had accompanied the army appeared unable to understand, and, while it was perfectly apparent that he comprehended much that was said to him, he was utterly unable to make himself intelligible. No wonder, therefore, that Andrew, while he bemoaned the fate of the brilliant young soldier whom he had come to love as a comrade, cursed at the same time the fate

which had chosen to thus visit the one man who, as he had shown by the last coherent words he uttered, alone knew the greater part, if not the whole, of his cousin's guilt.

"Missing! missing!" he said to Colonel Churchill, who told him the news of the man's disappearance on the second night they were back at Hagenau, and while they sat together in a room of the house which served as the headquarters of "The Royal English Regiment." "Missing, eh? 'Tis strange!"

"Why?" asked the other, in the quiet, well-bred tones in which he always spoke. "Why? There are many others not accounted for who followed the Imperialists out of the little wood. Doubtless they followed them too far!"

"Maybe," said Andrew reflectively. "Yet this man followed the enemy not at all."

"How know you that? Were you acquainted with the person of the Vicomte?"

"Ay, very well. I knew him." And he told Churchill of how he had been attacked by the boors on the night ere the whole army set out towards the Breusch, though, naturally, he made no reference to the duel.

"Ah! I heard something of that, too. Yet, tell me, Vause--how is it you know he did not follow those who chased the enemy out of the wood? He may have done so to deliver the orders of recall. He was sent out with others of the Marshal's guard to give such orders."

"I saw him pass the other way--when the fight was over. Returning towards Holtzheim where our base was. His cousin, Debrasques, who is lying above wounded, spoke to him. It was the man."

"Strange!" reflected Churchill. "Strange! What harm could come to him between the wood and Holtzheim, and with the battle over, too, and the enemy driven out of the former and in full retreat? He was not wounded?"

"No. He was not wounded."

And thus the matter remained as it had been--a mystery from the first. De Bois-Vallée had disappeared at the very moment when he was out of danger, with the battle finished and he safe in the French lines.

Yet, to Andrew Vause, meditating hour by hour on his disappearance as he watched and tended Debrasques, it came to be no such mystery as it was to Turenne and the companions of the absent man, his brethren of the *garde du corps*.

For he discovered that Debrasques was not astonished at his disappearance--discovered it when he told him that it had taken place.

"You understand what I say to you?" he asked, bending gently over the half-paralysed man the next morning--and none who had not seen Andrew in his gentler moments could, perhaps, have guessed how good a nurse the great soldier could be. "You understand, my friend? De Bois-Vallée is missing. Yet he was unhurt when he passed us, returning to our ranks. What can have befallen him?"

Debrasques, wounded and lying there, fixed his blue eyes on the other, while it seemed to Andrew that there was a glance in them which showed that, if he could speak, he would say that the news caused him no surprise; and a moment later his lips moved as though muttering some word, but no sound came from them.

"What--what is it?" whispered Andrew.

And again the lips moved, though with the same result, while still from Debrasques' eye shone the look of intelligence--of comprehension.

Andrew tried now another method. Debrasques could not tell him what was in his thoughts, but, at least, he could make signs, though with his eyes alone; he would question him, and, by a lucky chance, might hit on some suggestion--strike some chord that would fathom the other's meaning.

"You are not surprised at--at this disappearance?" he asked therefore. Then the eyes of the other told him by the bright glance that shot into them that here, at least, he had questioned aright. The Marquis was not surprised!

"You do not think he is dead?" And again, as he watched the other's face, he saw that he had surmised correctly. The eyelids closed over the eyes for a moment, and, next, the latter looked out brightly at him from beneath the re-opened lids. It was not death that, to Debrasques' mind, had caused his cousin's disappearance.

"What then? Why go? Oh! Valentin," for so he sometimes now addressed the young man, "if you could but speak one word, only one."

But this he could not do, try as he might. So that Andrew, seeing how painful the effort was to him, desisted from his questioning almost as soon as he had commenced it.

Yet, even as he busied himself about the room, making his pillows more comfortable, arranging the bed clothes, and doing other kindly services, he observed that the Marquis seemed struggling to regain his speech--that he had something to tell him.

Suddenly, as still he mused on what Debrasques might mean, there came back to his memory the manner in which De Bois-Vallée had received the wild shout of his cousin, the words: "Traitor! Scoundrel! I have told him all." He recalled the look on the Vicomte's face, the glance of hatred he had darted at that cousin, followed by the look of fear which had seemed to blanch his countenance, as, digging his spurs into his already jaded horse, he had ridden off towards Holtzheim.

The look of fear! Ay! that was it. It must be. For, not knowing that Debrasques was delirious from his injuries, he had believed that, whatever revelations he had to make, had in truth been made. Vause, he doubtless thought, now knew as much of some mystery that lay beneath his own conduct as Debrasques knew himself. And, dreading him more than before, had therefore disappeared. Andrew felt certain that, in this surmise, he had hit the mark. He knew it; it was borne in upon him!

"Valentin," he said, returning to the bed and gazing down at the young man who lay there with his eyes still open, "Valentin, I think I know--think I have penetrated your meaning. You believe De Bois-Vallée has disappeared, because, now--since you told him that I knew all--he fears me more than ever. Is it not so?"

To his amazement--his utter amazement--he had not, after all, hit the mark; it was not this that Debrasques meant. It was no increased fear of him that had prompted his enemy to disappear.

"What then? What then?" muttered Andrew. "What, if not that?"

But from the sick man nothing came that could assist him--only, once more, the look of grief at being unable to make himself understood.

Yet, unsatisfactory, disheartening as this was, it told Andrew one thing at least--there was in truth no mystery about the man's disappearance. It was plain that he had a reason for so removing himself.

"Still," pondered the soldier, musing over what such reason could be, or what powerful motives could have urged him thus to disappear from the army in a time of war, and to, thereby, incur the necessity of giving a thorough explanation of his conduct when he should reappear or be for ever disgraced, a ruined and a broken soldier; "still it all hangs, must hang, on Debrasques' words shouted to him in delirium, yet near enough unto the truth to fright him; the words, 'I have told him all.' Would that he had! Would that he had!"

And again at night, as he turned restlessly on his bed, which was placed in the same room as his friend's so that he might be near to minister to him if required, he asked himself, "What more was there to tell? What villainy that even I do not know of?"

Also he remembered that, when he first found Valentin amidst the heap of dead and dying dragoons by whom he was surrounded, he had said something about the woman, Marion Wyatt--had exclaimed that she was--what? Oh! that he had been able to finish that speech; to say what Marion Wyatt was, or had been, in connection with this matter, in connection with the bitter treachery that had broken Philip's heart. "I would almost believe," he thought, "that he meant to say 'Innocent,' were it not that such must be impossible. Innocent! innocent! How could that be? She who stole down the garden to the gate that led to the Mall, who disappeared for ever from my brother's and her father's knowledge; from whom no word ever came after that night. It is impossible! How could she be innocent and he guilty?"

Nevertheless, he decided now, that, as he had put other questions to Debrasques in the hopes of hitting on some suggestion which might prove to be the right one, so he would put this one--"Did he intend to say that Marion Wyatt was an innocent woman?" Yet, even though that answer should be Yes, it would bring him no nearer to understanding why De Bois-Vallée had fled from the army! Only, if it could be proved so--if, by any chance under heaven, it should be so--his determination to be avenged on De Bois-Vallée for the wrong done his weak and helpless brother would be intensified by a further determination to avenge the wrong done also to that brother's affianced wife.

But, how--how could such be the case? Though Debrasques should testify to it he might still be mistaken.

In the morning, however, he put his doubts to the proof. Bending over the now awakened man, who, all through the night, while he had watched near him, slept heavily, he asked the question, and, a second afterwards, the look in the other's eyes showed that he had surmised truly. Rightly or wrongly, with either clear or clouded brain, Valentin believed the woman innocent.

"You do believe it--think it? Nay," noticing the intensity of the other's gaze, "you know it. You

mean to signify that?" and, overcome by his emotion at this new development, he returned the intensity of that gaze. "There is no doubt?"

From the speechless man there flashed back the answer of his eyes--as eloquent as any words. There was no doubt.

Yet, still, he could scarcely bring himself to believe; again through his mind there flashed the thought, "how, if the man was guilty, was the woman innocent?"

Carried away now, however, by an overwhelming rush of ideas, he went on:

"And if innocent--Heavens! if innocent--does harm threaten her--threaten her more, since he thinks I know all, than before?"

Again he saw that he had struck the mark, had divined aright. Once more the eyes of Debrasques answered "Yes."

"Harm that may come to her through his fear of what he imagines I know? Harm that may be averted, perhaps, by me if I can find her--or, again, find him?"

And still once more--none could have doubted it who saw the face over which he bent!--the answer was in the affirmative.

"You counsel me, you bid me go, you warn me to avert this harm? It is so, Debrasques, even though I leave you?"

"So be it," he continued, as still the other with his eyes endorsed all he suggested. "So be it. I will go. Will find him and slay him, or her and protect her. You agree with that?"

And, as before, the other showed that he agreed!

"An innocent woman! An innocent woman!" Andrew muttered once again. "An innocent woman, and in his power! A power that will be doubly exerted against her since he thinks I know all. I must lose no time."

Yet, because he would make no mistake--because now, if he set out in this further quest, he was resolved that it should have but one ending--should, indeed, never end until he had accomplished his determination, he repeated his questions again and again; he made doubly sure.

After which, and seeing that Debrasques adhered to all he had hitherto conveyed to him, his resolution was taken. He hesitated no longer.

Wherever De Bois-Vallée was he would find him; wherever Marion Wyatt was he would serve her. And, once more face to face with the man who had done what he now knew was a double wrong, he would slay him like a dog.

For that Debrasques had been deceived it was impossible to believe.

Marion Wyatt must be--incredible as still it seemed--a deeply-wronged woman. Also, a woman who now stood in dire peril. Well! he would defend her from that peril if he were not too late.

CHAPTER XII.

A LIKENESS AND A CLUE.

From Hagenau and Saverne there is a road which, winding sometimes between vineyards and cornfields, and sometimes over billowy plains on which little enough can be made to grow by the Rhinelanders, arrives at last at the River Breusch, and so enters Holtzheim.

It was along this road that Turenne's army had marched a fortnight or three weeks before, and had found the Imperialists encamped between that village and the somewhat larger one of Entzheim; along it once more, as the late October winds blew down the leaves on to the rain-sodden earth below, Andrew Vause was travelling now. Only, he was riding his favourite horse instead of marching on foot with the company of "The Royal English Regiment," to which he had been assigned, and, instead of being accoutred as a soldier he was dressed as an ordinary traveller. Yet, as became a traveller of that day, and in such a locality--for Strasbourg was but a league or so off, and under its protection the Austrians and all their following of petty German

princelings were encamped--Andrew was well armed. His sword made music against his horse's flank and his left spur as he rode, his holsters had each a pistol in them, and on his shoulders was a small "back-and-breast," which his cloak, drawn tightly round him, now hid from view.

His second search for De Bois-Vallée had begun!

It was not difficult for him to be thus at liberty to continue that search; the contending armies had gone into winter quarters and, beyond watching each other's movements carefully, expected to have no more encounters until the spring, wherefore leave was granted freely. Already Churchill was on his road back to St. James's and the allurements of the court, as well as to the petulance of the woman he loved so dearly and by whom he was teased so cruelly; many of his regiment were also on their way home, numerous French officers were making for Paris--and Andrew was returning to Entzheim. For from that place, from the spot outside the Little Wood where last he had seen the man he sought, and had witnessed the look of terror that came upon his countenance at Debrasques' words, he intended to seek for the clue--nay, he intended to find and take up the clue!--which should finally bring him face to face and point to point with De Bois-Vallée again.

"For," he had said to his friend as he parted with him, and after all arrangements had been made for his comfort and well-being that were possible in such a place and in the circumstances, "For be very sure I shall find him, Valentin. Be sure of that! Even though I have to track him half over Europe, even though he should take refuge in your mother's house in Paris, still he shall not escape me."

Yet, as he spoke and gazed down at the wounded man, he saw that the latter place, at least, would not be sought as a shelter by De Bois-Vallée. The Marquis's eyes told him that, as plainly as, heretofore, they had told him so much else.

Whereby, seeing that glance, Andrew knew that he would not have to return to Paris to find his quarry.

"No matter," he said. "No matter. I shall find him. Alone and unaided I shall. Also I will find her. Then I shall know all. All, until we meet once more, and you shall be well enough--as I pray God!--to tell me in your own words that I have guessed aright. Farewell, my boy."

And so he went on his way after a tender parting with the youth he had come to love since the first night when he saved him from the thieves in Paris, and after, also, he had made his adieux to Turenne and several old and new comrades.

He drew near the wooden bridge that, crossing the Breusch, led into Holtzheim, as the October evening set in dark and lowering, and with great clouds coming up in the heavens from far down in the south, and he knew that in this village he must find some shelter for the night if possible. Yet he knew also that it would be a poor shelter at the best, even if anyone in it was able to receive him, since it had suffered considerably from its vicinity to the late battle. Indeed, some of the houses had been struck by the cannon balls fired from the Little Wood, and Turenne's troops had denuded it of food, wine, and forage. Still, either here or at Entzheim, he must obtain what he required; it would be impossible that he could gain admission to Strasbourg.

The bridge had already been rudely repaired since the departure of the French Army--which had naturally destroyed it ere retiring--and, crazy as the timbers were, he yet managed to lead his horse across it after dismounting. Then, this done, he rode forward smartly to an inn he had noticed on the day of the battle, an inn called the "Goldener Hirsch."

"What is it you seek?" a man asked, coming forward to the door of this house--a place which, at its best, looked as though it could furnish little but the wine grown in the vineyard hard by, and the coarsest of food. A man clad principally in the ordinary costume of a peasant-landlord, yet now wearing on his back a coat richly laced and gallooned, though stained with dark patches here and there. Doubtless, it had been removed from the body of some fallen officer!

"What should a man seek, my friend," asked Andrew, looking down at him from his horse, "but that which most strangers desire at an inn? Rest and food for himself and horse."

"Strangers! *mein Gott!* we have had enough of strangers here," and his eyes wandered down the filthy, uncleansed and pathless street to where, at the end, the open plain between Entzheim and this village lay. "Enough of strangers! We are fools to live on this frontier-land and be devastated every few years by these infernal wars."

"You seem at least to have benefited by some strangers," remarked Andrew; "did the last one who stayed here pay his reckoning with his laced coat?"

"Nay! An I had fifty such coats, and all that their pockets contained, they would not pay this fellow's and his companion's shot. Look!" and he pointed to a great hole above the doorway. "That's one piece of their work. Done by a cannonball of the Austrians. 'Twill take fifty thalers to repair. His coat's not worth that, all bloodstained as it is and rain-soaked. Also, all my fodder is gone--the French took that!--and my mare was slain by a spent bullet. Curse the strangers--especially when they come fighting here."

"I am not come fighting," Andrew reminded him. "And my question is not yet answered. Can I and my horse rest here and have food? For me no matter what I eat, so it is clean and wholesome."

"I will see," the man replied. "At least you and the beast can rest--if you will pay for it."

"I will pay."

"Dismount then."

Doing as the man bid him, Andrew carefully tied his horse to a hook by the door and followed the other, his spurs and the point of his scabbard clanking on the frowsy stone floor of the passage as he did so. Then the man threw open a door at the side and ushered him into a room, at one end of which a fire burnt in a recess, the green logs that lay on the stones level with the floor hissing and spluttering under the mass of smoke that poured up the chimney.

"At least I can drink," said Andrew, seeing that three or four villagers were seated at a table near the fire with coarse bottles of white wine before them, "also eat, my friend," and he pointed to two great loaves of rye bread on the table, or loaves that had been great ere huge hunks had been cut, or pulled, off them.

"Oh! as for that," the landlord replied, "if you are content with this you can eat and drink your fill. But," and his eye roved over Andrew's apparel and his handsome sword, "doubtless the Herr is accustomed to break his fast on better stuff than this." While, at the same time, he seized a cup and filled it from one of the wine flasks, after which he handed it to Andrew.

"Good health," said the latter, taking it and raising it to his lips. After which he went on in reply to the other's remark.

"The Herr can eat anything. He is an old traveller. Meanwhile, I will show you," whereon he seized one of the loaves, cut off an outside piece which looked as though it had been fingered by the boors sitting round, and then helped himself to a goodly slice and slowly masticated it, washing it down all the time with draughts of the thin white wine.

"I shall do," he said, "very well. Now for the horse."

Half an hour later one might have thought Andrew Vause had been used to passing his life--which had, in truth, been so full of excitement--in no better way than hugger-muggering with Rhenish peasants in humble inns. The landlord had been induced by him to find a good feed for his animal, who was safely bestowed for the night in a shed; also--by the clink of a ducatoon or so in his ear--to find something better than bread for the newcomer. Indeed, by the time that period had elapsed, Andrew was seated in front of a savoury stew of vegetables and meat, and a better bottle of wine had been discovered--as the host said, "marvellous to tell"--from the depths of a cellar beneath the living-room. Moreover, to add to its flavour, the soldier had produced from a flask in his holsters some choice eau-de-vie, which--as many a campaign had taught him!--singularly brisked up a poor wine when a spoonful or two of it was poured in. And, as he passed this bottle, and a second, round the assembled company, he very soon became a welcome guest.

"The Herr does not say what brings him here," remarked, however, one of the drinkers, "yet, perhaps, we can guess," and the man delivered himself of a heavy wink. "Oh! yes, we can guess. There will be other merchants along this way soon. Ha! *Mein Gott!*" and he laughed hoarsely. "Oh! yes. Ere long."

"Precisely," said Andrew, "without doubt. Ere long." But he added to himself as he passed the bottle round, "What in the devil's name is the fellow driving at? And what kind of a merchant am I?"

Yet, since it had but recently struck him that it was indeed necessary he should be able to produce some reason for his presence here, he was determined to keep his ears open, and find out from the peasant what that reason was. Evidently the man knew a great deal better than he did!

"Oh! for that, no matter. Let the others follow. First come first served! And the Herr has the first choice. He will treat us fairly."

"Fairly, my friend! fairly, my golden hart!"--for it was the landlord who had now spoken. "Indeed, I will. Ha! ha! Trust me." Yet again Andrew wondered on what dealings he was about to embark, and in what way he was to act fairly.

"You see," said another speaker, leaning forward over the greasy, wine-slopped table, and speaking in a husky whisper, for which there was not the least necessity, "it our only chance to recoup ourselves for all our terrible losses. Our only chance. Therefore we must do our best for ourselves."

"Naturally," said Andrew, more bewildered than ever, "naturally. Rely on me."

"We will! Therefore, Muhlenbein," said the last speaker to the landlord, "let us show the

gentleman, and let him select."

"*Ja, Ja,*" replied the host, "he shall see. You would care to see to-night?" turning interrogatively to Andrew.

"Of all times! What better than the present! Let me see to-night!" and, observing the others leave their chairs, he rose too; though still wondering what it was he had to see. Then the peasants all tramped out of the stone-flagged room and up a wooden ladder, he following them and the landlord, who went before with a lamp which he caught up.

At first he thought this might be some trap--for, though ever unsuspecting and bold to recklessness, his career had made him wary--to get him alone into some room; yet, even as he so thought, he laughed quietly to himself. He could feel his own strength within him, as all powerful men can do--and the rapier's scabbard-point tapped on the ladder as he mounted it; the hilt banged against his thigh! That was enough! Then, as the trapdoor above the ladder was opened, and they followed each other into the room, he understood what they supposed him to be. A purchaser of spoils from off the battlefield!

Piled up in heaps all around--as was plain to be seen by the flickering oil light which Muhlenbein held over his head--were numberless coats, jackets, vests, justaucorps, and tunics, most of them covered with lace; most of them, also, heavily stained either by the rain that had fallen all day during the battle, or by some other fluid. Likewise, there were breeches innumerable, great boots with the spurs still on them, piles of weapons standing in different corners--these being sorted. Halberds and pikes, cavalry cut-and-thrust swords; rich hilted weapons with great gold-thread sword knots to them; muskets and musketoons; inlaid and silver chased pistols--all that might be found and carried away after a terrible encounter, in which two thousand men had fallen on one side and three thousand on another, were there, as well as powder flasks and small wooden boxes of shot--a charge to each. And, on a rude table, were laid out various medallions and miniatures, with the chains by which they had been hung round their owners' necks; in some cases bracelets, which men then wore, crosses and reliquaries.

Yet, stranger than all, and forming, perhaps, a more ghastly and grim sight (though Andrew, pondering, knew not why such should be the case), was a huge heap of wigs that lay piled up in the remaining corner. Wigs of all colours; white, of course, the commonest; yet also of black, blonde, and brown. Of every modern form, too, such as full-bottomed, *à trois marteaux* and *à la brigadier*.

"A grim sight," thought Andrew, "especially to me, who must have known many of the wearers in life." But, aloud, he said, "My friends, I cannot buy all these things. 'Twould want a dozen mules to transport them, nor, I fear me," and he smiled, "would they pass many of the *octrois!*"

"By degrees they could be removed," one of the men said, thirsting for some of the pieces he had seen clinking in Andrew's purse when he had produced the ducatoons. "By degrees. And these at least are worth money and can easily be transported," and he swept his coarse hand over the table, where the medallions and the miniatures and their gold chains were.

"Ay," said Andrew. "Ay! They are worth money. And, perhaps, to-morrow I will buy some. Or a good sword now from out that heap. I could carry a second one behind my saddle."

"They are superb weapons, mostly," exclaimed Muhlenbein greedily, "superb; richly-mounted and chased, worthy of a noble, and with exquisite blades----"

"Friend," replied Andrew quietly, "I know a good sword when I see it. Perhaps none better. I deal in them."

After which they all trooped down the ladder again, the rustics wondering whether they were to construe the remark of the great stalwart stranger as meaning that he was a trader in, or user of, such tools.

And Andrew, going to rest that night in the room found for him--a cleaner one than the place below gave promise of, and with fairer linen on the bed than might have been hoped for--was musing deeply.

"For," said he to himself, as he drew off his long boots, "I would be sworn that one of those miniatures was on his neck as I turned him face upwards on the grass, upon the night I nearly killed him, while in that bundle of swords--but therein I may be mistaken. However, to-morrow we will see for it."

Yet, ere he slept--his own sword laid along the bed by his side and ready to his hand in case of need--he still pondered on what it might mean if in very truth that medallion had been worn by De Bois-Vallée.

"Might mean," he murmured between two enormous yawns, "that they found him dead and stripped him, or that--or that----"

By which time he was asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

TO REMIREMONT

In the morning there were none of the other peasants about, although Andrew could see them plainly enough as they lolled in front of their houses, or brushed the dust and rubbish from their doors into the road, where it would lie until the next rain swept it into the common sewer; or drove a grunting pig in front of them. And, as he looked at them through the window, while he ate the rude meal his host was able to set before him, he knew very well that the moment they suspected he had gone upstairs with Muhlenbein to begin trafficking for any of the "relics," they would flock in to take part in the bargain. For the "Goldener Hirsch" was, he had learnt overnight, the repository of their joint property, as being the place, or mart, where the "merchants" could most easily see all that was for disposal.

"Well!" He said to Muhlenbein after he had finished his breakfast, while, prior to beginning it, he had been round to see to his horse, "well, my host of the Golden Hart, if we are to have any dealings with the choice curiosities above now is the time. I must away ere long, and--and," this was an afterthought, which he considered would make him look still more like a merchant--"there is Entzheim, you know. Perhaps they have something there to sell, too."

"Nothing, nothing!" exclaimed Muhlenbein hastily. "Nothing. Unless the Herr wants to buy a wounded horse or two and some gun carriages and powder--tumbrils left behind by the Austrians--that's all they have got. The Herr doesn't want those."

"No," replied Andrew, "the Herr does not. Still, he must visit Entzheim. But now for the merchandise. Up, my man, up, and let us see what I can have for a few pieces of silver."

Up the ladder they went, therefore, as they had gone overnight, Muhlenbein muttering, however, that it was not "a few pieces of silver," but many pieces of gold which would be required to purchase anything worth having from his choice museum of relics; and, as Andrew had suspected, hardly were they in the room above, ere the men who had been with them on the evening before were there again.

"Fore gad!" he said to himself, "they are as keen as hawks. Their eyes must be able to see through the walls to know that I am a-marketing." And undoubtedly, whether they had seen through the walls, or the open door, or the two-foot-square window, there they were.

Disguising his desire to inspect the medallion which he believed to have hung round De Bois-Vallée's neck on the night when his sword had passed within four inches of it, disguising also his wish to observe if one of the rapiers in the bundle was likely to prove that which he suspected it to be, Andrew turned his attention to the wigs. Yet he had no intention of becoming a purchaser of any of these melancholy relics, nor of wearing the hair that had been on the head of any recently dead man. And, in spite of the recommendations of their present possessors--one of whom tried several on to give Andrew an idea of their suitability!--and of their chatterings and mutterings, he soon announced that he would have nothing to do with any of them.

"Nor of the clothes either!" exclaimed he. "What! wear them with this and this upon them," and he pointed with his finger to the dark stains, and--in some places--to the clean cuts through them from front to back, where sword or lance had passed. "Heavens! they would think I had murdered the previous wearer or stripped some gallows tree."

"But the lace, *gnädiger Herr*, the lace," whispered one, "the gold galloon. Look to it. See this"; and he held up a gorgeously-faced coat that when new must have cost many score of crowns.

"Nay, I will not have it either. 'Tis tarnished, spoilt--with rain and powder. No lace for me! Now, let us see for the weapons"; and he directed his eyes towards the bundle of swords.

"Ah! the weapons," said Muhlenbein, "the weapons. They are indeed worthy of so great a merchant as, without doubt, the Herr is. Now that one," speaking of a sword which Andrew was examining carefully, "is a noble tool, of splendid steel, a----"

"Tush," said Andrew. "Be silent, man. Did I not tell you last night I know a good sword. Your recommendations are useless."

However, even as he looked at the weapon in his hand he knew that there was no trace of De Bois-Vallée here. This sword had never been his, although it bore a strange resemblance to the one he had used against himself in their encounter; it being the exact length the Vicomte had

selected, and with its hilt and handle almost a facsimile of the other. But it had fallen from some Austrian's hand he saw in a moment, and not from the Frenchman's; the knot showed that, while the maker's name stamped into it of "Kraft, Nürnberg," added confirmation.

Still, it was so good a weapon that he was loth not to buy it and strap it up with other things he carried--only it was sheathless; so from this he passed on also--appeasing the men, however, who were now getting very discontented, by purchasing a pair of handsome pistols, after much chaffering.

Then he approached the medallions, while, as he did so, he thought, "If this, which I expect, fails too, I am no nearer than before."

Yet, when he held the trinket in his hand and gazed at it under the light thrown by the window of the loft, he felt sure it was the one on which he had looked as he opened the wounded man's shirt to give him air. The painted face that stared at him from the miniature, set in rose diamonds, was the one he had seen on the man's breast that night--the face of a handsome woman of some forty-five or fifty years of age, a woman with blue eyes and auburn hair, flecked with red.

"Doubtless his mother," Andrew thought. And, recognizing the similarity of the traits of the woman of the medallion and the man he sought, he knew that this was the ornament he had previously seen. Even the links of the gold chain attached to it seemed familiar.

Yet, still, he knew that there was no clue here; there were a score or more of such things lying on the table that had been taken from the necks of their dead owners, or picked up on the battlefield.

"A pretty toy," he said aloud, "the face of a beautiful woman. Nay!" holding up his hand at the exclamations of admiration which the man who owned this particular treasure instantly began to utter, while at the same time he loudly called attention to the splendid, the magnificent, the superb jewels with which it was surrounded. "Nay, friend, their value is known to me as well as the worth of the weapons. Yet I will buy it of you at a reasonable rate--though, since the battlefield has yielded you so many other treasures of a like kind----"

"But," burst in the present owner, "that is no battlefield spoil; 'tis better, much better--oh! far better--than any of the others. No simple officer dropped that, I will be sworn, but some great general in the retreat. Doubtless his wife, now, or----"

"No battlefield spoil! In the retreat!" Andrew repeated. "Fellow, what do you mean?"

But as he asked the question he knew there was a slight eagerness in his tone, though it was not apparent to their dull senses; senses blunted, too, by their desire to make a swift and profitable bargain. Also he felt a tremor at his heart! Not picked up on the battlefield! "Where then? Where?" he mused.

"Some half league from here--though now I think upon it, 'twas not the road along which either army retreated. But the track that leads to----"

"To!" exclaimed Andrew in his impatience.

"To St. Dié. The track known to many--across the mountains to Remiremont."

To Remiremont!

Andrew's pulse beat faster, almost his head swam, as he heard those last words. To Remiremont! Yet he had to pause to collect himself, to ask when and where and how, in connection with his enemy, he had heard that place mentioned? To pause while, all the time, his would-be vendor was dinning in his ears the value of the medallion portrait, especially the value of its setting, for which he would not take less than seventy écus. "From anyone else," he added, "though from the gracious Herr, because he was first come, he would take fifty."

Mechanically, scarce knowing why he should possess himself of the miniature, yet feeling he must stop the boor's clamour somehow and get time to think; reflecting also that to keep up his appearance of a "merchant," he must buy more than the pair of pistols, he again had recourse to the leathern purse and told out ten gold pieces of five crowns into the owner's dirty palm, while as he did so the word "Remiremont," "Remiremont," was beating at his brain.

"Where, where," he murmured to himself, "is the connection between that place and De Bois-Vallée? Where?"

In a moment it had come to him!

"He is of the *pays*; of Lorraine, near the Vosges, of the seigneurie of Remiremont. He will be doubly useful to Turenne in the Palatinate."

That was it; those almost the words! Uttered by the Court spy as he drank with Andrew at the inn in Paris! Of the seigneurie of Remiremont!

The bargaining came to an end as the clue rose to his mind; pushing the peasants aside, Andrew swiftly went down the ladder, his scabbard clanking on each rung, and the boors following--offering their wares at half, at a quarter, what they had previously demanded, now that they saw that there was no more huckstering to be done. Also, because their eyes had glinted into the leather purse and had seen many other gold pieces therein!

"Nay No more," he said; "I have done. Your treasures are too tempting. You will beggar me if I stay here. Now," laughing and pushing back with his masterful hands the men who flocked round him, begging all the time that he should miss no chance, and, therefore, offer his own price, "now, a bottle of the best, my golden hart, to drink to our next meeting, and then away. And the reckoning, too, Muhlenbein, the reckoning--though that should count as nothing with so good a customer as I!" and he laughed merrily, making even the peasants laugh too, his gaiety being infectious.

He had a little more to say, or ask, however, and it necessitated the drinking of a second bottle whereby to provide the time for obtaining the information he desired. Still, he did obtain it.

"This track," he said, "across the mountains of which you speak; to where does it lead? And Remiremont, what kind of place is that? And what leads from there?"

The second question none of them could properly answer, though one, who seemed to know more than the others, said there was a great nunnery at Remiremont itself, he thought. But as to where the road from it led, all knew. South to the old Burgundian city--the boors around him called it the "great" Burgundian city of Dijon; west, to far-off Paris, where the French King was who sent out his accursed armies; north to Flanders, where he might have heard other fightings were going on. While their town--for so they called it--of Holtzheim was to the east, but with the mountains between.

"So!" exclaimed Andrew, and now the third bottle was broached--which, after all, was not much amongst six of them! "So I, who must myself go that way--Dijon, you say, is great and prosperous?--or anyone who wished to go that way from here, would do well to proceed by this track? Better than the high roads, which are doubtless roundabout and lengthy."

"Better far," replied Muhlenbein, "since thereby you save half the distance. Yet, have a care if you adventure by it. In the mountains there are no inns--none such as this; *mein Gott*, no!--no refuge nor shelter. Nothing but the great trees, and, in a storm, the riven branches on your head."

"*Ja, Ja*," said another, the man who had sold Andrew the medallion, "and sometimes worse than that, worse than shattered branches to burst in the head. Worse! outlaws and outcasts, men driven from France and from this land, too, to whom the Vosges alone offer retreat. Travellers have entered those mountains on one side before now, and have never come forth on the other yet. *Gott in Himmel!* Their heads were not broken in by fallen branches. Not by fallen branches!"

"Ha!" said Andrew. "Well! here is one traveller who must pass that way. And we will see for the breaking of heads. We will see. While, for shelter, I have a cloak. 'Tis not," forgetting for the moment that he was a "merchant" and not a soldier, "'tis not the first time it has been my only roof. Friends, adieu!"

"The Herr will go," said Muhlenbein. "Soh! Well! he is big and strong. Has been a soldier, perhaps?"

"Ay, has been a soldier," and as he spoke he made his way to where his horse was. Yet, ere he mounted it he paused and said, while the rustics lolling at the inn door cast admiring glances over both man and steed:

"Where begins this ascent to the mountains? Tell me; or, rather, if anyone will earn a crown, let him conduct me to it."

In an instant all had proffered their services, and each man sprang forth as quickly as his great wooden shoes would let him, whereon Andrew, selecting one, set out upon his journey.

His journey! To end how, he knew not, and cared less, so long as it brought him to Remiremont. To Remiremont where he believed he would stand face to face with De Bois-Vallée once more, would find Marion Wyatt. The woman who, Debrasques had testified, was innocent, yet against whom all circumstances pointed as being guilty.

The road the peasant led him passed across the plains lying between Holtzheim and Entzheim, across the fields on which he had fought some few weeks ago, but which were now deserted except that there were other peasants from each of those villages still hunting and scraping for further pickings. For, to them, anything was precious, would fetch money some day if not now, would help to mend their broken and burst walls or buy fresh seed for their devastated fields.

Of the dead he saw but little, and what little he did see was enough even for him--a soldier. For if--half uncovered by the earth that had been lightly thrown over it, and, later on, washed away again by the drenching rains which had continued for days after the fight was over--any body met his eye, he saw that it was stripped naked by those who had come across it. Neither on

man nor fallen beast was there left so much as, in the case of the former, a rag, or, in that of the latter, a bridle rein or smallest piece of leather; nay, in the case of the latter their manes and tails were gone--they were useful for something! Yet, still, amongst the heaps and mounds, where the bodies of all lay covered, so that pestilence might not be bred in the villages, there moved the human ghouls who sought for a broken piece of chain, a ring, or coin, anything that would remunerate them for their losses, even though in their search that pestilence should seize on them.

Beyond the Little Wood, now tranquil enough except for the cries to one another of the searchers in it, and showing no other signs of what had happened there but those furnished by trees shattered with cannonballs, by broken gun carriages and fallen cannon not yet removed--the road turned to the right; half a mile further the opening to the track was reached which led across the mountains to Lorraine.

"God speed," the peasant said, as he pouched the crown tossed him by Andrew, "God speed. Beware of the storm; beware the marauders of the woods. Have your sword easy in its scabbard, your holster-flap open. Farewell."

"Adieu," Andrew replied. "I will beware."

And, slackening his horse's rein as the ascent began, he took the first steps that led towards the seigneurie of Remiremont. While, as he did so, he whispered to himself:

"This time. This time."

CHAPTER XIV.

ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS

"'Tis better, perhaps," thought Andrew, as, walking now by the side of his beast to ease it, he gazed down from the elevation he had reached to the plain lying below, "better that I did not slay him on that night, or leave him there to die. For then I should have accomplished only the task I was pledged to; might never have discovered that, besides revenging Philip, there was the woman to save if may be." And still pondering on all this, he continued:

"Debrasques might have been actually slain instead of condemned to this living death--as well be dead, poor boy, as he now is!--and then I should have known nothing; my search would have been ended with his cousin's death. Nothing. Nothing. And all my life I should have been coupling the name of Marion Wyatt with that of a treacherous, false wanton, as doubtless her father does if still alive. As Philip did unto the last, though sometimes he doubted. Well! his doubts had reason, it should seem!"

But now he almost laughed aloud as a new thought, or memory, rose to his mind. The memory of what description of revenge he had meditated on the woman when he supposed her to be as equally guilty as the man. A determination to carry her off from him as that man had carried her off from Philip, or to find her and, in some way, steal her love from De Bois-Vallée; to pretend love for her until her own was won--then to break her heart and fling her away. All this he had thought of doing, or of attempting to do, and had pondered on how it should be done, and now--now--instead--he was seeking her so that he might save her. He had reason to laugh at the change that had come into his heart.

The October night was setting in and the evening vapours arising amongst the great beech and fir trees on the mountain slopes, as Andrew reached the top of the pass and stood upon the level of the summit; seeing as he did so--through the rime and dank mist made by the dripping trees--that the track ran flat for some distance now. Whereon he set to work to calculate if it were possible for him to descend into the plains of Lorraine that night--to reflect also if it would be best to do so.

"I know naught of Remiremont," he reflected, "nor whether 'tis large or small--a place where a stranger may shelter himself without attracting attention, or be the object of all eyes by appearing there. I would I did so know, could see the place ere arriving at it."

Also, he reflected, he had to find out where this man for whom he sought dwelt. It might be, he knew, that he would have some great mansion in the town itself, or, which would be far better, that he lived in some outlying manor or grange.

"For then," he thought, "I could better find an entrance to it, bring myself face to face with

him. Could summon him to come forth and meet me, or, stealing in, confront him. Yet, whichever it be, I will find him. Even though he is surrounded by servitors I will get at him, have him point to point at last."

And as he said these words he determined to push on along the track once more, in the hope that, at least, the descent might soon begin.

He found, however, that he could of necessity go but little further that night. From the herbage at his feet there was rising now so strong and penetrating a mist that, already, it was difficult for him to follow the track; soon that mist would be a mountain fog enveloping everything and preventing further progress, and he recognized the unpleasantness of the situation. He was on the top of the mountains without so much as a cave to shelter him or his horse, and there he would doubtless have to stay until daylight--unless the fog which was thickening every moment should clear suddenly away, and the moon, which he remembered rose late, come forth. Stay there while both he and his beast would become chilled to the bone, so that in the morning they must be stiff with cold and cramp.

"A cheering prospect, truly," he thought, while as he did so he took from his valise his flask and some bread, and, having drunk a little spirit, moistened a portion of the bread with it and gave it to the horse, "a cheering prospect! Fore gad! I begin to think I am no wary campaigner after all, to be thus caught without a retreat. Yet that vagabond, my host of the Golden Hart, said the passage of the mountains might be made ere nightfall. It seems he was a liar, or I have come too slow."

Now, in truth, Muhlenbein had in this case told him no lie, since the passage of the Vosges from some parts of Alsace to the other side of the mountains was possible in a day--though not such short days as those of October; moreover, Andrew had set out late, it being ten in the morning ere he had left the Goldener Hirsch. But, if the man had not deceived Andrew in this manner he had in another, since, for his own selfish ends and to keep him longer at the inn, whereby he might be induced to make further purchases and to part with some more of his gold pieces, he had grievously lied when he said there was no accommodation to be found on the road. For--unless his memory was exceedingly treacherous!--he should have remembered that there were shepherds' and goatherds' huts at frequent intervals on the summit of the mountains, while but a little divergence from that summit and an earlier descent would have brought the traveller to St. Dié or Epinal. But doubtless his greed prompted his forgetfulness, or, to do him justice, he may have thought Andrew would not care to branch off to either of those places.

Therefore the latter soon found that, for certain, Muhlenbein was wrong when he said there was no shelter but that of the mountain pines to be found on the road, since now, as he led his horse along the level flat, and felt with his feet at every step to make sure that he kept the hard and beaten track, he distinctly heard voices ahead of him--voices that, from the dull and muffled manner in which they reached his ears, came undoubtedly from within some walls. Then, still feeling his way carefully over the soft and sodden *chaume*, on which both his and the horse's feet trod noiselessly, and directing their footsteps off the path towards the spot whence the sound of the voices came, he found himself outside a long low hut, as he concluded it to be--a hut from which a murky gleam of light was visible in the fog, proceeding evidently from some opening that served as a window.

"I tell you," a voice, harsh and rough, was saying, "the war is over! Otherwise how would he be here? I tell you I have seen him. And we know, we old and tried soldiers, that none leave the ranks till peace is signed." After which the speaker emitted a laugh as raucous as, and fitting mate to, his speech.

"Ha!" said another, "that is all very well for such poor devils as we are, 'when peace is signed.' But with him, now, of the noblesse--and of Turenne's staff, they say--'tis different. They leave the army when it goes into winter quarters; he would do so. Curse him! He needs come here to harry us about."

"Ay, but we will harry him, too, in God's good time. Some day he shall come back from other wars and find he has no home to enter. We will light the mountain tops with the flames of his old house in spite of his being Vicomte and----"

Unfortunately, at this moment, Andrew--who, at the words "of Turenne's staff" first, and of "Vicomte" next, had pricked up his ears wondering on what he had lighted on now, and what revelations he was about to hear--was prevented from listening to any more of their talk. His horse, chilled and cold, shook itself violently, rattling as it did so its bridle and chain and stirrups, so that none within could fail to hear the noise it made.

In an instant there was silence in the hut; a moment later a door was flung open and the shadow of a man, blurred and indistinct in the foul air that was lit up by the surly light cast out, was visible through the fog.

"Who's there?" came in an instant a different voice which Andrew had not previously heard, and, as he advanced to where the figure of the man was, he answered: "A traveller seeking shelter for the night for himself and animal; shelter at least till it is clearer, and he can pursue his way."

"There is no shelter here, monsieur," the voice replied, and the expression "monsieur" told him he was dealing with Lorrainers now. "None."

"My friend, there must be. We are cold and perishing, and I see you have a fire within. Let me come in," and, suiting the action to the word, he pushed up against the man standing in the doorway, who fell back somewhat at the sight of the stalwart figure before him. Yet he was stalwart, too, or had been once when younger, though he was now old and presented to Andrew nothing but the wreck of a powerful man. Still, old as he was, he seemed inclined to resent the intrusion and appeared almost as though about to bar his entrance, when another voice from within exclaimed--

"Nay, Gaspard, if the traveller wants warmth and shelter let him come in. Poor as our auberge is, doubtless he will pay for his accommodation."

"Doubtless," replied Andrew, not stopping, however, his inward progress while he spoke, but advancing towards the fire where he warmed his hands and feet, glancing round all the time at the inhabitants of the hut and thinking them about as villainous a looking crew as he had ever set eyes on. Nevertheless, this did not deter him from the resolve he had taken of obtaining shelter here, if not food, nor prevent him from assuming the masterful manner which he saw at once was the only one likely to serve him now.

Also he wanted to know--and meant to know!--who was the "Vicomte," the member of the noblesse, and likewise of Turenne's staff, who was here and had been seen by one of the speakers. For, putting those remarks together and coupling them with the fact that Remiremont was not far from here, he thought it would be marvellously strange if he had not lighted on the clue to De Bois-Vallée's present whereabouts.

Assuming, therefore, this masterful manner, which he felt would serve him so well, he administered a kick to a log of wood that had fallen almost from the rude fire on to the earthen floor without, stretched his large body in front of the embers until the warmth was obscured from all the others, and, looking down at the two men by the side of the old one, said--

"Well, my good friends, you seem to have devilish little hospitality amongst you, since you wish to close the door to any wandering traveller across these cursed mountains. Hey! is it not so?"

"We keep no open house," the elder one said, looking sourly at him as he stood there, his sword by his side, his hat on his head, and with one hand twirling his moustache, "therefore one may close their door against whomsoever they please."

"May they! What! When over that door hangs a bush--foul as the night is I could see that, the feather in my hat had almost brushed it as I spake to you--testifying you have wine for those who can pay for it--and what traveller goes without money for his wants? Also, I observe you have accommodation for beasts as well--if I mistake not I see the hindquarters of a horse down there," and he pointed with his finger to the end of the long hut--where, behind a piece of horribly dirty canvas that hung from a rafter to the earthen floor, he saw a grey tail switching every now and then.

None of the three men sitting there and gazing up at this powerful-looking intruder answered a word; instead, all scowled at him, giving Andrew the idea--doubtless a true one--that they were meditating some sort of attack upon him. Maybe to pull him to earth; one to spring at his throat, another at his legs. It was likely enough to be so, he told himself! And at the thought his spirits rose and danced within him; it was the love of encountering such adventures as these that had sent him wandering about Europe and fighting in any campaign where his sword would be accepted, when, had he followed his dead mother's desire, he would have remained at home.

"For those who can pay for their accommodation, I say," he repeated, and with this love of excitement egging him forward, he decided on tantalizing the men. Whereon he thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out his leathern bag, and emptied some gold and silver coins into his other palm.

"Here," said he, pitching a silver dollar down on to the table, "find me some food and drink, and drink with me yourselves. Meanwhile, I will attend to my beast," and he strode out into the raw fog again, and a moment later led in the animal by the bridle, when, taking it up to the end of the hut, he tied it by the reins to a nail in the wall.

"Now, a bucketful of water," he exclaimed, "and a handful of oats, and we shall do very well." After which he glanced at the others to see what disposition there was amongst them to obey him.

The sight of the money--or, perhaps, 'twas rather the sight of the leathern purse--had, however, wonderfully sharpened their hospitality, whereon, muttering that "since monsieur appeared desirous of recompensing them for his intrusion they were willing to oblige him," the old man, still looking sour and grim, set about finding some refreshments. From a hole in the wall he produced a bottle of wine that, by its appearance, seemed to be old, if not strong; some cheese and rye bread was also forthcoming, but he said that, as regards meat, he had none whatever.

"We are poor, very poor," he explained, "simple charcoal burners and truffle-hunters--nothing

else."

"Humph!" said Andrew, as he masticated the provender before him, though he did not sit down to the table until he had seen the horse also given water and a feed, "Nothing else, eh? Now I should have supposed you two worthy gentlemen," and he directed a glance at the others, whose mugs at the same time he filled to the brim, "would have been something more in my way. Soldiers, for instance. There is a good regiment raised hereabouts, the one of Epinal; I have seen it in the field. Commanded, when I knew it, by Maisonfleur. Yet the *arrière-ban* has been out a long while and you are here."

"The war is over," one of these answered, speaking now for the first time since Andrew had been making himself at home. "We know that."

"How?" asked Andrew, looking at him with a swift glance over his glass. "How, friend, do you know that?"

"Have we not proof? Monsieur suggests he is a soldier. Yet he is here--as we are."

"A cunning *riposte*," said Andrew to himself, while he exclaimed aloud. "My friend, I do not count. I am an auxiliary, or what you choose to call me--volunteer, nay, mercenary, if you please--and can do as I desire, only if I do not fight I am not paid. But for you, you are Frenchmen, and the war is not over. Turenne will engage the Imperialists again, Condé is in full campaign. Fine fellows like you should be earning laurels--and louis d'ors."

"*Peste!*" exclaimed the one who had not hitherto spoken. "Louis d'ors! How many of them does monsieur think we get? And as for being here--well, why not? It is our *pays*, and we are not the only ones out of the war. There are others of this neighbourhood back from it--as we know very well," and he gave a glance as he spoke at the two men.

"To wit--whom?" asked Andrew, knowing that now the conversation was approaching the point he desired. Knowing also that it behoved him to be very careful. If he was that, if he could but be a diplomatist for half an hour, he might learn much.

"Oh! *avec ça!*" the man said, "it would be useless to tell monsieur. He would not understand. But we know--we know, *mes amis*," addressing his friends, "*N'est ce pas?*"

"Perhaps," said Andrew, "I know, too. Know to whom you refer. Shall I say--for instance--a Vicomte. Mention another name? Humph! Also beginning with a V?"

All looked at him, the big old man over a pair of horn spectacles he had assumed, the others under their brows. Then the younger of the two remaining ones, a dark handsome man, though with a face spoilt by signs of debauchery and, perhaps, of rough living, said:

"Is monsieur a friend of his?"

"Scarcely that! Otherwise I might be riding on my way now, reckless of fog and reeking mist, reckless of missing my path and falling to the bottom of some abyss from one of your crags, to tell him he was in danger of his house being burned to the ground, of these mountain tops being lighted by the reflections of the flames from that burning house."

He had hit the mark when he mentioned the letter V as the first one of the name of the man they undoubtedly hated, knew it, saw it directly from their actions.

The man whose home was to be burned over his head, the man who they had said harried them, whom they had sworn that very evening to harry in God's good time, was, must be, De Bois-Vallée.

And Andrew laughed fiercely under his moustache as he thought to himself:

"Between us--with me first--he should not escape this time!"

CHAPTER XV.

"HE IS MINE. MUST BE MINE NOW!"

Nevertheless he knew that it was necessary for him to be very careful.

For, to begin with, these men were doubtful allies--even if he wanted any such, which, after

all, he was not sure about. Certainly he wanted none to help him slay De Bois-Vallée and thereby avenge Philip--but even as he so paused, endeavouring to think what was best to do, he observed the looks of consternation still on their faces at discovering he had overheard their remarks when outside. Yet, might not their assistance be of the greatest use to him in rescuing Marion Wyatt from evil at the Vicomte's hands? Might not they also be of the greatest service to him in helping to discover what evil it was that threatened the woman? Or, further and better, was it possible that they had some knowledge of what that evil was?

"Harm that may come to her through his fear of what I know, as he imagines; harm that may be averted perhaps by me if I can find her--or again find him?" he had asked Debrasques, he remembered; remembered also that from Debrasques' eyes had come the answer in the affirmative. And he had bidden Andrew go and avert the harm impending; now he was here, and it seemed that an opportunity had arisen which might assist him in thus averting it.

He must extract all that he could from these men; he must lose no chance. Indeed, his only regret was that his manner had not been more propitiatory from the outset, less rough with them, and he prayed that the big leather purse, and another which he had put carefully away, might be able to win their goodwill. If so they should have it all, even though he had to go without food until more money could be obtained from England.

They sprang up--or two of them did--as he uttered the words about the burning house and the flames whose reflection should be cast on the mountain tops, while the elder man cast an evil glance at him that would have augured badly for his safety in that lonely spot had he not been so big and strong. Then the first of these two men, whom he had heard called Jean, exclaimed, "You heard that--outside! And know that it was of him and of his house we spoke?"

"I know it now."

"And what will you do?" while as he spoke he bent forward with a sinister look on his face, and with his hand in his coarse brown blouse, "What will you do?"

"I will tell you," replied Andrew, "only, first, give me that," while as he answered he darted his own hand out like lightning, seized the fellow by the wrist, and drew his hand from out of his bosom. In it was a long knife.

"Let it fall to the floor," he said, compressing the man's wrist so that he winced, while Andrew turned as he did so and spoke to the other two (who had sprung up and were standing over him threateningly) in a marvellously quiet voice, yet one that had its effect.

"Make no interference," he said. "Be warned. Resume your seats or we shall all regret it. Do as I say," he continued, his voice sinking even lower as he fixed his eyes on them. "As I say. It will be best."

Whether it was his height or his broad chest, or, perhaps, the sight of the huge hand that compressed Jean's wrist, which forced them to obey, cannot be said. Suffice it that, after a look of indecision on the part of the well-favoured, dissolute-looking man, and a scowl on the part of the old one, they did as he said. Each returned to the settle, or stool, he had occupied, though not without murmuring and muttering.

Another squeeze from Andrew finished also Jean's affair; the fingers unloosed the knife, which clattered down on to the earth, and, at the same time, his wrist was released, scored with a red mark as though an iron vice had been screwed on it.

"Enough," said Andrew; "now we shall be very good friends. Listen, therefore, to what I have to say. But, first, find another bottle of wine."

Obedient to his orders--although it might be but for a time and until they could concert some joint attack on him--another dusty, cobwebby bottle was produced from the hole in the wall, and, when the one glass from which Andrew drank and the mugs of the others had been filled, the former spoke again, though with his eyes on all their faces and on their hands, too, to see if they threatened harm.

"I will tell you," he said, "what I shall do. Yet, first, let there be no mistake. The man of whom you speak as having come across these mountains, the man whose home you purpose to burn to the ground, is the Vicomte De Bois-Vallée. Nay," seeing the look that came on their countenances, "deny it not! There is but one who has so come from Turenne's camp, but one who has fled from the army, deserted his post. The man I seek and follow."

"Fled! Deserted!" they repeated, while the old man muttered incoherently.

"Ay, fled, deserted. Shall I tell you why? If I do, you will perhaps acknowledge that, for the present, at least, you may leave his house in peace."

"Tell us," all said together.

"He has fled," continued Andrew, "because thereby he imagines he can evade me--me, who have sworn to slay him. And I am resolved to slay him. See, listen. I am an Englishman, well-to-do

now, though not long ago I had nought but that which I could earn with this," and he let his left hand fall on his sword hilt. "Well-to-do, I tell you, might live at home in my own land, run no greater danger than a man encounters in his own fields and gardens. Yet I am here. To slay him."

"To slay him!" the dissolute, good-looking peasant repeated. "To slay him! Camille De Bois-Vallée! To slay him!"

"Ay! From England to Paris I came, from Paris to Turenne's army, from that army here. Tomorrow to Remiremont, to-morrow night, as it shall fall out, or in a week, or month, or year, to return to England with my sword left sticking through him. Say, shall I do that first, ere you burn his house down?"

"What is your wrong?" asked Laurent, the good-looking man. "What? *Pardie!* a woman, I suppose."

"Ay, a woman. Yet from your words, your guess at that, it should seem I am not the only one. Has he wronged other men--through the women they love?"

"Yes," Laurent answered. "Yes. That way and others."

"That way and others. So, 'tis not I alone who seek to punish him. Yet from me the punishment shall come. And 'tis better so, is it not? If you, or others, destroy him, you are here to be punished in return, you are yourselves of the *pays*, as you tell me. But I--I am a stranger, and, that done which I must do, I shall be gone; none can harm me. Moreover, he will fall at my hands in honourable duello. I shall not spare him as I spared him before."

"What!" came from all their lips, while the old man thrust his horn spectacles up on his forehead, and leaned across the table to stare at him. "What you had him once, and you spared him?"

"Yes, to finish the work better next time. And it was not his murder I sought" Whereupon he rapidly told them of the fight in the glade behind the church, and of how the peasants would have slain De Bois-Vallée, had he not interfered for his protection.

"'Twas folly," Laurent said, "I would have left him there for them to do the work. Thereby, monsieur would have had his desire gratified at no cost to himself."

"Nay," replied Andrew, "'twas because I had not done the work that I saved him, as now I prevent you from wreaking your vengeance on him. 'Tis I who must do it. Also, there is something else to be done. Listen!"

And now, because he saw and knew that he could bind these men to him either through their hatred of his enemy or because of their cupidity--or through both combined--he told them that the woman who had been wronged by this man was, he believed, somewhere in his power, and that, before all--before his revenge, before theirs--she must be found and saved. "Could they," he asked, "help him to save her?"

"Where is she?" answered Laurent, who seemed to take the lead now amongst his companions. "Let us know that, and, since you desire it, we may be of service. Alas! that we could have saved other women!"

"That," replied Andrew, "is what I do not know. Is what, indeed, at present, I seek to learn. Further, I know not where his house is, nor how to find entrance. Though soon I shall."

Then, at once, spurred on as it seemed to Andrew by a desire for vengeance on the part of Laurent particularly, who, he could see, nourished a personal hatred against the man, and, on the part of the others, by a desire for gain, and by greed, they gave him some information which he did not doubt was true.

De Bois-Vallée, they told him, lived not in Remiremont itself, but, instead, some four or five miles this side of it, and at the foot of the very mountain which they were now on the summit of. It was a large property known as Bois-le-Vaux, they said, consisting of wood and forest with a mountain stream through it that afterwards joined the Meurthe, and, in the middle of this estate and backed up by the hills, was the house itself.

"Of what description?" asked Andrew.

"Oh! for that, old, very old. Dating back, some said, to the days of Le Duc Thierry," the old man, Gaspard, answered. "Built partly of stone, hewn out of these mountains, one should suppose; a house long and low, with, above the ground floor, much wood. Also outhouses and stables and a granary, all of wood. Therefore," he added, "it would burn well."

"But not yet," answered Andrew, "not yet. That is for after I am gone, by which time he will be dead. For which reason there may be no necessity to thus destroy it. Are there any as bad as he to come after, and have all who went before him been equally as bad?"

No, they answered, each telling the tale by little pieces; no, there were none to come after of whom they knew; he had neither brother nor sister, nor was he married.

"Wherefore," interjected Gaspard, who seemed the most anxious for the destruction by flames of the mansion of Bois-le-Vaux, "it may properly be burned down. All of this country hate it and him; after his death we desire no memorial of his race."

"And of those before him. Were they like him?" again asked Andrew.

"His mother was a saint on earth," the old man said; "I knew her. And his father was harmless. The old wolf-blood of his forerunners has come out in him."

"His mother!" exclaimed Andrew. "His mother!" and he clapped his hand to his pocket and drew out the medallion. "You knew her. Is this she?" and he showed them the portrait.

"Ay," exclaimed Gaspard, after he had brought the spectacles down from his forehead to their proper place again, "ay, 'tis. I knew her well. She was a saint--all loved her--'tis for the sake of her memory we have so long borne with the son."

"Enough," said Andrew. "I will return it to him."

"Wherefore?" asked Laurent, not understanding.

"As something which he dropped in fleeing from the army, from me. He can scarce refuse to take it, to come and take it from my hands; thus we shall be face to face again."

"And the woman?" one asked.

"Ah the woman. I had forgotten. No; first I must find out if she is here, below, in this gloomy mansion you speak of. Then--then--it will be time to decide what I must do. But it grows late; to-morrow I must see this house and reconnoitre. My friends, if you will be such, let us make terms. Will you place yourselves at my service?"

"As I told monsieur," said Gaspard, "we are very poor. We must live. And if monsieur desires vengeance on one whom we all hate we will serve him. Though I for one can do but little. I am old--yet I do not forget. Ah, Julie! Also he forced me from my cottage, raising the seigneurial rights month by month till I became an outcast, living here on no man's land."

"Curse him!" exclaimed Laurent. "All I desire is to see him dead. And as for payment--well, I have no money--I, too, am an outcast, he would send me to the galleys if he caught me. Curse him!" he cried again, "give me but the wherewithal to live, and I will help you. Either you or I shall slay him."

"He has wronged you deeply?" Andrew asked, noticing how the handsome features of this man were convulsed by his fury.

"Wronged me! Wronged me! My God! Listen. I married this man's daughter, Julie," and his hand shook as he beat it against Gaspard's shoulder, "and he took her from me, took her to that hell, Paris, and--and--left her to die there. Judge if he has wronged me."

"And you?" turning to the third, the man Jean. "Do you hate him, too?"

"I hate all aristocrats," he replied. "They grind us to the earth. And him I doubly hate. For--for--well, I have cause. Also," and he laughed now the harsh and reckless laugh which Andrew had heard as he approached the hut, "you saw how I loved him when, for fear that you might be here to help him, I drew that on you," and he pointed to the knife lying where it had fallen.

"'Tis well," said Andrew, "we understand one another. And, for earnest of my good faith, take this and do what you will with it"; whereon he drew forth once more the leathern bag and emptied its contents--a dozen good louis d'ors and as many écus and German dollars--on the table. As he did so he noticed to whom the spoils fell. Gaspard, with a greed often enough the accompaniment of old age, especially when that old age is surrounded by and steeped in poverty, thrust out his gnarled and knotty hands, endeavouring to cover all the pieces. Jean, with a laugh, clutched some ere the other could prevent him. Laurent alone was moderate. One gold coin rolled towards him, which he picked up and thrust under his blouse.

"'Twill suffice a long time for meat and drink," he said. "By the time 'tis spent--well!--what I desire more than money may be accomplished."

"You have left yourself without any," the old man said, turning to Andrew, almost with a look of shame on his withered face, yet still with his hands on all the coins that Jean had been unable to wrench from beneath them. "What will you do?"

"Nay! never fear. It is not my all. I have more--for myself and you. And, after that, can obtain still more. Serve me faithfully and you will find me a good paymaster."

Then, after they had vowed again and again that they would do so--Laurent alone wasting no words in protestation--Andrew remarked:

"He is mine. Must be mine now. Nothing can save him or prevent me bringing him to book. Even though we have to besiege him in his house! He is mine. And, even should he escape me for

a time, he is a ruined man. To the army he can never return. His desertion prevents that. My friends," and he rose from his chair, "De Bois-Vallée will never harry you again. From this time forth we harry him."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HOUSE OF THE ENEMY

The fog was gone next morning when Andrew awoke from the bed of straw on which he had lain all night covered by his cloak, and with--for he was too wary a soldier to entirely trust his new-found acquaintances until he knew them better!--his unsheathed sword by his side under that cloak.

Gone, swept away by a soft breeze that came up from across the Meurthe and sighed amongst the great fir trees all round, and amidst also those at his feet on the slopes below--at the base of which lay Remiremont--while, above his head, were the blue skies and the bright October sun. And, talking to his new friends, he learnt that he was on what is known in that fair mountain region as the *Ballon d'Alsace*, and that the river sparkling in the distance like a silver thread was the Moselle, while the blue mountains in the still further distance were the Jura.

Already some plans had been decided on between him and the two younger men while they sat at breakfast--a meagre meal of more rye bread, an egg or so which Gaspard had managed to produce, and a bottle of wine--and this is what they had resolved upon doing first.

Laurent was to lead Andrew by a path which he very well knew (though it was doubtful if any stranger to the neighbourhood could ever have found it) to a copse on the lower slopes, from which he could look down on the house itself; could, indeed, he said, approach so near above it that a man might throw a piece of twisted paper, or any light substance, on to the roof.

"For," said the man, as now they prepared to set out, "it was cleverly placed was the old house, *voyez-vous*, when the forerunners of this Vicomte--the men who were known as *Les Loups de Lorraine*--set it up. It stands back so near to the slope that, from the mountains, no attack can come--from men at least, though missiles might be thrown. Between the house and a vast stone wall, with which the side of the hill is faced, is a space of twenty feet--who can overpass that? Also the ledge of this wall-facing is some twenty feet higher than the flat roof; who will dare to jump down? A reckless man might attempt it, 'tis true, or two, or three, but where would they be? They could never reach the roof, even though they slung themselves over with a rope; should they by chance arrive they would be thrown down into the stone-flagged space 'twixt house and wall."

"Doubtless," replied Andrew, "there is no method of reaching the house that way. Yet, supposing there was a large number of men above this ledge of wall, and firing down on to the roof--would they not injure it, break it in; perhaps do as friend Gaspard says, fire it? It might be."

"Nay, you shall see," replied Laurent. "Meanwhile, come," and they set forth from the hut on foot, Andrew's horse being left there for the time, since the path they were about to descend offered no passage for any animal larger than a sheep or goat.

As to Jean he was already gone, he having another mission to fulfil in the service of their new employer.

He had said overnight as they lay talking on their straw pallets ere sleep came, that he had a cousin at Bois-le-Vaux, a man who was half gamekeeper and half gardener there, and who--as the house had been more or less shut up since the death of the Vicomtesse five years ago--did also many odd jobs, such as attending to the poultry, what horses there were in the stables, the dogs, and so forth. This man he had, therefore, set out to find, with the object of learning if possible if any strange lady was detained within the mansion unknown to all outside it.

"A thing," Laurent had remarked, "that might well enough happen. My wife--ah, my God! my wife--was there a month ere he took her to Paris, and none outside knew it--not even I nor old Gaspard here, though we searched the country for miles around, even suspected this man. None knew of it. Not one."

"Yet," replied Andrew thoughtfully, "'twould be strange if this lady can be here and her presence unknown. It is near two years--a full year and a half at least--since she must have come here, perhaps was brought here. Could all knowledge of her presence in this house have been

concealed so long from the outside world?"

"Oh! *comprenez!*" exclaimed Jean, "that would not be so difficult. He has two custodians who let none enter that mansion, and who can be dumb and secret as death. Inside the house they would warrant none finding out her presence."

"Who are these custodians?"

"One--the worst!--a man, his steward, bound to him by many ties. A fellow he saved from the wheel for endeavouring to rob the abbey----"

"Is there an abbey here, then?"

"*Mais oui*, a noble abbey. And the abbesses mostly princesses. *Mon Dieu!* they live as such; 'tis a great abbey, as they are great ladies. Forty years past, Turenne, making his first campaign, endeavoured to besiege it, and these noble women drove him back so that he failed."

"Turenne beaten by women!" murmured Andrew, recalling the great soldier's career betwixt then and now. "Beaten by women! Think of it!^[1] But," turning to Jean, "about this man? He would have robbed the abbey, you say?"

"They say so. It is full of precious relics. Gold and jewels, the bodies of three saints--Amé, Romaric, and Adelphe--and he tried for some of the treasure; the bodies of the saints he wanted not! But the ladies caught him and would have broken him on the wheel--only there was no man to do it, no *bourreau*, and the townspeople would not without licence from the Duke. Then De Bois-Vallée begged for his life and saved it--his mother, the lady of the portrait you have, had been brought up there, might have been *chanoinesse* if she would."

"Therefore his steward serves him well?"

"As his own brother might. If De Bois-Vallée is a devil, so is Armand Beaujos; if devil's work is to be done he loves to do it. Be sure if any woman is kept there by his master's orders he will keep her tight."

"And the other?"

"A woman. Also a villain, yet true to him. She was his foster-mother, and they say--but," breaking off, "it may be lies."

"What do they say?"

"That this woman loved his father--that, *par consequent*, she hated his mother. Has said she should have been the old man's wife, the young one's mother, had things gone well with her."

"Humph!" said Andrew, "an interesting family, a pleasant house to make the acquaintance of. Well, it shall be done, nevertheless. Now, Jean, speed on your way and find out, if you can, if there is any woman known to be there. Then come back to me."

"Ay," said Jean, "to-night. To Plombières."

"To Plombières. What is the auberge you say I may find accommodation at?"

"La Tête d'Or. I shall be there to-night. Yet, since you desire to attract no more attention than necessary, be ready for me in the street; thereby I am not forced to ask for you. There is a fountain of good water facing the inn. Look for me there, monsieur. Ere sunset."

"I will not fail. Neither do you do so. Remember--I have another purse."

It had been arranged, when all arose that morning, that it would be best Andrew should seek some place where he could remain as long as he desired to be in the neighbourhood; until, as he himself had said, "the work was done." The work which, as he reflected, meant so much more now than the slaying of De Bois-Vallée, namely, the finding of Marion Wyatt, and, if all was as Debrasques had said, the rescuing her. That was now the first and most important part of what he had to do, the other would follow in due course.

Also it was impossible, or almost so, that he should remain in Gaspard's hut. Soldier, adventurer, as he was, used on occasion to hard living, he could not stay there; he and his beast would be starved as the least of evils, while, in case prompt action became necessary--swift movement on his part one way or another, either in pursuing De Bois-Vallée should he again elude him, or in fleeing from him for a time and from any whom he might summon to his assistance, should Andrew be able to carry off Marion Wyatt from Bois-le-Vaux--the hut was no suitable place. Therefore he had decided, after taking counsel with the others, that Plombières must be his abiding place until the work was done. It was, they said, a quiet little village, well situated for leaving at any moment, since good roads led to all four quarters, and, as it was some five miles from Remiremont and two more from the house on which his attention was fixed, his presence there was not likely to be known to De Bois-Vallée until he himself proclaimed it.

"And meanwhile," he said, "I shall be near enough to him to move at any moment, near enough

to present myself before him when the time comes. It will do very well."

And now he and Laurent set forth to descend to that spot whence he could overlook the house into which he meant ere long to obtain entrance, the house from which he meant to rescue Marion Wyatt if things were as he believed and as Debrasques had, by nods and glances from his sick bed, hinted; the house, or the surroundings of which, he meant to make the scene of De Bois-Vallée's death. For that it should be the scene of his own death, that he should fail in what he had set himself to do, he never permitted himself to imagine. If the idea arose it was banished as soon as it came. It was, he told himself, an impossible one. He would not fail!

Following his guide he passed swiftly down paths that seemed made only for rabbits, so narrow were they; through groves and copses of oak and fir trees, from which a sweet, delicious aroma was diffused through the morning air; and, pushing aside bushes in which the wild raspberry grew in profusion, though now the fruit was gone, they came at last to an open space below which was a fringe of more fir trees.

"We must skirt this," Laurent remarked, "otherwise we may be seen from the grounds down there. Observe beneath that line of trees," and he pointed to the fringe below, "the woods and pastures. All those are his property. If he, or any, are outside the house this morning, none could pass down this open spot without being seen."

"Come then," replied Andrew, "let us skirt this glade and so continue"; whereon, keeping beneath the wood that grew all along the side, they descended still further.

A few moments later and they were above the house--looking down on to the roof and back of it. From where they had thrown themselves flat after creeping to the very edge of the slope (they being, indeed, so near the wall which had been built up as a facing to that slope that they could touch its topmost stones with their hands) they might, as Laurent had said, have thrown a rolled-up piece of paper on to the roof. Yet there were full twenty feet between those topmost stones and the parapet of the house, which was itself some twenty feet lower than the summit of the wall and lip of the slope! A space wide and yawning, through which, if any should fall, instant annihilation would await them at the bottom on the hard stones. A space over which projectiles might be hurled from cannon or, in older days, from catapult and warlike engine, but across which neither man nor deer could leap and hope to reach the other side below.

"Safe enough from all attack this way," said Andrew, while he gazed down at the topmost windows of the ancient house, "safe enough. A regiment might demolish it by firing on it from here, but nought else would avail. And how many would be picked off by musket ball and caliver from masked windows and loopholes while doing so? 'Twould be a perilous attack!"

"Gaspard's thought is," whispered Laurent, as though fearing their voices might be carried across the chasm on the morning air, and so reach any within the gloomy house, "that burning brands cast down on it at night, when all slept, might easily cause destruction. Observe, all is of wood above, even the roof. The old man is right. It would burn well. Must burn well some day!"

"But not yet," Andrew answered, also in a half whisper. "Remember, the woman I have come to save is doubtless in this house, held fast. If it were afire there might be no escape for her."

"Not yet, perhaps," replied Laurent, "but some day, *a coup sûr!*"

After this, Andrew busied himself by observing the whole situation of the house and the approaches to it from various quarters.

That the lower part of it might well date back to the time of Duke Thierry was easy to believe; it being built of vast stones that looked as though Time itself could never destroy nor remove them, and Andrew, who could see only the back of the house, judged that the front would be exactly the same, with, he supposed, one huge, iron-studded doorway in it. Likewise, he pictured to himself small lancet windows, heavily barred also with iron; windows that swept the great open *place* in front of them, and across which not so much as a dog could pass without being instantly observed! Above this stone basement, the wooden part began and formed another, or second floor, yet, though of wood and supported by enormous beams, it looked scarcely more modern than the lower part. For beams and supports, stanchions and cross-beams, were all black with age and with the stains of countless storms, and even the various devices--some with the Cross Florettée upon them as sign of Crusading ancestors--were almost obliterated now. Yet, old and weather-beaten as this ancient mansion looked, it presented to Andrew's gaze a firmness and solidity that appeared almost impregnable.

"A house hard to get into," he thought, "if well defended. A house equally hard to get out of when once in it. Yet, in some way, I will do both, and, when I attempt the latter, it should go hard if she whom I believe to be a prisoner here comes not away with me. At least the attempt shall be made. Ere a week is past I will be inside."

Then, after sweeping his eye round the woods which bordered this mansion, he told Laurent he had seen enough for his first view, and that there was no more to be done at present.

"But to-night," he added, "if Jean brings to Plombières the news I want, I may be back again. Only--next time I must see the front of the house. 'Tis from there the entrance must be obtained,

by fair means or foul 'Tis that which I must reconnoitre to-night when the moon is up. She rises at eight, I think. Pray heaven there is no fog!"

"Beware what you do," said Laurent. "If caught and overwhelmed by numbers, it may go hard with you. He has many whom he can summon to do his bidding."

"Bah! I have encountered numbers before and fought my way through them."

"That may be so. But, once inside that house, you will have others than men to contend with. Strong bars and locks; ay, even chains. Beware."

"I shall run no risks," replied Andrew, "but if the woman I seek is there I will reach her. On that I am resolved. Nothing shall thwart me."

CHAPTER XVII.

"A WOMAN IS THERE"

Lolling against the doorpost of the yard of "La Tête d'Or" stood Andrew that evening, watching the sunset, glancing his eye up at the crimson glow on the top of the mountains behind the village of Plombières, wishing "Good-night" to any passing peasant who spoke to him, and occasionally patting some child on the head as it stopped to gaze at the figure of the great stranger at the inn-yard gate.

His arrival had caused some little commotion an hour or so before, when he had ridden up to the door--though not, perhaps, as much as it would have done had the times been more peaceful. For in such a period a stranger looking like a soldier, though with no particularly distinctive marks of his calling about him, would indeed have caused a flutter in the little village, to which none from the outside world ever came, except some broken-down, gouty Lorrainer from Nancy or Epinal, to whom the boiling springs of Plombières were known as health-giving, since they drove out, or were supposed to drive out, all the evils produced by wine drinking and gluttony, and gave to those who partook of them a fresh lease of indulgence.

But now the village was full of soldiers, men of Lorraine who, since the Imperialists were going into winter quarters, were straggling back to their homes, or to where they were billeted, and who, as Andrew drew rein in front of the door, were engaged in drinking confusion to the French King, although he was at that present moment master of the province. For a strange state of things prevailed all through it just then. The reigning Duke, Charles IV., hated France, and fought against her under De Bournonville and Montecuculi, while, at the same time, Louis called himself King over Lorraine, and, although most of the nobility followed the Duke with their dependants and threw in their fortunes with his, there were some who, being discontented, espoused, and had done so for some time, the cause of France. Amongst these was De Bois-Vallée, who had been French from interest, if not from feeling, since 1670, when Louis's proclamation of his sovereignty over Lorraine had been made. Yet, had Turenne not prevented the Imperialists from advancing across the Vosges, the French claim to possess the department would have been even more hollow than it actually was at the moment, and the local champions of France would have been in a dangerous position. Indeed, they were in a dangerous one now, since, should the Austrian allies finally defeat the Marshal, Charles--who never forgave!--would probably ruin, if he did not destroy, every subject who had espoused the French cause.

"Is the gallant gentleman on his road home from the campaign?" asked a gigantic Lorrainer who stood at the entrance to the inn-yard as Andrew rode up, a man who wore the cognizance of De Vaudemont on breast and hat. "For sure he is a soldier."

"For sure he is," replied Andrew briefly. "Yet not on his way home at present," and he dismounted from his horse as he spoke.

"Ay! that I see, or rather hear by your accent. You," said the soldier, "are no Lorrainer."

"Friend," replied Andrew, facing him, "have I said I am?" while, with something very like a sneer, he added, "there are other forces engaged in this campaign, I understand, as well as the inhabitants of your province. Also Providence--doubtless in a moment of forgetfulness!--made other countries besides Lorraine. I myself belong to one almost as small--so small, indeed, that probably you never heard the name of it."

"I have been to school--what is the name of this little country?"

"England," and, as Andrew answered, he unceremoniously pushed by the man, who was bigger than himself, and jeopardized his great feet as he led his horse over them.

"Figure to yourselves," Andrew heard this fellow say to some comrades half an hour later, as he sat eating a meal the landlord had placed before him, after providing him with a room in the roof and a stall for his horse, "figure to yourselves, he is an Englishman, and a surly one at that." Whereon he narrated his little interview with Andrew--who calmly went on demolishing part of a pasty and drinking his wine without glancing at him--and concluded by saying he believed he had fought on the French side. To all of which the other vouchsafed no attention until he heard the Lorrainer growl--he being now well in his cups!--that he was afraid he would have to chastise the Englishman.

Then Andrew looked over to him across the room, put out his fork carelessly, and tapped the hilt of his sword with its double prong.

"Thirty-eight inches in length, friend," he said. "What length is yours?"

Whereon the group to whom the man was talking burst into a roar of laughter, and, clapping the giant on the shoulder, bade him not be a fool.

After that, however, they left him alone, perhaps because he looked dangerous, perhaps because they knew that an assault upon the stranger might go hard with them if the Syndic or the Prince de Vaudemont heard of it. Louis--the great King, the man who, although they served him not, had a terrible reputation amongst them--had been in the neighbourhood not long before, and had won the hearts of many by his graciousness. For, contrary to the ways of the Duke, he had told them that he perfectly well understood that their sympathies were not with him, and that he would not take it ill if they bestowed their swords where their consciences prompted them. Also he had bidden the Marquises de Maraucourt and de Beauvau join the Imperialists since they desired to do so, and had publicly praised the Prince de Vaudemont for the manner in which he had defended Besançon against him.

Therefore they knew that it would go badly with them if De Vaudemont heard they had outraged in his land--he being the Duke's son--any man serving the French King. And, later, they were all drinking together, and paying chopine for chopine as though they had been comrades fighting side by side, instead of serving against each other--though Andrew's first acquaintance seemed still a little sore at his raillery.

But, as the sun dipped towards Le Marne, Andrew, who had kept his head cool, and whose potations had been of the slightest, put on his sword-belt and strolled towards the inn door. It was the time when Jean should be near at hand.

He had not leaned long against the inn door, bidding, as has been said, good-night to passers-by who spoke civilly to him, when down the street he perceived the man approaching--on the other side where the water from the fountain ran. On which he advanced to it, and, as Jean came up, lifted the iron cup and drank a draught of the cool, fresh water.

"Well?" he asked, as he handed it afterwards to the other. "Well? What have you discovered?"

"A woman is there," Jean replied, holding the cup himself in a nonchalant manner under the spout, as anyone might do who desired to drink. "Has been there, my cousin says, for more than a year."

"Ha! Is she a prisoner?"

"He thinks so. He has never seen her, yet----"

"Yes!"

"Others have. Have seen her face at a window."

"At what part of the house?"

"The top. On the front. A woman pale as death and sad. They say she has made signs to those who have approached near, yet has never been able to communicate with any. Once she threw a paper down, but Armand Beaujos secured it. He could tell me no more."

"And De Bois-Vallée? Is he there?"

"He does not know. He was a week ago, and my cousin saw him. Since, he has not seen him."

"Does your cousin know what men there are in or about the house?"

"I know," Jean replied. Whereon, peasant-like, he began to count upon his fingers.

"First," he said, "the wolf himself, if he is there. Next, Beaujos, the steward. Then, one, two, three, four serving-men--*ma foi!* I cannot think of more. Outside, those who attend to the horses and dogs, away in the *écurie*."

"Where is this *écurie*?"

"Near the house, to the right of it. There are no more."

"There is your cousin."

"Oh! for him, he counts not. He sleeps not there, but in Remiremont, to the other side. Also, I have spoken to him. Told him danger threatens the wolf. He is glad; he hates him, too."

"Is he safe?"

"Safe! *Mon Dieu!* He is of my blood. We all hate him. He will say no word."

After that Andrew bade the man good-night, making an appointment with him for the next evening at the same hour.

But before they parted, he said: "Remember this. If I am not here, if you can glean no news of me, I shall be dead. Otherwise, I shall return. And, if I come not back, then you must wreak your vengeance on him and his house as beseems you all best. Only--remember the woman. Save her if you can. It will be worth your while. She is of good blood in my land; if you can restore her to her father you will be made men for life. I guarantee it. Will you do this?"

"In truth I will. Does monsieur give that message to Laurent and to Gaspard too!"

"To all who hate him, De Bois-Valle."

"*Ma foi!* they are many," while, hearing sounds of revelry proceeding from the inn door and windows, he, glancing over towards the house, broke off, and said: "Who are inside? They are gay and joyous."

"Men of De Vaudemont's service. Carousing at going into winter quarters----"

"De Vaudemont's! service De Vaudemont's service!" He repeated, nodding his head. "So--so!" and again he nodded.

"What strikes you?" Andrew asked. "What is it?"

"He," whispered Jean, "he--the Vicomte--was under De Vaudemont once, then joined France, and, 'tis thought--we have always thought so here--gave information that helped the French generals to take many places round about. *Corbleu!* If some of De Vaudemont's men could catch him, they--they--well!" and he laughed and used a local expression, "they would not kiss him."

"Are they, these men belonging to the Prince, of this neighbourhood?" asked Andrew, struck by a sudden idea, "or only passing through to their homes. What think you?"

"How can I tell? I hear their voices all jangling together, but can distinguish none. They sing," he said, "a song of the *pays* all the same--but then we all sing that." And he bent his right ear towards the Tête d'Or, whence was issuing, amidst the clinking of glasses and other sounds, the refrain of "*Lorraine, Lorraine, ma douce patrie.*"

"Go in and see," said Andrew; "drink a cup with them, you may know some."

And as Jean, seemingly nothing loth, entered the inn, Andrew strolled up and down in the darkness that had now set in.

He could not judge from the sounds that arose as the song finished whether they were applause and excitement at the performance, or a welcome extended by the returned soldiers to an old friend, but after waiting a quarter of an hour or, perhaps, less, Jean returned--wiping his mouth on his sleeve--and instantly said:

"Four are of this neighbourhood. One of Plombières itself, another of Fougerolles, another of Aillevillers, a fourth from the Val d'Ajol."

"Who is the biggest of all--one bigger than I? With a great beard? Do you know him?"

"He--he is from Aillevillers, hard by. Pierre Lupin. Ho! *figurez-vous*, if he thought De Bois-Vallée was here he would spit him like a lark, or hug him to death in those great arms. Lupin was in his troop when the Vicomte rode captain under De Vaudemont, and was badly treated. If he only knew--nay, if all the four only knew."

"Yet," said Andrew, "let them not think so yet. I command you. Later--if I come not back--then enlist them in the service of vengeance. And, for this Lupin--tell him that the Englishman who offended him has been slain by De Bois-Vallée. He and I had a few words together, yet that passed--is drowned in a cup. And he seems a brave and honest soldier--he will forget our difference. Remember, however, tell them nothing as yet."

"I will remember," answered Jean, repeating his lesson; "if you come not back soon, the wolf's house will meet its fate. Also, we will remember there is a woman to be saved. Fear not!"

Whereon they separated.

The moon hung rusty in the heavens half an hour later, proclaiming that there was mist between her and the earth, as Andrew rode slowly up the ascent of the pass which lay between Plombières and Remiremont. Yet it was a good night, too, for the errand he was on, one of inspection of the house of his enemy, into which he meant later to obtain entrance somehow; a night on which a figure keeping well in the shadow could be screened from observation. A night in which, he thought, he might draw near enough to the house to examine the front and the other two sides he had been unable to see from the summit of the wall beneath the slope, at the back of the mansion. To examine, also, if there was any way by which silent entry might be obtained, though, even as he reflected on this, his mind turned and turned again to that wall and slope.

"I could make entrance thus I am sure, and doubly sure," he pondered, "could attain at least that roof. A rope tied round my body and lowered from the top of the wall until level with the top of the house, then a lusty thrust with my feet, as a swimmer thrusts against a bank to propel himself--and I should be there. So! that would be easy enough. But how to return, and with the burden of a woman--one who may be small, but, again, may be big? How to do that? 'Tis a yawning chasm--I should scarce dare look down the height myself!--no woman, unless she had nerves of brass, would ever consent to pass it. Yet she may hate her imprisonment so much that even that would not appal her."

He was armed now to the fullest extent possible; his great sword of course by his side, his "back-and-breast" on, a pistol in his belt. He knew the undertaking he was upon was full of danger, and that, from the moment he entered the estate of Bois-le-Vaux, he would be in direst peril. For that De Bois-Vallée would cause him to be slain without giving him any opportunity of defence, and without meeting him in fair fight, he never doubted; nay, he felt very sure that, if the chance came in his enemy's way, he would slay him treacherously, wherever they might meet. How much more certain then his fate if he should be caught on the villain's own land, and with the villain's own creatures to do his bidding!

But such reflections as these troubled him not a jot, and when, on rising the summit of the Little Pass, he saw Remiremont lying under the clear rays of the moon, which had now freed herself from the mists below, he gave his horse rein and rode on swiftly to the town.

The town from which a road branched off that, a little further, would bring him beneath the mountains, and to the spot where the woman was whom he had vowed to rescue.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SLEEPERS

An hour later and Andrew Vause was slowly making his way through a deep wood of chestnuts that fringed the property of De Bois-Vallée, and which lay between the open *place* in front of the mansion and the side road along which he had come from the southern entrance to Remiremont.

From the beginning, from the moment he knew he was outside Bois-le-Vaux, he had been forced to recognize that no chances were omitted for rendering the property what it was, and what it had in all probability been since first constructed in the time of Duke Thierry, namely, a strongly guarded and protected place. Inside the road, between the chestnut wood and the road itself, ran a high stone wall--the mountains above providing the stones for that as well as for the house itself--which was two feet above Andrew's tall head, and which at first presented the appearance of being insurmountable. Yet this was not the case, as very shortly the adventurous soldier proved.

Having tied his horse to a tree, he, from its back, soon clambered on to the summit of the wall, and then (since, inside, the copse of chestnuts grew close up to it) lowered himself by a branch to the ground. He stood, therefore, within the place which held his enemy and the woman whom that enemy kept prisoner, as he believed.

But, because he was a wary adventurer who knew that now his life hung by the veriest thread if discovered, he lost no opportunity of making himself safe, and no sooner was he within the place than he took steps to provide for his exit.

"It may come to a rush for escape," he thought, "to the necessity for reaching the horse's back the moment I am on the wall--let's see for a mark to guide me," whereon he paused and looked around for something that should give him a clue to the exact spot where he had left the steed.

He was not long in finding one.

Through the copse, or fringe of chestnuts that ran parallel with the wall, he saw that there were one or two small paths which crossed each other at intervals, some following the line of the wall itself, and some running directly forward from it. Paths used doubtless by the woodmen and trappers of small game, such as hares and rabbits; and, walking carefully along one of those that ran from the wall, he finding it close to his feet, he emerged soon into an open grassy space. And here he discovered the mark that should direct him back safely to the spot outside of which the horse was tethered; namely, three small trees scarce better than saplings, yet standing out clear and distinct in the full flood of the moon's light, and casting a long shadow beneath them on to the grass.

"It will do very well," he thought. "I cannot miss these trees once I regain this glade," after which he drew his sword, carrying it henceforth naked in his hand, clasped half-way down, and, thus prepared, skirted the chestnut copse as he made his way towards where he knew the house stood.

As he progressed he noticed how intense the silence was on this still October night; so intense, indeed, that his own footsteps on the now fast falling leaves, which each breath of air brought down about him, seemed loud to his ears. Also the creeping of anything in the copse, such as a mouse, or the rustling of a disturbed bird in the branches above, could be distinctly heard. But beyond these sounds nothing else; no barking of dog nor neigh of horse. Nothing. All as still as death!

"But that I keep ever before my eyes the memory of Philip's broken life, the knowledge, which I now believe myself to possess, that this woman whom I go to rescue has been as treacherously betrayed as he, I would be on no such secret quest as this," he thought. "This midnight skulking is not to my taste. Were it not for her safety, I should be hammering at his door, calling to him to come forth and try conclusions man to man with me, smiting him before all his following. Yet, to save her, I must do it thus." And, again, stealthily and cautiously he pursued his way beneath the shadow of the trees.

And still all was as silent as before, except that now the wind rose a little more and rustled the leaves, and brought them down in bigger handfuls. A wind that blew towards the house to which he was slowly making his way.

He was near it soon, however, after having progressed for something like a quarter of an hour; already above him he could see its wooden upper portion rising higher than the trees, with, above that, the topmost slopes of the mountains. He was very near now! Then, suddenly, the woods finished, he was on the eastern side of the great open *place*-paved, he plainly observed, with great cobble stones that were worn very smooth by time, and also, doubtless, with the passage of many feet, both of horse and man, during the centuries. For that the great *place* had been the rendezvous of all the followers of the De Bois-Vallées, of those who had gone forth with them to countless wars, and those who had assembled there for merriment and rejoicing, was certain.

Now, it was empty, deserted; across its surface nothing passed but the shadow of some cloud that occasionally scurried beneath the moon; it seemed almost as if the house was deserted also.

Yet Andrew, keeping himself well within the darkness of the wood which ran close up to where the cobble-stoning of the *place* began, or ended, saw at once that such was not the case. In the topmost floor of wood--there being two--a light glimmered--and threw a dull glare out; a light shielded by some curtain, or hanging, which obscured the rays. "It may be hers," he thought, "nay, must. It is the position Jean spoke of. On the top, to the front. Yet the room from which it comes is unattainable from the outside at least." And again he said to himself as he had said before, "It will be from the back, from across the chasm I must reach that room--as I shall reach it. It is the only way."

For that he would reach it somehow he was resolved--that he should fail to do so he never considered. Not unless he was killed that night would he fail.

In truth, none could have attained the room in which the light burned, from the front. There was no foothold by which a cat could have climbed to it from the outside; naught but a bird could have gone straight to that small window. The lower part of the house stared out blank and unrelieved by any ornament or window-sill, or other projection by which one might mount; the huge arch, which formed the frame of the one great door, was unadorned by any moulding or decoration that would assist either foot or hand. All was bare wall, except for slits of windows no bigger, than eyelets, with sloping sills, and the door. Above, on the wooden floors, there were outstanding beams and stanchions by which an agile man might perhaps have raised himself, but those wooden floors were thirty feet from the ground and unreachable.

From the great door there came also two strips of light, one from beneath it, the other a bright ray that seemed to the man regarding it from afar as though proceeding from some huge keyhole.

"If," he thought, as still he watched and saw this flow of the light, "it can stream out thus, an eye placed to the orifice can see in. Mine shall be that eye. I will not return until I have observed

what hall it is from which that ray proceeds," and, as he spoke, he drew from his belt a pistol, saw to its priming, and carefully shook fresh powder into the pan, then returned it to its place and made ready for his task. Yet he did not hesitate to acknowledge to himself that, if his footfall outside was heard by any who might be within--if that door should open while he was outside it--his life would possibly cease on the instant. The hall might be half full of armed men, and of them he could possibly kill two; the rest would undoubtedly kill him--bury a dozen swords or daggers in his breast.

But, even as he so reflected, he was on his way to see what was beyond that ray of light; was, under the shadow of the half-leafless trees, creeping up the copse until he stood level with the face of the house, and with its left angle to his side. Then, on tiptoe and keeping close to that bare face, he passed along it until he reached the huge door and stood on the half-moon of flagged stones before it, so that the light from underneath played on his feet, and the light from the great keyhole made a luminous star upon his breast.

He prayed his knees would not crack as he bent down to put his eye to the hole--even such a slight noise as that might suffice to betray his presence; he did not venture even to put his fingers to the door to aid his stooping position--without their support he brought his body down so that his eye was close to, and level with, the hole, and, thus, looked in.

At first his sight was blurred by gazing into the light, then, gradually, he became able to see and to distinguish clearly what was within.

In a well in the middle of a great hall, so vast that fifty men at least might have sat at table there, and fifty more have found room to walk about and wait on them, there burnt a log fire, the embers low and charred now, and lurid, as though they had not been put together for some time. Around this fire five men sat in deep wooden chairs, all of them asleep, or seeming so. One, he who had the largest and most comfortable seat, appeared by his dress to be superior to the rest, he having on a dark blue coat, passemented with galloon, a satin waistcoat, and knee breeches of the same. Also, there was a wig upon his head--thrust somewhat awry by the movement of his shoulders as he slumbered--a wig that had not been powdered nor combed for many a day, and was thus of a dirty brown and touzled. An elderly man this, with a red, blotched face, coarse thick lips, and--as he slept--of a frowning aspect; a man big and brawny, too, as Andrew could well see; one who, although no longer young, might be a difficult antagonist in an encounter.

"Doubtless the steward, Beaujos," Andrew thought; then scanned the others.

These were fellows clad half as serving and half as fighting men, it seemed, wearing leathern jerkins of a period somewhere earlier than the present; coarse, baggy breeches and rough hose, and with their own hair, matted and thick, hanging about their heads. They carried in their belts knives in wooden sheaths in contradistinction to the other, whose sword lay on the table by his hand. On that table, too, Andrew could see, was a great flagon, doubtless drained of its contents ere they slept, and some cups; also a lamp from which the light came that streamed forth into the night. And still there were two other sleepers in that great hall--though sleepers less sound than these five. They, instead of being round the fire in the well, by the side of which, indeed, no room had been left for them by the men, lay at the foot of the huge broad staircase that led up from the left of the hall, yet were still in Andrew's range of vision. And he, looking at them, knew that here was a greater danger to him than might come from the others.

They were two enormous hounds--half boarhounds, as it appeared to him gazing in through the keyhole, of the sort much used in Alsace and Lorraine, and all the region; yet, it seemed also, as though with something of the bloodhound, too, since their great heads rose conical, and their huge ears swept the ground.

"I must away," said Andrew to himself, "there is danger here. By heavens! my presence is known to them already." Yet, with that danger which now threatened him--as it had not threatened from the other sleepers--impending near, he felt himself fascinated by the monstrous creatures.

Impending very near, since he had divined the truth when he said to himself that they knew of his presence already. He saw one--the female, he thought, since she was longer and leaner than the other--slowly lift her head as a snake lifts its head ere it strikes--the snout raised sniffing towards the roof of the hall, the ears drooping to the paved floor. And the bloodshot eyes cast backwards, the shift of those eyes around the hall, proclaimed what would happen next. A roar of alarm, a warning to those who slumbered still.

"Away," Andrew muttered, "away!" and, as he spoke to himself, he slid swiftly along the wall and regained the copse.

Not a moment too soon! There came a deep, sharp yap from the dog; an instant after another from her mate, and then the roar from each throat. Almost it seemed to Andrew as he withdrew that he heard the patter of the great paws upon the flagged floor as the dogs rushed to the door; almost it seemed as though their great forms were hurled against it, they striving for egress.

And he heard other sounds ere he was gone from outside that door--those from the human throats within!

First the voice of the man he supposed to be Beaujos, shouting:

"Awake, you vagabonds, awake! Hark to the dogs! Unbar the door. Heaven and earth, there are some without! 'Tis sure! Unbar, I say."

Also, he heard cries from the men themselves, the clatter of their wooden-shod feet upon the flags--of this there was no doubt--a grating noise in the great lock, and a thumping sound as though some ponderous transverse wooden bar had been thrown back to admit of the door being opened.

And, from where he was, he could perceive now a vast body of light streaming out into, and mixing with, that of the moon, could hear the deep-mouthed bay of the hounds broken by short angry barks.

From where he was by this time, namely, passing swiftly down to the open spot where the three saplings grew, pushing branches large and small aside, trampling down the wet leaves and sodden grass, he prayed fervently that he might reach the spot outside where his horse stood ere they found him. For, brave man as he was, and ready to face a dozen, or a score, of human foes, his blood curdled in him at the thought of those ferocious fangs tearing him to pieces; the thought of the hot breath of the brutes in his face as they sprang at his throat and dragged him to the earth.

"Any number of men," he said, "and armed to the teeth I can face and laugh at, but five men and two hounds such as those---nay, I am no coward to avoid them."

Yet, even as those thoughts coursed through his brain, he shuddered and his flesh crept. The deep bays had ceased; so, too, the equally deep barks; but now he heard another and a more fearsome sound in their place. A sound of snorting, of heavy sougning, low down on the earth, mingled with the crushing and snapping of brush and underwood.

He knew what those sounds meant.

The hounds had found his trail, were on the scent.

There was no doubt of it, there could be no chance of doubt--a glance back over his shoulder showed him it was so. Close to the ground, not fifty paces off, were sparkling two pairs of beautifully green circles. Those circles were the eyes of the dogs that were tracking him, as they glistened in the darkness of the wood.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHERE IS DE BOIS-VALLÉE?

Andrew thanked God for one thing! He was near the wall, near the spot outside which the horse stood. Down through an opening a little way ahead of him he could see the three trees--the shadow which they cast being directly under them now as the moon rose higher--a hundred feet to the left, and there was the wall and the branches of the tree by which he had descended! But--could he reach them?

The dogs were nearer now--their eyes scintillating less as they approached more closely, but their grunting and sougning as they sniffed the earth more distinct. They would be upon him soon--in another moment or so--and then!

Still, he ran as hard as the thick growth of the trees and the underbrush would allow him; once he stumbled and nearly fell, recovered himself, and, as he did so, saw them--saw their dark forms close behind him! Yet, now, he was near the spot where safety lay. Only--he was too late!

As they rushed at him he sprang behind a tree--it would save him for an instant!--and one of the brutes tore past it ahead of its companion, and went on some paces ere it could stop the impetus it had upon it. The other came full at him.

"Now," he murmured, "now, God give me courage!" and as the beast came he thrust full with his sword at its breast, and just as it reared to drag him down. Then he felt his weapon torn from his grasp, wrenched from out that great brawny hand as no human foe had ever yet had power to wrench it--but it was by the falling body of the hound, pierced through and through. The good sword had entered the animal's breast and come out close by its spine; as the dog fell, with a hideous roar, the weight of its body carried the sword within that body to the earth. Yet, he knew

there was no time to waste; in spite of the dying creature's snappings and plungings at him--its ferocity as great in death, if not greater, as in life--he must regain his sword. Otherwise he would have to use the pistol on the second dog, and thereby give a signal to the men, whom the beasts had far outstripped, as to his whereabouts.

By the grace of heaven the dying creature had fallen on its back, the hilt of his sword protruded from its chest; in a moment he had seized it and drawn it forth--never before had Andrew been forced to so exert his strength to release his weapon from the body of a prostrate foe! It seemed as though it were wedged in wood! But, now, he was ready for the other! And, leaping back, he stood on his guard against those monstrous claws and the hideous white fangs that gleamed in what light there was; the body of the convulsive creature between him and the other hound.

Yet there happened that which he could not have hoped for--could never have dreamt of nor anticipated. His wildest expectations, even had he had time to think in those exciting moments, could never have pictured this.

The animal--it was the female--paused in its onward rush astonished--almost, it would appear, dismayed--at the sight of its fallen companion; then walked round it--crawled round it, indeed--sniffing, and lifting its head next, and emitting a loud and long howl. It seemed as if its agony was so great that all else was forgotten--even Andrew, its quarry.

Slowly, therefore, he backed away from it, keeping ever his eye upon the moaning, grief-stricken creature--taking care, too, that his reeking sword was ready for thrusting out at any sudden attack made, and also taking care to have ever some tree in front of him as he retreated, which might ward off for the moment any rapid rush. Yet, moving swiftly backwards all the time, for now he heard other sounds coming near--the sounds of men talking hurriedly to each other and calling the names of the hounds; above all others, the harsh rasping voice of Beaujos, if it were he, being the most distinct.

At last his back was to the wall that bounded the domain. Propelling himself sideways along it, and facing always towards the quarter whence the attack must come if renewed by the stricken beast, he felt the leather of his jacket scraping against the tendrils of the ivy with which the wall was overgrown; a few more seconds and he was by the tree that had helped him to descend. And his horse whinnied as he sent a whispered word over the wall to it--whinnied and moved; he could hear its hoofs striking the earth as though the creature rejoiced at his return.

Another moment and he would be safe. His hands were on the lower branches; he was drawing himself up level with the top of the wall, when there came an awful roar and the crash of the dog's great body tearing through the brush after him, while an instant later it had reached the spot--was close by the escaping man. And the horse, affrighted by these sounds, neighed piteously in its terror.

But Andrew was safe. As the huge jaws clashed together at the same time that the hound sprang at him, and, missing his mark, hurled itself heavily against the wall in its onrush--while, at the same time, it uttered a grunt of pain--he was on the ledge. Another instant, and he was in the saddle. Another, and the bridle chains were clanking and his saddle creaking merrily as he went down the road and left behind him the noise of the yelling and shouting of the five men--caused, doubtless, by the discovery of the dead hound.

He wiped the sweat from off his face and hands as he rode along, while inwardly he sent up a devout prayer of thanksgiving for his preservation.

"Heaven defend me from such another encounter," he muttered. "It is too much! Henceforward, send me only men, not brutes." Yet, because he loved all animals--especially those of the noblest orders--his heart was sore within him, both at the slaying of the first hound and at the pitiable grief of its mate. "I have killed a nobler creature than the master it owned; at least, it faced me, rushed boldly to its fate--but where is that shrinking, unworthy master? May fortune grant that, when next I see him, my sword makes as clean a passage through his breast as through that of his dog."

Where was his foe? He had pondered upon that more than once since the time he had brought his eye to the large and worn keyhole, and had seen through it only that foe's menials. Where? Surely if he had been in his house he must have been aroused by the baying of the dogs and the excitement and noise of his servants--must have joined in the search made by them. Yet, of all the voices, Andrew had not heard his.

"He must be away--for some reason he has not remained here long--what does it mean? Did he fly his post by Turenne's side for other purposes than his fear of me, and of what he imagined I had learnt--does he even dread now to remain in his own fortress--for such it almost is! It must be so. Had he been there to-night the turmoil would surely have roused him--brought him forth--and---" at which thought Andrew smiled. "He could not have suspected I was there, however. Even his men can but have supposed the intruder was some midnight thief, or poacher, creeping about the house."

He passed through Remiremont as it lay sleeping quietly under the moon's rays, and with no

light glimmering from any windows except that of the inn--from which, even now, at midnight, came forth the eternal chant of "*Lorraine, Lorraine, ma douce patrie*," and he would have given something considerable for a drink of wine, or even of water, to quench the thirst which his late adventure had created. But he knew he must forego it until he reached Plombières--the road he was upon came only from Bois-le-Vaux; to halt here would be to give a clue as to what kind of man had been within its precincts that night, should inquiry be made the next day.

Instead, therefore, he went quietly by the auberge, riding slowly so as to make no more clatter than necessary, and looking carefully as he passed to see if any face came to the window or any form to the door. But none did; the provincial song drowned the sound of the horse's hoofs, and he went through the village unheeded.

And then, once on the little pass that led from Remiremont to Plombières, he put his animal to the trot again, and so reached the latter place as the church clock tolled one, finding some of De Vaudemont's men still drinking and singing, and some lying about on the settles and benches, their carousals over for that occasion.

In the morning he told Jean--who had spent the night in Plombières at another inn with some acquaintances who were also back from the war for the winter--all that had happened to him, and the latter appeared much struck by the encounter with the hounds. Yet, he shook his head, too, on hearing of the conclusion of the adventure, and muttered a few words as to the effect of its being "a pity."

"What is a pity?" asked Andrew, looking up from his plate. They were alone now, for most of the De Vaudemont men had already set out for the outlying villages to which they belonged, others were not yet risen, and others, still, were wandering about Plombières chatting with friends and acquaintances, and beginning another day of wassailing. Therefore, they had the living-room of the inn to themselves.

"What is a pity?"

"That also you did not slay the second dog, I know the breed, though I knew not that the *scélérat*, De Bois-Vallée, possessed any. They are mountain dogs--old Cantecroix--whose daughter was affianced, if not married, to the Duke--some do say that she was his lawful wife--bred them, up at Gerardmer. One scarce knows, though, what this strain is--the old man would never tell--but they are terribly fierce, as monsieur has learned. Also, their scent is remarkable; they never forget those they have once smelt, and----"

But here he broke off and put a question.

"Monsieur intends to visit Bois-le-Vaux again?"

"Without doubt I do. Only, next time in a different way."

"You should have slain the other. She will remember you."

"*Peste*, man! how could I slay her? I was on the branch--on the wall--as she reached me; my sword is not a mile long, and it would have been folly to shoot. The men were near; the report would have brought them to us--and I was saved. That was enough."

"All the same, 'tis a pity. The dog should be dead ere monsieur goes again. Of a surety she will smell him out if he is in or about the house. And, when she scents him, she will go nigh mad in her desire to reach him; will make noise enough to wake the dead."

"Humph!" said Andrew. "Perhaps 'tis a pity, too, since such is the case. Yet, 'tis too late now. There is nothing to be done."

"Ho, la, la!" exclaimed the other, "'tis not yet too late. She can be made away with. There are more ways than one of killing a dog."

For a minute or so Andrew reflected on the man's words. Reflected, because it was repugnant to him that the creature should be put out of the way--a creature who, although a brute, was a noble one. Yet, must her life stand in the way of what he had to accomplish--must he spare the hound and, thereby, fail in what he had to do, namely, to find his way to Marion Wyatt, to avenge his brother? No! If the animal stood between him and his task, better she perished a hundred times--better a hundred noble animals perished than that he should fail.

"She is certain to remember me--to discover my presence there when I return--you think?" he asked, still touched with regret at the necessity for her fate.

"I do not think. I am sure."

"How to do it, then?"

"Leave that to me, I will do it. To-day, I will go to my cousin--we had best know what they conclude from the affray last night--and then I shall find my chance. To-morrow, or the day after, the dog will have gone to join its mate. When next you visit Bois-le-Vaux you will not have her to contend with for one."

Andrew would not ask him in what way the creature was to be destroyed, though he imagined it was by the simple method of poison; he preferred that he should simply learn later that it was removed from his path. He had seen enough of the alertness of both it and its mate to thoroughly understand how keen their senses were--they had discovered his presence outside on the *place* when not one of the human sleepers had been disturbed; also, he had had solid proofs of their fierceness. And, if now, to that fierceness and that keenness, was to be added also the certainty that the dog would be doubly alert through its previous knowledge of him, it must be removed. The lives of countless noble hounds must not stand in his way, he thought again.

"So," he said, therefore, "it must be. Let me know ere I go there once more that it is done. Also, bid Laurent meet me here as soon as may be. I have work for him--need his assistance."

"To enter Bois-le-Vaux--the house this time, perhaps?"

"Ay, the house this time."

"You do not count nor dread the risk?"

"I dread nothing. As for counting, it is done. I count my life against the undertaking. One or the other will rise uppermost. Either the undertaking succeeds, or I fail. If I fail, the price of failure will be, must be, death."

"Monsieur is very brave," said Jean, looking at him with eyes full of admiration.

"He is very determined," Andrew answered. "That is all."

"And," the man asked, after a moment's pause, "the instructions are the same? If you come not back soon--in a day or so--we are to be sure you are dead? Then, to take our own way."

"Remembering always the woman's safety."

"That always."

After which Andrew told him there was one other thing he desired to know ere paying his next visit to the house, namely, where De Bois-Vallée was! If that could be discovered it would be useful intelligence to him. Did he think he could find out?

He could try, at least, Jean said. And, though gone, he might be able to find out where the Vicomte was. He could, he thought, discover whether he was at home or not.

"Do that," said Andrew, "and it will suffice."

CHAPTER XX.

ACROSS THE CHASM

"The moon," said Andrew, "is past her full, therefore she will not rise until close upon eleven. Now is the time."

He was seated in the general room, or parlour, of La Tête d'Or, and opposite to him was Laurent--it being the third day after his visit to Bois-le-Vaux.

He had the inn to himself now, as far as regarded visitors, since all of De Vaudemont's service, as well as several other Lorrainers who had returned with their masters from the campaign, had by this time gone to their respective homes. Yet, to some of them a hint had been given--a whisper sent round--that one of those who were most hated amongst the seigneurie might ere long be brought to his account, and that, if they desired to participate in the knowledge of what was happening, they should let Jean know their whereabouts.

"For," said he, over many an ale-house table in various villages around, "there may be some brave doings ere long--doings in which some of you may like to share. There are many of us who have had our noses to the grindstone a long while--many who have eaten hard bread so that those who have dominated us should feed well--some, too, whose hearths have been made desolate. Well! it may so happen now--God, He only knows!--that there will be one more hearth desolated soon. That--well!--that the oppressor shall have no hearth to warm himself at."

He had given many other hints, too--accompanied by divers winks and nods and shrugs, common to peasants of his class--hints that there might be a house to be burnt down and so forth;

a fearful retaliation to be made on one whom they, in that part of Lorraine, had come to regard as a pest and curse; a man who was a traitor to all their traditions; one who--this being in the eyes of many the worst crime possible--had given in his allegiance to France.

And in the telling of all this he had so inflamed the imagination of his hearers--rude soldiers, mostly, who had been born and nurtured in the one idea that, above all other things, France was never to be permitted to enfold in her grasp their fair province of Lorraine--that, at any moment, they would be willing to rise and wreak their vengeance on the man at whom Jean hinted. And, their curiosity being also much aroused, as was natural enough, they tried hard to extract from him the name of the identical seigneur against whom such retaliation would probably be practised. This, however, he would not divulge--having been warned by Andrew and Laurent on no account to do so--and, thereby, inflamed their imagination the more! So that, when he left them, he did so knowing that they were fully primed to join at any moment in any attack to which they might be summoned, should the necessity arise; both he and Laurent believing in their own minds that that opportunity would not be long in coming.

For, though both these men considered that it was most probable Andrew would obtain the entrance to the mansion of Bois-le-Vaux which he desired, neither of them thought he would ever return or escape from that mansion alive. And, with him destroyed, there would be no further necessity for delaying the project on which they and others had long meditated--the project of destroying and razing to the ground the ancient home of the De Bois-Vallées. Therefore, the warning to those others had gone forth; they were bidden to be ready.

"So," said Laurent now, in answer to Andrew's remark, "it is to be to-night?"

"It is to-night. If all goes well I shall be in the house by ten o'clock, and out of it again an hour later with, I trust and pray, the lady safely rescued."

"I pray so," Laurent answered. But again he whispered to himself, as he had done before, that the English stranger would never return alive. He would be caught, discovered by some of the servitors--men thoroughly in their master's interests, since he at any moment could send them to the gallows-tree for past offences--and would be set upon and slain. Yet, when he told Andrew this, the other turned a deaf ear to him--refused to believe in such peril.

"There are five," he replied, "since their master is away--what devil's work is he on now, I wonder? What are five? How many times think you, my friend, have I been opposed to five men in the campaigns I have made? Why! 'twas but at Entzheim the other day that I was alone and unsupported amongst a dozen of the Duke of Holstein-Pleon's soldiers; yet, as you see, I am here, and without a scratch."

"Ay, I see," muttered Laurent, "but 'twas on an open field, your friends and comrades near you, ready at any moment to come to your assistance as, doubtless, they did. Oh! I know, I have been a soldier myself! But now, see, it is different. You will be alone in a strange house--in the dark--egress impossible during an attack on you. *Mon Dieu!* you will be run through and through or shot ere you can get back to the slope--with no possibility of help from friends and comrades there. Heavens!" he concluded, "the risk is fearful."

"Bah!" answered Andrew, his nerves not touched one whit by Laurent's forebodings. "Bah! 'Twould want forty men to place me at such disadvantage as you speak of. For, observe! I shall be at the top of the house, since I enter that way, and she is also there--do not you--one who has been a soldier--see the advantage I have? Five cannot mount the stairs abreast, 'tis unlike they will be broad in that part of the house. As they come singly, or in twos, I shall have my chance."

"They will use firearms."

"And so shall I. Fear not, my friend, I shall return alive."

And again Laurent said, "I pray so," while, again, he thought to himself, "It is impossible."

Then Andrew asked him if it was certain, as Jean had reported, that the dog was dead?

"He says," replied the other, "that almost for sure it must be. He and his cousin have laid the poison carefully; the cousin, indeed, getting at the meat with which it is fed. It cannot be still alive."

"Therefore," said Andrew, "I am safe from its discovery. Yet, poor beast, I would it had not been necessary."

"Pray God it is dead," replied Laurent. "Pray God it is. For if it still lives when you are in that house, nothing can save your presence from being known."

"Bah! croaker! Even if it still lives it must have a strong scent to discover me in the topmost part of the building when they are all below. I will not believe it."

After which he set about making all necessary arrangements for reaching the mansion into which he had resolved to penetrate that night.

They were soon concluded, as he himself had pondered much over them during the time that had elapsed since his escape from the jaws of the hounds on that, his first and only, visit--it but remained for him to go over them carefully with Laurent. Therefore, he asked now, "Is the coil of rope safely bestowed?"

"Ay, it is," Laurent replied. "Thirty good metres of the newest and best. Placed in our hut far down the slope, where the wood is kept after the felled trees are cut into billets. It is there. To-night we shall find it."

"'Tis very well. Now listen. To-night I set forth from this inn and shall reach Gaspard's cabin about the hour of nine. You will be there. Then we shall descend without loss of time and, ere ten minutes have elapsed, I shall be across. It will not take long, once the rope is fixed to that chestnut which grows close down to the summit of the wall."

"It will not take long, in truth," Laurent replied. "That will not, Monsieur," and the man's face testified true anxiety. "It is the returning I fear."

"Dispel your fear--I shall return."

"And with the lady?"

"And with the lady!"

"Suppose," said Laurent, "you find her guarded by the woman. It may be she sleeps with her, or close by her side. What then?"

"I must find means to silence without hurting her." While, impetuously, he said, "My friend, all is thought of--as far as may be, all foreseen. I know well the risks and dangers I have to encounter. See. Let me tell them over to you," and swiftly he proceeded to do so.

"First--there is the risk that the rope may break--then----"

"For that never fear! I guarantee that!"

"So be it. Then, first--since that counts not--I may be seen ere I reach the roof by someone on the look out--'tis not very like, yet it may be so. Whereon I shall be shot like a sparrow, and die hanging 'twixt earth and heaven. Or, let me reach the roof, and be hacked to death, or hurled to the paved court below. Is not all possible?"

For answer Laurent shuddered. "*Mon Dieu!*" he muttered, "your nerve is iron."

"On the other hand, allow I gain the roof and find all barred--trapdoor or ladder--or discover no entrance that way I must then come back and try elsewhere, another time. But, presuming I can gain the entrance--what then? I have to reach the lady, silence her fear at sight of me--poor soul! doubtless she will think at first I am her doomsman--persuade her to come away with me, force her to pass across the chasm. 'Twill terrify her, yet--it is the only way. We can never escape below--specially if the hound happens by any chance to be still alive!--I must fasten her to the rope, let her swing across, while you from the other side will draw her up. Then the rope can be thrown back to me; why should we fail? Fail, bah we will, we must succeed. Say, have I not thought of all?"

"In truth you have," Laurent exclaimed, and, catching some of Andrew's spirit, he answered, "We will succeed."

* * * * *

The night came--dark as pitch, with, above, dense clouds rolling so low that they swept the tops of the fir trees on the summit; covered, indeed, that summit so that Gaspard's cabin was enveloped in the dank, reeking mist. And, through that mist, Andrew and Laurent were descending to where was the ledge of the stone-facing to the slope that backed up the mansion of Bois-le-Vaux.

As far as was possible, every arrangement had been made for removing the woman, known to Andrew as Marion Wyatt, to a place of safety directly she was out of the house, it being deemed by him not necessary that, at first, she should be taken farther than Remiremont itself, or, at most, Plombières. For, once beyond Bois-le-Vaux and with him to protect her, Andrew shrewdly suspected that the Vicomte would make no further attempt upon her liberty, since to do so he would once more find himself opposed to his sword, of which--*maître d'escrime* as he almost was--De Bois-Vallée must now have learnt to have a wholesome respect. And, as for summoning any authority there might be in the neighbourhood to his assistance--that was not to be imagined. Even though he should be able to show some kind of right to retain the lady, none in that place would be likely to lend assistance to one so cordially detested as he was, both because of his

family and of the manner in which he had broken with all the traditions of the province in espousing the cause of France instead of--as most others had done--contenting himself with remaining lukewarm, if not inclined to join the Duke.

No! there was no danger once outside the house. It all lay inside!

They reached the hut where the wood was stored by the peasants when cut into billets, ere being sent down to the mansions and towns that lay around the western side of the Vosges, and, furnishing themselves with the thirty metres of good new rope which Laurent had purchased by Andrew's orders--rope two inches in circumference and strong enough to bear the strain of four men of even his bulk--they set forth again on the descent. Also, Andrew took with him a small lantern and a tinder-box, since he knew not what impenetrable darkness might bar his way towards the room of the woman he sought, when inside the house.

But this was not all. He recognized that, once he quitted the comparative safety of the walled slope, his life would not be worth a moment's purchase if he were observed; he was resolved to part with that life as dearly as possible. To his sword, therefore, were now added the pistols in his belt, well charged and primed; likewise he had in his breast a dagger-knife, good either for stabbing or cutting.

"For all," he said to Laurent, "may be needed. The sword in close encounter with a number--they will be clever if they get beyond its point!--the pistols for use at a distance. To wit, when I am swinging over the chasm! For, there, a bullet would reach a man ere, perhaps, one from him can reach me. And for the knife--well, 'twill cut a lock away from an old door, or hack a rope in half with one lusty cut. Is't not so, my friend?"

"It is so," Laurent assented. Then he muttered, "You appal me! I never thought the man lived who knew not fear. Yet now I have found him."

But Andrew only laughed and bade him push on his way by the path that, even in the sodden, rimy darkness, the Lorrainer was well able to find.

At last they were on the brink of the chasm; they stood upon the coping of the wall of rock erected, doubtless, centuries ago by some De Bois-Vallée to prevent the flattened face of the slope from falling away and filling up the gap left between it and the house itself. The gap of twenty feet across which Andrew was now to pass.

Below, in front, nothing was visible; the mist rolling up from the plains obscured all. It was so profound that none who had not been there before could have imagined that, some yards away, though lower down, there stood the roof of a vast mansion; that, between the roof and their feet there was a gulf--a space--through which a step more, if taken by one who did not know every inch of the mountains, would hurl him to annihilation below.

"It is the safest moat--the most devilish!" Andrew whispered, "ever devised or thought of. How many have stumbled over this to death and destruction, I wonder, in the years that are gone and on such a night as this?"

"They are devils all, these De Bois-Vallées; devils all! Perhaps the *Loup de Lorraine*, the first of their race, foresaw the many stumbles that would happen here in the days that were to come."

"Maybe," said Andrew. "Well! by God's blessing I will not stumble nor fail in my passage. Now for the rope."

They wound it round the chestnut tree half a dozen times, knotting and making it fast at this end, so that by no chance could it slip and become uncoiled; they tugged singly and together at it until they were assured that it was as secure and fast as human hand could make it. Then they measured the length of what remained and judged that it was as nearly as possible what was desired.

"I shall be," said Andrew, "a little lower than the roof when I am at its full length below, therefore 'tis very well. For, when I am about to plunge across, it will require more length to gain that roof. Now, I will make a trial. And, one last word. Remember, I shall come back ere long. I feel it--know it. As man to man, I charge you not to desert me; not to quit this spot until all human hope of my return has vanished from your mind. On you my life, and the life of her I go to rescue, depends."

"There is my hand," Laurent said, finding that of the other in the darkness. "Alive I will not quit the place. Even though you come not back for forty-eight hours I shall be here."

"Enough! If I come not back in that time I shall be dead. Then--do as you will."

He looped the end of the coil about his body under his armpits, and, taking as well one turn of the rope beneath his shoulder, so that it should by no possibility be able to slip up over his head, he also wound it round his left arm. That done, he knew that nothing but the fraying of the strands upon the coping of the wall, or a sudden hack at it from a knife, could plunge him on to the stones below. It would never leave his body now until he removed it, or until, if dead, some other performed that office.

"Let it slip gradually round the trunk of the tree," he said, "till it is all payed out. About a foot from the ground; thereby it will escape the rough stones of the edge. Farewell! Remember!"

And now he knelt down upon the extreme lip of the coping-stone, found that one place in particular was very smooth, and decided that it was over this that the rope must run. Thereby, the friction would be scarcely anything.

"Lower me down," he whispered, as his legs hung dangling in the unfathomable space, and the toes of his boots scraped against the surface of the wall. "Lower me now."

And as he spoke he perceived himself slowly gliding down the face of the dank, wet wall, and felt the ferns and mosses that grew upon it brushing against his jacket.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE ENEMY'S HOUSE

Once--the man above letting the rope slip a little too quickly around the body of the tree--he felt the speed at which he was descending increased, and, a moment later, that descent stopped by a sudden jerk. And he thought the rope had broken; that, in another second, he would be dashed to pieces on the stones below! No wonder, therefore, if from all the pores of his body the sweat oozed out, that his heart seemed to have stopped beating. Yet, another second, and the rope was running slowly again, and he understood what had happened and thanked God fervently. One of the turns had been made too loosely round the trunk of the tree. That was all! Yet, for the time being, bad enough!

A few more moments and again it stopped with another jerk, though from a different cause. It had come to its end.

And now he had to prepare for the plunge across to the unseen roof that he knew was there; would have, when he arrived on the other side, to feel with feet and hands--since his eyes were useless in this black darkness!--for something, either coping of roof, chimney, or gable to which to clutch, and, thereby, find foothold. "Oh!" he thought, "if I could but see, could but know how to direct my body." Yet, even as he so thought, he remembered that the darkness served him as equally as it rendered his task more difficult. If he could not see, neither could he be seen. No one could fire at him, as he had suggested might happen, or, firing, could hope to hit him.

He had not recognized before, though he did so now, how fair a boon the darkness and the reeking clouds of autumn fog were to him, by hiding from his vision the dreadful depth below. For, though he knew 'twas there, and that, between him and a swift flight down to death and destruction, there was naught to save him but the goodness of the rope's strength and quality--he did not see it! Therefore, he felt it less, could keep his head cool and his nerves calm in a manner that he doubted if he could have done on a bright sunny day, or even moonlight night.

Turning his face towards where the roof was, he prepared to take the plunge, his feet drawn up behind him and pressed against the wall, so as to get the full force of his propulsion, as a swimmer drives himself forward into a stream from the river's bank. Also--again like a swimmer--he threw his long arms in front of him so that he might either grasp aught which his hands should encounter or, with them, defend his face and head from being struck by wall or parapet. Then--for the moment had come!--he pushed with all the force of his feet against the rope and shot himself swiftly across the chasm. A minute later and he knew that he had failed!

His outstretched hands had struck something--he thought it was a horizontal water-pipe beneath the edge of the roof--but the strong fingers missed their grasp, the weight of his body in the rebound tore them away from whatever the object was which they had touched; a moment later and his form was swung back to the spot whence he had come, while the impetus given to the rope by the concussion of the rebound caused him to spin round and round like a teetotum till he was sick and giddy. Yet, with his hands against the damp, slimy wall, he managed to arrest the spinning at last; a moment or so later and he was hanging as before.

His breath was coming laboriously from his breast now, the swift return to the wall having nearly knocked him senseless--also the rope had tightened so about his body that it seemed as though it must cut through him. He lifted his hands above his head, therefore, and, seizing the rope, while he placed his right heel on a little unevenness it had encountered in the wall, eased himself somewhat by relieving the strain.

"Next time I must not fail," he thought. "If I do, I must desist and be drawn up." But as he set his teeth firmly, he muttered through them: "I will not fail. Now for it!"

With even more force than before he repeated what he had previously done, drew his feet a little higher behind him so that, as he thought--for quaint ideas come to our minds, even in the moment of most deadly danger!--he must present the appearance of some huge gargoyle, had there been any eye to see him, and then launched himself again across the chasm.

This time he did not fail.

He had shot himself beyond the edge of the roof, his hands struck against some hard substance which he clutched with all his might--breaking his nails as he did so--his feet scraped something beneath them; then he let them fall with all the weight he was capable of--and a moment, a second later, he was standing firm.

"I have arrived!" He said. "Arrived! Thank God!" Whereon he sat down exactly where his feet were just before, and felt all around him with his hands to discover how much more solid space there was beneath and about him. For, with all his wariness and coolness returned to him, he knew that he might be on the immediate edge of the roof, from which one false move would hurl him to as instant destruction as must have been his lot had the rope broken during his aerial flight.

As far as his hands--and feet--could reach there was a roof under him covered by some metal--which he guessed to be sheets of tin placed there to keep out the rain and damp from the woodwork beneath--covered also by soft masses of innumerable leaves blown across the chasm from the trees on the slope. Leaves that, maybe, had deadened any sound of his falling feet as he alighted; would have almost, he thought, have deadened the sound to any who might be immediately below. So far all was well.

Still, he was not satisfied of his whereabouts, nor of how much solidity there was around him; he drew, therefore, his long sword and, bending over in each direction, felt about with its point, discovering that there was no open space near. He had landed well upon the roof, he knew, consequently; until he should move from this spot there was no danger.

The object against which his hands had struck and his nails been broken and torn was, he found out directly afterwards, a great chimney--it was quite warm, and showed thereby that fires were burning somewhere below; also, as he reclined a moment with his back against it, the warmth was grateful. It served likewise for attaching the rope to, which he now removed from his arm and body, though as he did so he did not forget that, should aught arise to prevent his return with Marion Wyatt ere the day dawned, it must be allowed to fall back to the other side, and be drawn up by Laurent. To be seen from below when the dawn came--as undoubtedly it would be seen ere the day was an hour or so old--would tell too plain a tale.

He had reflected long ere this present moment that, once inside the house, it was more than possible he might have to remain within it until another night had come; even, perhaps, longer. For the prisoner's fears might prevent her from being able to summon up courage to cross that awful gap at a moment's notice; she might be ill--twenty things, he knew, might bar the way to an immediate flight. Wherefore, the tell-tale rope must not be there. Must be returned, and later on, when wanted, cast across again by Laurent. That could be effected easily; a stone attached to it would make its passage sure, as well as cause the end to remain when once it had landed on the roof.

From Laurent there came no noise nor signal--on the other side all was as still as death! That this should be so they had agreed, yet now Andrew could not resist sending a little whistle across the chasm, a whistle that, to the man watching over there, would be understood, while, if heard by others, it would doubtless be thought to be the cry of some bird in the night. That it was heard and understood he had no reason to doubt.

A second or so afterwards a similar sound was returned. Therefore, Andrew knew that Laurent kept his watch well; knew also that nothing untoward had arisen on that side.

He was refreshed now with his slight rest; the time had come for him to continue his task, to commence, as he recognized, the harder portion of it. To penetrate into the house of the man whom he had forced to be his enemy, to endeavour to rescue by the same perilous means which had so far gained him admission to the outer part of that house, a woman. Truly, if his arrival at this spot had been dangerous and terrible, how much more so would the quitting it be for her?

Yet he meant to do it--or die in the attempt.

Upon his hands and knees now, one after the other of the former carefully put out before him to feel for any break in the roof which might plunge him to the depths beneath, as well as to seek for, and haply find, any trapdoor or entrance to what was below, he crept carefully forward, directing his course to where he supposed the centre of the roof was. Yet, at first, he encountered nothing beneath the mass of leaves swept on to the roof by the autumn winds, or nothing else beyond another stack of chimneys. Chimneys that were warm like the others.

"They keep good fires," he thought. "'Tis fortunate! Pray heaven the whole house is warmed, if

I can find a way into it. Otherwise I am likely to perish of the cold."

While he so reflected his hand struck a projection, something that rose perpendicularly from the roof for some three feet or so, as he felt by running that hand upon it. What was it?

He knew in an instant. The side-rail of a ladder rising above the roof--a side-rail which anyone, on emerging from below, would grasp as they stepped forth. Here was the entrance!

Yet, flat and level with the tin covering, or leads, there was still the closed trap, it being fastened from within by some bolt or pin, but--as further search proved--with its great hinge outside, so that it could be pushed upwards from the inside.

Shortly, however, he had forced the trap open--the dagger-knife with which he had provided himself having cut away the tin and woodwork from around that hinge, so that he could lift it some few inches, and, drawing it towards him, he drew also the bolt inside from out the staple. The road was free to him now!

Without a moment's hesitation he descended, one hand grasping the side-rail, the other the hilt of his sword; carefully counting the steps as he went. Fifteen in all he numbered, so that he thought the floor below must be close at hand--when, suddenly, the steps ceased. Yet--there was nothing below! No floor that he could feel, though he lowered himself as far as he might, grasping the bottom rung and the rail for support, and plunging his long leg down into the space. Nor even when, bending down as low as possible in another position, he tried to touch something solid with his sword!

Nothing!

He was not cold now; instead, all over him he felt the perspiration ooze out at the idea that here was a *guet-apens*, into which he had almost stumbled.

"Doubtless an oubliette," he thought, "a death-trap for any coming hastily down. Heavens! those *loups de Lorraine* forgot no precaution. Have any others ever passed the way that I have come, found an entrance from across the chasm to the roof, only to perish here?" Yet, even as he spoke, he was standing firmly on the lower step and feeling for his tinder box and lanthorn. A few moments and the latter was ignited, and, even with the dim rays it cast around, he was able to see and appreciate his position.

Below that last step there yawned a circular opening some ten or twelve feet in circumference, and large enough, therefore, for any human body to pass through it; the opening of a great shaft that, doubtless, passed all down the centre of the mansion, to end, perhaps, in some stone-floored dungeon or, maybe, some bottomless well fed by the mountain streams. Led to--no matter in what form--certain death below!

But, glancing round the rough, wooden-walled garret, or *sous-toit*, in which he was, and observing all that was possible by the flickering of the lamp, he saw, too, that, for those who were acquainted with the place, the ascent or descent of the ladder offered no difficulty. To the left of it, outside the rim of the shaft and not a foot away, was a species of wooden mounting block by which one could step on to, or off, it--the danger threatened only those who did not know of the trap, or should come hurriedly down the ladder in the dark as he had done! Also, he perceived almost immediately opposite to where he stood, a small door let in to the wall or side of the garret, or rather a doorway or arch.

"My way lies there," he said to himself, and stepping on to the block he proceeded to follow it.

The lamp in one hand, it being shielded by his other palm, he passed beneath that arch and so encountered another flight of steps, or, in this case, stairs, having balustrades on either side, and thus descended to what was, in actual fact, the topmost floor, since that which he had just quitted was no more than the support of, and space beneath, the roof.

He was now in the house proper; now was the time when danger was close at hand, when one false step, a stumble, the slightest creak of a board beneath his foot, one glimmer from his lanthorn, would bring destruction on his head.

For, up to this floor the great staircase rose unbroken, and up the well of the house which that staircase made there came the warmth from the hall below, the odour of the burning logs, the noise made by snoring men. And Andrew, the lamp out now, peered over the topmost rail of the stair's balustrade and gazed down.

As before, the watchers slept, Beaujos in his great chair, the tankard on the table by his side; upon that table also his sword. Only, now, the weapon was flanked by two others--by two great pistols. He saw, too, that in the belts of each of the serving-men were pistols added to their wooden-sheathed knives. All were doubly armed!

"Thank God!" he muttered; "the dog at least is not there. It must have met its end: perhaps 'tis from that end and my previous visit, added to the death of its companion, that they take this double caution. Yet, had they taken five hundred times as much, I must go on. I have embarked; I must see the voyage through."

He knew--had known all along--none could have failed to know!--the risk he was running, the door of Death at which he stood. One slip now, a cough alone, and he would be face to face with those doubly-armed men. Yet the knowledge of his danger did but one thing--it made him all the more determined, while resolving at the same time to exert his utmost caution.

Removing his eyes from the men below, he let them roam swiftly round the floor on which he was, though, up here, all was in so much darkness that he could distinguish nothing. Yet he knew that there was at least one room upon it used and inhabited; a room which faced, as he calculated, to the front, and looked out over the great courtyard.

A room from under the door of which, as he peered through the darkness, there stole now a gleam of light.

CHAPTER XXII.

MARION WYATT

As calmly as he had ever gone into battle, or--as he had told Laurent--had fought his way through the Duke of Holstein-Pleon's men at Entzheim, he prepared to find out who was the occupant of the room from under the door of which that ray of light emerged.

He began by doing what he had before thought of in the garret above, and would have done but for the fear of rusty nails or other things which might wound his feet. He took off his boots. Then, carrying them in his hands, creeping as softly as a mouse in spite of his great size, and holding the scabbard of his sword tightly, so that no clank of it should arouse the sleepers below, he made his way towards where the light streamed forth from under the door. Yet, as he went, he cast ever an eye over the balustrade towards those sleepers, and observed that none stirred.

Soon he was close by that light; it shone upon his stocking feet--the moment had come for him to discover, if possible, what was beyond that door. Whether the inhabitant was the woman he sought--or--? Was it De Bois-Vallée himself?

That supposition had already arisen in his mind. It might be--probably it was!--he. What then? What next to do? He thought he knew--nay, he did know! His determination was already taken. His soul revolted against the necessity for creeping as he had done into another man's house, although that man was his enemy and a scoundrel: if it was De Bois-Vallée, another five moments should see him on the inside of that door, or the owner of the house outside it, and their swords crossed. And then--and then! Well then the servitors below might rush up to their master's assistance, plunge their daggers and knives into his body--only, first, he would make sure of the man who had broken Philip's life and sent him to his grave. He would make sure of him! Ere the men could mount those stairs the last owner of this gruesome fortress should be dead. But was it he behind the door? He must know that! Possibly his task was not yet near its accomplishment.

He bent down to the keyhole, as he had done three nights before when outside the great main door, but this one offered him no opportunity of seeing through it. The key stood in the hole and blocked all chance of his peering into the room--he must find some other way.

So, next, still as soft as a mouse, he brought his great form level with the floor and endeavoured to see under the door; but again he was foiled. The gap was not large enough; he could observe nothing. Then, suddenly, as he pondered what to do next, there arose voices from below. Had they discovered his presence above? In a moment he was able to give himself the answer. Not yet. Though it seemed likely that ere long they must do so. They were going to their beds--would they mount to where he was?

"He will not come to-night," he heard Beaujos say, recognizing at once the voice that had roared at the sleeping servitors three nights back; "no need to watch longer. Get you all to bed, all, that is, except Brach. As for you," doubtless he was now addressing the one so called, "sleep you here, yet sleep light. If he comes, best be wide awake on the instant, or beware the Vicomte's anger."

Were they speaking, Andrew wondered, of their master, for whose return they might be waiting, or of him--the man who had disturbed them so before; the slayer of the hound. Yet, no matter which it was, he must not be caught here should they mount the stairs. He must hide himself till they had retired for the night, and, thinking this, he stole softly back to the garret above.

Half an hour later, and all in the house was again as still as death. The men who had been ordered off to bed were gone and Beaujos with them, and, fortunately for Andrew, and for them also--since he had resolved to slay the first who should discover his presence above--they had not mounted the stairs. Instead, they must have betaken themselves to some room leading out of the hall: must have done so since, to the watcher above, no sound of a footfall on the stairs had come. All were gone except the one addressed as Brach, and he, Andrew could see by once more stealthily glancing over the balustrade, was already asleep again, this time in Beaujos' great chair.

Through the silent house he made his way a second time to the door from under which the light streamed; again he reached it and sought for some means whereby he might discover who was in that room. Not De Bois-Vallée, he felt sure now, since, almost for certain, had he been there the servitors--Beaujos, at least--would have come to him for their last final orders for the night and the next morning. Therefore it must be she--and guarded, perhaps, by the woman of whom the peasant had spoken--the woman who had loved the Vicomte's father.

As he mused thus, wondering also how it could happen that anyone within that room should remain so quiet for the time he had been in the neighbourhood of it--since, with the exception of once hearing the logs of a fire within fall together with a dull crash, no sound had issued from that chamber--another ray of light caught his eye. A ray so tiny that, at first, he thought he was subject to some illusion produced by the excitement of his mind. For it was close to him as he stood outside the heavy, rude, oak door; so close that it seemed to shine straight into his eye--a ray no bigger than a pin's point! He looked at it again, and steadily put up his hand in front of his face, when, lo! it was gone; put next his finger out towards it and touched the spot whence it proceeded, and found that, set in the door at about the height of an ordinary man, was a little wicket an inch or two square, with a sliding cover running in an upper and lower groove. A spy-hole for those outside to gaze through upon the inmate of the room, which, by accident, had been left unclosed the smallest fraction.

His finger moved it still another fraction, and the interior of the room was visible at last!

It was a large apartment hung with tapestry and handsomely furnished; a great table in the middle of it; upon that table a lamp giving a bright light, also a vase containing some brightly-coloured autumn leaves and flowers. In the far corner of the room, a bed with the clothes turned down for the night; by the table, a great lounge on which a woman lay sleeping--a woman whose face was so pale and white that, in truth, she might have been dead and yet no paler.

Her hair, of a golden hue, was all undone, and, being thick and long, hung over the head of the couch so that it reached almost to the thickly-carpeted floor; one hand as white as marble hung over the side of the couch, also: her dress, a *robe de chambre*, was likewise white, and added to the general ghastliness of her appearance. And Andrew, peering in at her, wondered if he had come too late; if he was gazing into a death chamber instead of the apartment of a living being!

Yet, in a moment he knew such could not be the case--the woman lying there turned the slightest degree possible in her sleep, and sighed once. Then slept again--if she had, indeed, awakened.

But, now, he was face to face with a difficulty which, although he had considered it more than once before, presented itself more forcibly than ever to him. That difficulty was how to open communication with her; how to arouse her and make his presence known without causing her so much alarm that she should shriek or call out, and, by doing so, spoil all. How? How?

At last he decided. Poor plan though it was, it was the only one--it might answer. Especially might it answer since he had made sure she was alone, and that the other woman of whom he had heard was of a certainty not in that room also. His eyes had taken in everything in the chamber; whoever her custodian was, at least she was not there to-night.

He went back swiftly, therefore, to the garret above, recognizing that no time must be lost, since, at any moment, that pale ghastly figure might arise from the couch and prepare for bed--and, when there, he lit once more his lanthorn. Next, he took hastily from his breast a small set of tablets which he carried--they had been Philip's once, and bore upon the case his name and their family crest--and hastily wrote:--

"Make no noise. Philip Vause's brother is here. To save you if need be. It is the truth, I swear. If you believe and wish to escape, open the door. To-night the chance is yours. Perhaps to-night only!--ANDREW VAUSE."

As quickly as he had come he went back to the door of the room, peered in once more through the slit of the little lattice, and, seeing that still the woman slept upon her couch, bent down towards the space where the light streamed out.

Then, his nerves tingling, for on the next few moments, and the woman's actions during them, depended all--his life, perhaps hers!--he pushed the tablets under the door, gave them a fillip with his hand which sent them a couple of feet into the room, and struck once upon the oak. Struck a sharp, quick blow, loud enough to awaken her, he thought, yet not loud enough to startle any others asleep in the dark and silent house.

He waited now for what should happen.

Nor had he long to do so ere he knew that the rap he had given had had its effect. He had re-closed the lattice tightly after he had come back from the garret, fearing to alarm her either by looking through it or by letting her find it open; he relied, therefore, upon his hearing. That hearing told him now that the woman had awakened--he heard a rustle of her garments, heard her feet touch the floor as she rose from the couch; heard, too, that she came swiftly towards where the tablets lay, the whiteness of the ivory catching, doubtless, her eyes as she arose.

In the silence that reigned in the house he could hear those tablets being picked up by her, almost hear the grating of the hard leaves against each other; did, without doubt, hear a gasp as his message was perused. Then silence--or a silence broken only by rapid, quickly-caught breathing. But no noise, no word from the woman on the other side of the door!

At last, however--when he himself could scarce restrain the breath from coming in great gusts from his lungs, so terrible was the suspense--he knew that she had moved again, was close against the door. Then a soft, low voice said--

"As you are a man and I a helpless, unhappy woman, is this true?"

"Before God and as a soldier, it is true."

"You swear you are Philip Vause's brother?"

"I swear it."

The key turned in the lock; then, a moment later, the voice within spoke again.

"I am a prisoner here. The door is fast on your side also. There is a bolt above."

He raised his hand as she spoke, thrust back the bolt quietly--it making no noise as it left the staple--and when this was done the door opened from within, and Andrew entered the room.

Seeing the great form before her, regarding with amazement--perhaps alarm--the bronzed face and long black hair of Andrew; observing also that the clothes he wore were torn and smirched by the efforts he had made in crossing the chasm and reaching the roof above; noticing, too, his unbooted feet--the woman raised her hand involuntarily to her breast and exclaimed, though in a whisper--

"You! You Philip's brother!"

"In truth, lady, I am. And you? There can be no mistake. You are Marion Wyatt."

"Unhappily." Then she said, still gazing up at him, "I have waited long for this release to come. Prayed night and day for it--feared at last that he would never follow nor seek me out. And now, even now, he comes not himself, but sends you. Oh, sir! why has Philip not come--or--or"--and she paused, but continued a moment later. "It cannot be that he thinks----"

"Madame," said Andrew, regarding her steadfastly--it had never dawned on him until now that she could not possibly know that Philip was in his grave--"Madame, this is no time for explanations. They will suffice when we are outside this house." And because, even as he spoke, he wondered if he knew all there was to know in connection with this woman, he added, "It is your desire to quit it, I imagine? You have no--no wish to remain?"

"To remain! Here! My God!" and now she lifted her eyes and looked him straight in the face, he seeing as she did so that they were large, grey, truthful-looking eyes. "To remain here! In this villain's house Oh! have I not tried to escape more than once--almost succeeded; should have done so, but that they found me by aid of the dogs----"

"The dogs!" Andrew exclaimed. "The dogs! They set them on you. Ha! Since that is so I regret no longer they are dead."

"Dead!" she exclaimed in her turn. "Dead! Was it you, then, who slew the first one?"

"It was I. You know of that?"

"I know it. They thought it was some *braconnier* stealing about the place, or some enemy of his. And it was you!"

"I came here to find a way to you--to save you, if might be," Andrew replied. "To find some entrance to this house. I have found it. Madame," and his voice was very grave and serious as he continued, "being here we must not tarry. This is our chance--to-night. By dawn it may be gone. It is not well to lose time."

"How to go?" she asked. "How escape?"

He told her of the rope and of Laurent watching on the other side of the chasm; made light of any danger there might be--which he assured her was but imaginary--told her that when across

and safely on the slope her liberty was assured.

"For," he said, "once there, none dare to harm you or me. Nor to attack us. I beseech you, delay not; I beseech you come."

At first she shivered with fear, said she knew of the distance between the house and the slope; that she would rather live there a prisoner for life than venture on so terrible an escape. Yet, also, at last she yielded to his persuasions, nay, his threats almost, that, if she came not now he must leave her and seek his own safety. She would go, she decided.

"So be it," Andrew replied. "It is best. There can be no other chance. I will go prepare the peasant. Be ready, I pray you, when I return." And, pointing out of the window of the room, to which he had stepped, he said, "See, madame, the mist and fog are gone, the stars shine forth--it will not be so dark and terrible. And, as I have said, it is nothing. From the roof you will glide swiftly across the gap--'tis not far--a moment later you will be drawn up. Courage! Courage! I go to prepare Laurent," and he turned towards the door.

"I must be muffled, blindfolded," she whispered, "then I shall be brave. But, if I saw what is below, my courage would fail--I should draw back at the last moment."

"It shall be so," Andrew said, removing the last objection she was likely to make. "I will muffle you." Then a thought struck him suddenly, and he said, "there is a woman attends to you. Where is she?"

"In heaven's mercy away for the night. Her father, an old man, is ill at Gerardmer hard by; she has gone to him. She will return at daybreak. Oh!" she added, "you do not know how I am watched. When I tell Philip all he will weep for me."

"'Tis well she is away," Andrew replied, ignoring the latter part of her remarks. "To-morrow she may return, and welcome. The bird will be flown. Again I say, courage, madame. Courage, and be ready at my return. 'Twill be immediate."

Swiftly he passed to the garret and, from it, to the roof, lighting his lanthorn for an instant, so as to avoid the shaft beneath the ladder that mounted to the leads; then, having drawn on his boots once more, he climbed up and stood again upon the roof. As he had said, the fog and mist were gone now, the wind had changed and blown them both away, the stars were shining brightly above; across the chasm he could see dimly the trunk of the tree round which the further end of the rope had been wound by him and Laurent.

The night, too, was very still, nothing broke the silence--or only one thing. Far off as yet, though drawing nearer every moment, it seemed to his trained ears as though there was the sound of a horse's hoofs beating with regularity upon some road. Yet, he remembered, there was but one road near of which he knew; the road from Remiremont to Bois-le-Vaux. He must be mistaken! It was some other sound which, in the stillness of the night, resembled that made by a swift oncoming horse.

He whistled once, gently, yet loud and clear enough to reach the watcher on the other side; but no reply came. And again he whistled soft and low, but still the result was the same.

"Heavens!" he muttered, under his breath. "To sleep at such a time!" And, having arrived by now at the great chimney to which he had attached his end of the rope, he grasped at and jerked it violently so as either to arouse Laurent--if he was in truth asleep--or to attract his attention if awake.

As he did so, his hair seemed to stand on his head in horror!

For, in the moment when he tugged at the rope, he felt that the other end was loose--was no longer attached to the tree across the brink. Loose and hanging down over the side of the house on the roof of which he stood.

CHAPTER XXIII.

L'ESPÉE CARNACIERE

"God knows what has happened," he said to Marion Wyatt when he had returned to her. "Yet one thing is sure. There is no escape now. We are snared."

"Is it treachery?" she whispered, shaking and white to the lips with terror, so that she looked more like a spectre than before. "Treachery on the part of the man in whom you confided?"

It was not strange the girl should be so startled, so overcome. For more than a year she had been incarcerated in this house (as yet Andrew knew not how she had been brought here, scarce knew, indeed, whether, after all, Debrasques had not been mistaken, and that, originally, at least, she might have come here of her own free will, even though made a prisoner of afterwards), had been incarcerated here with no hope of escape. Then, as she reflected hurriedly, the chance had come, unlooked for--as chances come always to us in this life--and, as unexpectedly, had been snatched away a moment afterwards. Snatched away, while leaving behind it a horror greater than before! For now, this man, the brother of that other who was her affianced husband, had placed himself also in deadly, hideous peril. A peril that must surely engulf him, since there was no loophole left for escape. He would be found here, must be found ere many hours had passed--and then! What would happen then? She dared not even think, could not think; could do nothing but stand trembling before him, white to the lips.

"Scarcely treachery on Laurent's part, madame," Andrew replied, and, as he spoke, Marion still gazing at him as she had done since his return from the garret, wondered if this cool, determined man could, indeed, be gentle Philip's brother! This man who, here, shut up in a hostile house, with death threatening him as the reward for his intrusion when once he should be discovered, spoke as calmly as though he stood on his own brother's hearth.

"Scarcely treachery, I think. The rope was not-unwound from the tree as, doubtless, it would have been by him, had he resolved to play me false. Instead, when I drew it up to make examination, it was cut cleanly through. Also, somewhat shorter than before. Whereby I found it had been severed hastily."

"By whom, think you?"

"How can I say? How tell? The following of the man, in whose house we are, are all asleep. Not by them, therefore. As for him, De Bois-Vallée. Where is he?"

For answer, she started as one starts who is suddenly reminded of that which it would be well they had not forgotten.

"My God!" she exclaimed, "to-day is Friday. He was expected back to-night."

"From where?"

"From Nancy. He had gone to seek the Duke----"

"To seek the Duke!" Andrew echoed. "To seek the Duke! Perhaps to make his peace with him," he continued with a bitter laugh. "To be well with the side that seems the winning one now!" Then he continued, "Nancy is north of this. Between it and Remiremont the mountains run. He might pass them, would pass them, doubtless, to gain his home. Yet, why descend to the slope? There could be naught to arouse his suspicions."

"Who else could have done this?" she asked, shaking still.

"I cannot say. Yet be sure of one thing, we shall know very soon. If it is he, he must be here ere long, and then--then we shall meet again."

"Again You have met before? And you do not fear him?"

"Fear him," said Andrew, looking down at her and touching her arm with one finger as he spoke. "Fear him! Mistress Wyatt, I came from England to----" Then he paused, knowing that he must not say too much as to why he was there instead of Philip. Contented himself, consequently, with saying, "No, madame, I do not fear him," and he laughed beneath his breath, remembering that, unless he wished to precipitate matters, he must not wake the sleepers below.

"Wake the sleepers below," he repeated to himself, musing, "wake the sleepers below!"

Even as the thought of doing so ran through his mind, there sprang new born into that mind another idea--the recollection that all was not yet lost.

"What is it?" she whispered, knowing intuitively by his changed countenance that some fresh plan had suddenly dawned on him. "What? Tell me. I will be brave."

"Listen," he said, catching her by the arm in his excitement; bending so low to murmur in her ear that his long moustache brushed her neck. "There is one last hope. But--to avail ourselves of it you must be bold. Very bold. You promise that you will?"

"Yes. Yes. I am brave now. What shall I do?"

"Come," he replied. "Come. Follow me," and he unlocked the door in which he had turned the key on re-entering the room.

"Hold up your dress so that it makes no noise if you can do without them, put off your shoes. I

will carry you when we near the sleeping quarters. Come."

She obeyed him, lifting up the end of her long robe with one hand, then--because she was now, in truth, brave and nerved to face all--she took off her shoes and carried them in her other hand. And, stepping gently, she followed him out without question into the darkness of the corridor.

Looking below, he could see by the flickering light of the still burning logs that the man called Brach was fast asleep; indeed, could very well hear that such was the case by the noise he made. But, beyond the faint light which those logs emitted as they now smouldered to an end, the whole house was enveloped in black gloom. Surely, he thought, they should be able to steal to the great door, to turn the key and emerge into the night without anyone being aroused. And, if they were aroused--why! he had his sword and his pistols.

Feeling their way by the balustrades, her hand following his, they crept down stair by stair until they had reached the floor below, and could look over the wooden parapet that ran all around the square hall here, seeing plainly the features of the slumbering man, on which, occasionally, the light cast by little flecks of flame from the logs would glance. Could see that he was plunged in a profound sleep--could hear also the noise of the others snoring somewhere near.

He tapped now the hand that followed his down the stair-rail; once he looked back and his lips muttered, "We shall succeed"; then they went on. Stood at last in the stone-flagged hall with, between them and Brach, a huge pillar that served as one of the supports to the floor they had just left.

And still the sleeper never moved, but, instead, snored loudly, the noise reverberating through the house.

Turning, he put his arm around Marion Wyatt's waist and lifted her off the ground so that her body was on his shoulder--he seeming to her to do this as easily as she, herself, could have lifted a velvet cushion--then, on tiptoe, and keeping always in the deepest blackness of the hall's extremity, he advanced to the great door and felt for the lock. But the key was not in it! Had it been, another moment would have seen them outside, since there was but one transverse bar to push up, and one turn to be given to that key.

"The bunch is on the table," he whispered. "I see it glittering in the light cast by the logs. Stay here while I go back for it and--if you can--push up the bar that is athwart the panels. But, in the name of heaven, of all our hopes, do it gently, softly. If it creaks or makes any noise so as to awaken the man, I must stab him to the heart for our own protection. Be careful--do it inch by inch--I will stand over him. Begin when I am by his side."

A few moments more and he did stand over the other, his hand upon his dagger ready to plunge it into Brach's heart should he awaken. Once, too, that hand half drew the knife from its sheath--for the great transverse bar creaked slightly as the girl removed it from its wooden socket and pushed it upwards!

In his other hand he held the great bunch of keys!

And now the time had come; they were saved! The bar was up. Brach still slept. All in the house was quiet as death. There was no more to do but to fit in the key, turn it, and so go forth into the night. They were saved!

* * * * *

Across the hall he made his way, Marion Wyatt standing by the great portal, her back to it, waiting for him to reach her. Then--suddenly--on the vast *place* without, they heard the rapid clatter of a horse's hoofs, heard the iron of its shoes ring smartly out upon the stones as it struck them; heard a man's voice call harshly, "Ho! within. Open quickly," and, with a smothered shriek, Marion fell on her knees, her hands clasped and wrung together.

"'Tis he," she wailed. "He! De Bois-Vallée. God help us We are lost."

"'Tis he for sure," Andrew replied. "As for being lost, we will see for that. Put back the bolt. He is not in his house yet. Later, we will open to him. At present the work is here," and, wasting no further time, he rushed at the man, Brach, who, even though he had not been already awakened, would have been so by the loud reverberation of the bar as the distracted woman flung it back across the door into its socket.

But he was awake now--as, Andrew knew, were the others. From the room whence their snoring had proceeded, Beaujos was shouting, "the master! the master!"--evidently he was not yet aware what else was happening!--also the men clattering and stamping about, as they pulled on their garments, were plainly to be heard. It was, however, with Brach that Andrew had first to

deal; Brach, who had by now staggered from his chair to his feet and, although dazed with astonishment, hurled himself with bulldog-like ferocity at the intruder. He was, however, no match for him, who, added to other advantages, had no drowsy slumbers to shake off, and who, as Brach rushed at him, struck full at his head with the bunch of great keys and knocked him senseless to the floor. Then, since it was no part of his intention to allow De Bois-Vallée to enter his own house yet--in spite of the infernal din which he was making on the door, accompanied by oaths, threats of terrible punishments and other exclamations--he flung the bunch on to the ashes of the now almost extinct fire.

He had but time to stride over to Marion Wyatt, who, a mass of shivering fear, crouched against the door; to whisper a word to her and bid her take heart--"they were not," he said, "undone yet"--when into the hall rushed all the others, Beaujos at their head, while two of those behind him carried lamps.

"Who in the devil's name are you?" exclaimed the steward, starting back appalled at the sight of the man before him. "Who? Who? And how come you here?"

That he should be appalled was not strange!

Andrew had by now unsheathed his sword--it shining ominously in the light of the lamps carried by the men--in his left hand he held a pistol. Also, his size and aspect, as he stood before Marion Wyatt, covering her with his great form, were enough to affright a bolder man than Beaujos.

"Your master's enemy to the death," he replied. "One also who has vowed to save this woman from him. Hark, how that master clamours at the door! Well, I will not have it opened. Therefore, stand back."

"Stand back!" exclaimed the other. "Stand back at your command! Ay! thus," and with that he rushed at Andrew, wielding a large, dangerous-looking blade as he did so.

"You are a fool," exclaimed the latter, "a fool! Best go and lock yourself up in some room, I warn you. Otherwise it will go hard with you."

For answer, the steward attacked him vigorously enough, and not without some skill in the use of his weapon, yet jumped back quickly at a sudden pass which Andrew made. A wicked pass he did not understand, since, to his astonishment, the other's blade ran along his until the hilts met with a clash, and, with a quick turn from its owner's wrist, forced his own weapon from his hand.

"Away!" said Andrew, "you are useless at this play! Find another weapon."

"I will," yelled Beaujos, and, as he stepped back, he seized a pistol from the hand of one of the men and discharged it at Andrew. Then the fellow thought his doom was sealed! For, in a moment, he knew that he had missed him, and that the pistol which Andrew now lifted in his left hand would be used with better aim. And, with a harsh cry, he jumped behind one of the pillars, calling to the men to shoot Andrew down; to throw themselves upon him and drag him to the ground.

Meanwhile, from outside the door, amidst the kicks and beatings which the master of the house was administering, his voice arose:

"What devil's work is doing in there?" he called out. "And what means this clash of arms and firing while I wait outside? Answer, you hounds Are you snarling between yourselves, or whom have you there?"

For reply, Andrew struck the door with the butt of the pistol and called back:

"You desire to know?"

"Ay, answer! Whose voice is that?" And it appeared as though his own voice had changed somewhat as he asked the question.

"The voice," Andrew replied, "of Philip Vause's brother."

It seemed to him--his ears on the alert to catch the other's next words--as though that reply produced a gasp from the man outside; also, he thought, an awful, blasphemous curse. One thing for certain it did produce--silence henceforth. De Bois-Vallée spoke no more.

But, now, he had to return to those around him, since, though Beaujos had fled behind the pillar as Andrew raised his pistol, it was evident that he had not desisted, but only retired temporarily from the attack.

He was coming at him again, supported this time by the others; was whispering--though so loudly and excitedly that each word was plainly to be heard, "You, at his legs, you, seize his sword arm; I will run him through. If that fails--shoot him dead."

"Gad so," said Andrew, answering him, "we will see."

Then the affray began. One man against four--a helpless, shaking woman crouching behind that one.

Did ever sword flash as flashed that sword wielded by the intruder, the pistols being unused at present! Beaujos' strokes were parried as though by magic; like streaks of lightning the outnumbered man's weapon darted forth; one, two, three passes it made, and, with a clang, the steward's blade fell to the floor, his right arm pierced through--the muscles and sinews cut to pieces, while, uttering a moan, the wielder sank down slowly to the ground. Yet, as Andrew drew his blade back, a serving-man leaped to his sword-arm, seized it by both hands and, with the whole weight of his body, bore it down to Andrew's side. But, even now, he was not conquered; with his left hand he dealt the fellow such a blow as sent him reeling away--he was free again!

Free to face the others coming at him, their pistols ready, their swords raised! In his movements his own pistol had fallen to the ground and he did not see, nor know, what was happening behind. Yet, a moment later, a report rang in his ears, one of the servitors threw up his arms with a shriek and fell headlong before him--the fingers clenched at the first joint above the palms--sure sign the heart was reached!

'Twas Marion's hand had slain him! Her hand which had grasped the fallen pistol!

Still, there were the others to be dealt with, and he braced himself to do it.

Again his sword flashed, beat down the blade of the servitor who struck at him, would, in a moment, have sent him to join the man whom Marion had shot, when another report rang through the hall, a lurid gleam of fire almost blinded him--and his own noble weapon dropped from his hand; a faintness came over him, and he reeled back heavily against the door.

As he did so, through the fast coming darkness that seemed to be enveloping him he saw the remaining servitors raise their swords as though to strike him down, saw also, behind them, another form advancing swiftly from a low arched passage at the extremity of the hall; recognized De Bois-Vallée!

And, as Andrew saw him, it seemed to his numbed senses that he heard his enemy say:

"Hold your hand. He is for me alone. Injure him not."

Then the darkness became intense and he knew no more.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WEIRD WOMAN

Andrew Vause raised himself on his left elbow--though his right arm and shoulder were so intolerably painful that it caused him agony to do so--and endeavoured to peer into the darkness in which he was enveloped. Endeavoured to discover, or imagine, where he was; also to remember what had happened.

Yet he could recollect nothing, had no more conception where he was, or why he was lying on his back suffering excruciating agony accompanied by a burning thirst, than he would have possessed had he been but that moment born.

All was chaos to him.

As, however, the lowest form of creature on which nature confers existence, even though owning no power of reasoning or memory, or the knowledge of why or how it so exists, yet seeks for the necessities that existence requires and for the wherewithal to supply its wants, so the man lying there sought for some assuagement of that intolerable thirst. Sought for it by endeavouring unconsciously to moisten his lips with his dry and parched tongue--then, failing in this attempt, relapsed into the lethargy, followed by the oblivion, which had previously been his.

Yet again, later on--though he knew it not himself, no more than he knew that many more hours had passed since first his eyes had opened--he awoke a second time, still dazed, still unconscious of who, or what, or where he was; knowing only as the unreasoning brute-beast knows that it is suffering, yet also knowing not why.

But now his agony was so intense--the agony of thirst! for the other pain, that of his right side, might be borne--that, like some wounded creature, he writhed and tossed about upon whatever

object it might be on which he lay, and in his writhings and the tossings of his long arms his left hand struck something. Something that, even to his bemused mind, seemed to give promise of containing the wherewithal to quench his thirst. Whereon the long fingers twining round that object found that it held water. Then, still with no knowledge of what he did, with nothing beyond that instinct shared by the lowest of creatures to tell him that what he was doing would bring him relief, he drew the vessel nearer and drank. Drank and drank, long and copiously, until at last there was no drop left, then sank back once more, and once more lapsed into unconsciousness.

* * * * *

Again he awoke, more hours afterwards, with still the impenetrable darkness all around him, and with still the dazed blankness of memory and the inability to recall who or what he was, yet with now through all his density of mind some feeble glimmering of humanity working in his brain. Some hazy idea coursing through that brain and suggesting that he was a thing that had life in it, that he had not only just begun to exist, but, instead, had been existing heretofore. That he was a creature not used to lying paralyzed and helpless here, but, on the contrary, one full of action.

Memory was beginning to assert itself! Though, even as it did so, he slept again, went off once more into oblivion.

At last, awakening for the fourth time, with the terrible thirst gone, he awoke also to life and reason. A little longer--after lying still in the darkness--he recalled the fact that his name was Andrew Vause.

After that the rest was easy, indeed, too easy; for, with this clue to aid him, the whole of the past surged up in such huge waves of remembrance that they almost served to engulf memory altogether. That past rushed in upon him, recollections crowded swift and fast upon his mind and hurtled one another away; gradually he remembered all. All! The passage from the mountain slope to the roof; the meeting with Marion Wyatt; the still unexplained reasons why this English girl should be a prisoner here in the Lorrainer's house; the attempted escape; the fight and his defeat. But, beyond and after that, only the blank occasioned by his insensibility--and now this black impenetrable darkness!

Where was he? He must know that! Always a man of action, and with the promptings to action still working in him, all wounded as he was, he made, therefore, an attempt to rise, but found that attempt useless. His leg was attached by a chain to something at the foot of where he lay, a chain that, as he moved the leg, hung heavily upon it above the ankle and clasped it tight. He was a prisoner. That much was certain. But what else?

His hands, which were free--though the right still caused him great pain when he endeavoured to move it--told him he lay close above a floor upon some stretched-out rug or skin; his other senses revealed to him that he was in some large, vast place into which the air entered freely; a damp, cold air, too, that blew upon his face, yet was grateful since it cooled the fever that raged within him still. But that was all; he could discover nothing further, could, from where he was, touch nothing beyond the bare boards around him, excepting only the vessel which he had some time previously--he could not recollect whether it was an hour or a day ago!--drunk from. No more.

Yet now, lying there--half dozing sometimes; sometimes forgetful of everything and recalling next each incident as it had happened and in its proper sequence, as well as with strange clearness--it seemed that a sound broke on his ears. A sound as of one who slowly mounted some steps, or stairs. A footstep that came nearer each time it fell. And, suddenly, as he lay listening, wondering if, with this approaching footfall, his doom approached too, if he was now to pay with his life for the entrance into his enemy's house, a light sparkled in his eyes from a slight distance, then blazed full into them, and a woman carrying a lanthorn in her hand stood before him. A woman who had mounted some steps close by him, and thus entered the place in which he lay. By the light of that lanthorn he recognized where he was namely, the garret beneath the roof of the mansion of Bois-le-Vaux!

She held the lanthorn high above her head, peering down at him under its rays for some time as though scrutinizing the great form stretched before her, and, perhaps, did not see that his eyes were open and looking at her from under his long and much dishevelled hair as curiously as she regarded him. Whereby he had time and opportunity for observing what manner of woman this was who stood there.

She was no longer young, that he saw from the great streaks of grey which mingled with her hair, that once must have been as raven black as his own was now; was, indeed, a woman of about fifty years of age. Yet no man could regard her and fail to observe that she must also once have been beautiful, though with a beauty spoilt and marred by the workings of strong passions within--sensual passions, as testified by the full thick lips and large gleaming eyes--which even

now shone with a strange, fierce brightness!--cruel, vindictive passions, as shown by the manner in which those lips closed tightly together; by the broad jaw, and by the perpendicular line between the eyes, which caused a frown to be always upon her face.

Fixing her glance at last full on him she saw he was awake and conscious, and, so seeing, moved the lanthorn a little and peered under it into his eyes. Then she spoke, while as she did so her features either assumed a cynical smile or seemed, in the flickering light of the lamp, to assume it.

"So," she said, "you are the man who found his way into this house by a road none have ever been known to travel before in our day. The man who thought to carry off your countrywoman--almost succeeded in doing so! *Ciel!* at least you are a brave one."

"I am the man," Andrew assented calmly; "who are you?"

It seemed, however, to be no part of her intention to tell him this, since, after casting another glance at his stretched-out form, she strode off to that part of the garret where the ladder, or steps, from below entered it, and, stooping down to the floor, picked up a jar of water and a platter of bread which she had placed there ere she advanced towards him. Then she returned to where he lay, put them by his side, and, taking up the other water-pitcher which he had drained when alone in the darkness, prepared to retire. But Andrew--who hoped that, even from this stern-looking woman (who was, he did not doubt, that custodian of Marion Wyatt of whom the peasant had spoken--the woman who had loved De Bois-Vallée's father and hated, in consequence, his mother) he might obtain some information as to what had been the conclusion of the events which had occurred in the hall--put out his hand as though to stop her going, and exclaimed:

"Tell me, I beseech you--as a woman yourself--what has befallen that countrywoman of mine. Is all well with her?"

Pausing in her withdrawal to gaze down at him, while the dark, piercing eyes looked into his, she made the enigmatic answer:

"As well as before. As well as it is ever like to be," then again directed her steps towards where the ladder descended from the room.

"And I----" he cried, endeavouring thereby to arrest her steps, "I--what is to be done to me--what attempted? Tell me that."

But she answered no more, continuing still upon her way to the steps. Yet, had Andrew been a timorous man who feared for whatever was about to befall him, he might have shuddered even as much as though she had told him he was to be done to death that very hour. For she turned her dark, grey-flecked head over her shoulder and looked at him with those piercing eyes--pausing in her progress as she did so--and in the eyes, nay! in the whole face, there was so mocking, devilish an expression--in the flickering rays of the lanthorn it seemed to be a grin!--that he divined there was no hope for him. That look told as plainly as a hundred words that he was doomed! Was in the hands of one who would forego nothing of the opportunity that had fallen in his way--and this woman knew it, gloated over it!

Yet, with what he felt to be his fate foretold by that baleful glance, this creature with her air of weird sardonic *espîèglerie* fascinated him, even as the snake fascinates those who cannot fly from it, and, as she strode slowly towards the other end of the vast garret, he followed her with his eyes, unable to withdraw them. For it seemed to him that in her he saw a living semblance of those women, those Fates or Furies, of whom his mother and gentle, scholarly Philip had read to him in his wild boyish days; the dark and terrible women who held the web of men's lives in their hands and tore it as they listed. And he wondered if she, this woman, whose worn face told of fierce and stormy passions not yet spent--perhaps only subdued and half burnt out--might hold his fate. Was she to be the administrator of some terrible death marked out for him by the man in whose power he now was--did that hideous glance she had given him over her shoulder mean this, or mean, instead, that though death might not come to him at her hands she knew well how it must and would come?

Watching her still, half awed, half bewitched by her weirdness, he saw her suddenly stop ere she approached close to the ladder-head, gaze on the ground, then flash the lanthorn's miserable light on the spot at which she stared; next, stoop swiftly to the floor--supple now as a girl of twenty!--pick something up from the floor and, holding it in the palm of her disengaged hand, regard it by the lamp's gleam. And, if her face had stirred him with an undefined feeling of repulsion as she cast that leering, evil look over her shoulder, it horrified him now by the glance of hate it bore as she inspected the object in her hand.

For it was the face of a devil glaring on an enemy, and that a well-hated one; the face of a fiend regarding that which it would blast to all eternity if possessing the power to do so. The mouth twitching--the full lips livid now, and with the teeth clenched over the lower one so that they seemed dug into it, until Andrew wondered no blood spurted forth--the eyes staring, the last remaining colour gone from the already dead-ivory of the cheeks--the woman gazed Medusa-like at what she held in her hand.

Then, suddenly, her long, loose gown swishing the floor as she moved, she strode back to him, her movements resembling a tigress's now; and, standing quivering before him, she said--while her voice sounded hoarse from out her throat--

"This! This! This! This cursed thing! It has fallen from your body--must have done so when you were brought here. How came it yours? Answer!"

"If," replied Andrew calmly, yet marvelling now at what the "cursed thing" could be, the finding of which had stirred her so--observing, too, the shaking of her limbs and the wild tempestuous fury that held her in its grasp, "If madame would deign to say what it is that she has found which moves her so----"

"What it is! What!" she repeated. Then exclaimed, "Man, trifle not with me, or I shall anticipate your death by some few hours. God! why bring this before my eyes? This! This picture of Fleurange Debrasques! His mother! And in your possession. In yours! It is some trick 'twixt you and him! Are you in truth his enemy?" and she bent her livid face down and peered into his face. "Or is this a scheme to torture me even in my swift-coming age, as, oh my God," and she wailed out these last words, "I have been tortured all my life by her. By her and by her memory," and, while she spoke, she struck the miniature against the side of the lanthorn as though demented.

In a moment it seemed to Andrew's now cleared brain that here was an accident, a chance, that might go far to help him to win, perhaps, this wild cat, this creature of mad passions, to his side. To win her--to!--to!--ah! it seemed more than one might hope for! Yet he would make the attempt. His life--Marion's life--might hang on what he could do with this woman.

"That," he said quietly, "Oh! that. The miniature. Why, 'tis nothing. Only his mother's portraiture. True, I have heard she was a Debrasques. And beautiful as the morning. Is it not so?"

Yet he had to pause as he looked now at the fury above him. For, by his remarks on the beauty of the woman whose likeness she held in her hand, he saw that he had goaded her almost too far. That she was trembling from head to foot, that a little more and he would spoil his chance. He must goad her further--but by degrees.

As he so paused she controlled herself. Calmed herself enough to say, "how came it in your possession? Answer that."

"'Tis simple. He dropped it fleeing from Turenne's army--fleeing, as I do pride myself, from me. For in solemn truth I am his enemy. Yet, I pray, an honest one. And, therefore, because I know he loved that lady, his mother, dearly, because also I knew his father worshipped her from the moment he set eyes on her first, it was my intention to have returned the jewel to him."

Andrew never moved his eye from off her as he spoke; he knew it might have been death to do so. If she had a weapon about her, his words were as like as not to cause her to use it on him. He was driving her to desperation; only--he did not want that desperation vented on him. And, watching the woman thus, he knew that it must find its vent somehow. Those livid lips--dashed now with flecks of foam--those glaring eyes, told clearly of the fire burning within.

"His father worshipped her! His father worshipped her!" she repeated, bringing out the words, as it seemed to him lying there before her, with an agonizing effort. "His father worshipped her. From the moment he set eyes on her first. My God! that they had been blinded first! That she had never come across my-- Yet," calming herself with another strong effort, while she took a step nearer, so that now she stood rigid before him--"how know you that? How? How? You never knew nor saw his father--nor," and she seemed to force her glance to rest upon the medallion--"this woman, Fleurange Debrasques--his wife."

In Andrew's mind there rang the Lorrainer's words, "She loved his father and, they say, hated his mother *par consequent*"--he knew that his cue was here. Also he knew he must be careful. Must be ready to ward off any blow from hidden knife or dagger that might come; be prepared to feel himself struck to the heart with some bullet from concealed pistol when next he spoke. Yet the train was laid. The time had come to say his last words.

And he said them.

"Know it? How know it? Is not the tale oft told hereabouts? Even I, a stranger, have heard it! Sometimes with laughter--sometimes with pity for another--sometimes----"

"With pity for another! What other?"

As she spoke no statue of marble, no corpse, was ever more rigid than this woman standing there before him. Nor more white!

"What other?"

"One whom he thought he loved at first," the words coming clear and distinct from Andrew's lips, "yet found he cared nothing for when Fleurange Debrasques--ay! that was her name--met his view. One whom they say he even then meant to discard, having grown weary of her; one whom

he did discard when Mdlle. Debrasques made him love her. Have you never heard this?"

* * * * *

The woman spoke no more, nor, as Andrew had thought would happen, did she spring at him. Instead, without one word, she turned on her heel and slowly made her way to the ladder, where, grasping the side-rail, she descended it. Yet, ere she did so, she turned her face once and glanced at him, the look she gave him piercing to his heart.

And, as he flung himself back on his rug, he muttered in the darkness by which he was once more surrounded:

"Heaven forgive me! Heaven forgive me! I had to do it--it may win her to our side; help Marion Wyatt and myself to our freedom. It had to be done. Yet, it has driven her mad--if she was not already so. Heaven forgive me!"

CHAPTER XXV.<

THE UNEXPECTED

Lying on his couch--if the bare floor and the rug upon which he found himself could be called such--Andrew began to perceive that whatever hurt he might have taken in the affray of the hall was leaving him. He had long since, in the passage of one weary hour after another, discovered that the wound which had rendered him insensible was not serious, and that the blow had not proceeded from the pistol which had been fired in his face. On the contrary, it was certain that he had been struck down from behind, at the moment that weapon exploded, by either some bludgeon or sword wielded by one of the servitors, and that, beyond this, he had received little harm. As for the pain in his shoulder--that did, indeed, proceed from the pistol bullet which had grazed his collar-bone, but had done no further injury.

And, now, in spite of his hard bed and poor nourishment--for nothing beyond the jug of water and the platter of bread was ever given him--he still found himself returning to strength and health. His mind had cleared also, as he perceived when he was able to so work upon the feelings of the maddened woman who had visited him--he felt he was ready to resist his doom in whatever form it might approach him. Nay, more, that he was ready to combat and avoid that doom should any opportunity arise of doing so.

Yet, he asked himself again and again as he lay there, how was the resistance to be offered! How? He was chained, and at the top of the house. There was no exit that way. Doubtless, those who had carried him up to this garret while he was insensible remembered that; calculated also that, even though the chain had not been about his leg and securely rivetted to the floor, he had no chance of escape. The chasm was impassable and there was no other mode of egress, since, never again, would he be allowed to reach the lower part of the house unobserved.

The woman had come no more by the time that he supposed a day and a night must have passed since she visited him, or, if she had come, he had not known it. Yet he had found the water replenished again in the vase by his side, and the empty platter filled with bread.

Therefore he knew this must have been done when he slept, and, doubtless, done in the dark. Otherwise he would have been awakened by the glare of the light!

But now, having discovered that this had happened, he resolved that it should not do so again. It was contrary to all his military ideas to be thus surprised without knowing it; repugnant also to him to be thus visited by some enemy, or some creature of his particular enemy. It should not be repeated, he vowed.

To prevent any such further unknown visitation, he raised himself into a sitting posture and stretched out his hand for the stone pitcher which stood by his side, when, grasping it round the neck, he drew it towards him. He meant to sleep when next slumber came to him with his hand around it, and to place the platter beneath his arms. Thereby, unless they were left untouched and fresh supplies put in their place, it would be impossible for his food and drink to be

replenished without his knowing it, as well as being awakened. And, should it be the woman who thus replenished them, it might happen that he could wile her into conversation, might, indeed, by working upon her feelings, induce her to say something that should give him a clue as to what fate was before him.

Thinking this, he drew the vessel towards him, when, to his amazement, he found that it struck against and moved something lying on the floor; something that, when he had previously raised the jug to his lips directly from the floor, he had not observed. Something long and thin that slid on the boards with a scraping sound.

To his further intense astonishment as he grasped the object, he found it was a sword in its scabbard. A moment later he knew it was his own sword.

There was no doubt about it. He could recognize his own long curled quillon amongst a thousand, knew the particular shape of the steel hook by which he fastened his leather-slashed "carriage," or *porte épée*, to his belt; knew also the feel and grip of the handle. It was his own sword, the one that, below, had dropped from his numbed hand as the bludgeon, or other weapon, had struck him down at the same time that the flash from the pistol had blinded him.

"What does it mean?" he whispered to himself, as, lovingly, he ran his finger along the keen, sharp blade. "What? That I am to have a chance for life even though against tremendous odds; even though outnumbered. Ha! well, no matter! Better that, with this true friend to my hand, than poison or a swift fall down that hellish shaft to regions unknown. Far better that, with you in my grasp," and he thrust the blade back into its scabbard. Yet, cheered as he was by discovering this good servant by his side once more, a moment's reflection told him how, even now, it was of little use to him. Rivetted to the floor was one end of the accursed chain that held him fast--with that about his ankle what could he do even though armed?

"Kill one or two, 'tis true," he mused, "even as they come at me. Kill them, run them through, as once I saw a Turk at Choczim kill four men, while he lay on the ground with both his legs torn off beneath the knee by one of Sobieski's cannonballs. Well! even so, 'tis best. Best to die fighting, causing as many as I can to travel the same dark road I go upon. Far best." And, hugging his sword to him, he lay back and pondered on who could have done him so fair a service as this.

"The woman, without doubt," he thought. "The poor mad, distracted thing. It may be that she deems I shall be the instrument of vengeance on the son of the man who threw her off, and so provided me the wherewithal."

Still thinking over all this, and musing, as he had mused more than once in the long lonely hours spent in the darkness, on what could have caused Laurent to either cut, or permit to be cut, the rope which would have saved him and Marion Wyatt--would have opened the door to their freedom--wondering, also, if he had been suddenly attacked from behind--perhaps slain--Andrew dropped off once more into a gentle slumber. Though now, with the sword to one hand, and with the other round the pitcher's neck, while the bread platter lay beneath his arm.

Dropped off into a slumber from which he was awakened by hearing a step upon the ladder, and by the room becoming suddenly lit up by the rays of an approaching lantern. The lantern carried by the woman whom he deemed distraught.

Because he thought that, after all, she might not be the one who, in her mercy, had placed his weapon by his side, he pushed it beneath his body so that, if such were the case, it might be possible she would not observe it; then he leant over towards where she was advancing to him and regarded her fixedly, looking straight into her full, wandering eyes.

"So, madame," he said, "you visit me again. Is't on some errand of pity that you come--or to tell me my fate?"

For a moment she answered nothing--standing motionless before, and gazing down fixedly upon, him, though he perceived that those strange eyes were searching the floor as though in quest of something. Doubtless the sword! Then she said--

"What fate do you expect--at his hands?"

"God only knows! Yet, if you should know also, tell me."

Again she paused--the eyes still sweeping the floor, so that now he felt sure 'twas she who had restored his weapon to him--when a moment later she said, speaking in a harsh, emotionless voice--

"You are to be taken from here to Nancy, where the Duke is for the winter period. There you will be tried on various charges--attempted murder, abduction--he will swear she is his wife! You will be condemned. Nothing can save you; he has given in his adherence to the Duke now; he will obtain his desire--to see you broken on the wheel."

"So! A brave scheme! When is it to be put in practice?"

"When you are recovered."

"I am recovered now. See!" and he sat up on the rug stretched over the floor. "Observe! I am not so weak but that I can stand if I desire to do so. Will you tell the Vicomte there is no hurt to prevent me setting out at once to see this Duke, to make acquaintance with the wheel."

"My God!" the woman muttered, stirred out of herself. "Can this be real? Are you, in truth, so careless of fate?"

"Bah!" He replied. "What you prophesy is child's play--child's talk! The fellow whom you serve," and at the word "serve" she started, "dares no more haul me before the Duke than he dare haul me before the Duke's own master, Louis; the Duke's better in war, Turenne. 'Tis to them the Duke has himself to account. Babe's prattle, I tell you, woman! If I am to perish, it will be here in this house, down that well, by poison in my food or drink, or dagger-thrust through my heart when I lie sleeping. The wheel is an open death for all to see, set up at cross-roads or in market places--such things are not for De Bois-Vallée. Go, give him my service, and say so!"

"You wish me to repeat that?"

"Ay, repeat it. Repeat also this. That, though I lie here with a chain round my leg like an ox at the shambles; though I am here in his topmost garret a prisoner, I shall ere long be free again. I know it--feel it. Tell him, also, that Andrew Vause was never born to die at his hands--but, instead, to slay him--as I will! And, if he dares to come to this garret--fail not to tell him this!--and stand before me within the reach of this chain at my ankle, I will throttle the life out of him as I would out of a savage dog. Will never lose my hold till his tongue is a foot out of his mouth. Begone, and fail not to repeat my words!"

The woman said no more--yet cast one long searching glance at him as though wondering what manner of man this was--then went to the head of the steps, or ladder, leading from below, and brought back still another fresh jug of water and a platter, both of which she had left there on entering.

"Here is food and drink for you," she said. Then added: "There is no poison in it!"

"'Tis well. But, remember what I say. If your master compasses my death 'twill come that way--or in some other equally subtle. Yet it will not pass unknown. His cousin, Debrasques, knows him for the unscrupulous villain he is; knows I have come here. If he recovers, as every chironurgeon who saw him believed he would do, he will denounce this man. Therefore, I care not what he does. Now go."

"Debrasques!" the woman repeated, turning sharply on him. "Valentin Debrasques! He knows you and you know him? You say that?" and he saw that her astonishment was great.

"Ay, he is my friend!"

"Debrasques," she whispered. "Debrasques. And your friend!" Then she muttered to herself, though not so low but that he heard her. "And his enemy; as his kinswoman, Fleurange, was mine. 'Twill come. 'Twill surely come."

She stooped down now to lift up the empty water-pitcher and the platter and to put in their place those which she had just brought, and, having done this, again prepared to depart from the garret, walking slowly towards the ladder head. But as, once before, she had turned to cast that evil glance at him over her shoulder, so she turned again. Only her face was different now from what it had been on the occasion of her first visit--there was no evil, demoniacal smile upon her features nor devil's light glancing from her piercing eyes. Instead, a softer look shone from them, a look such as one might cast upon another with whom they were at peace.

"All men's fate is in their own hands," she whispered, as though half to him, half to herself, then turned swiftly and was gone, leaving him alone again with the darkness and his thoughts.

"Fore gad!" he said to himself, feeling strangely exhilarated by this woman's visit--he knew not why!--though, perhaps, 'twas her last words had cheered him thus! "I do think the lady desires I should escape. Yet, if so, why in heaven's name not help me even more than she has done? My sword is useless while I am bound thus to this accursed floor; if my foot were free from that 'twould not be long ere once more the weapon was at his throat. Oh! De Bois-Vallée, the moment must arrive at last. It must! It must! It must!"

For something told him that this garret was not to be only one last step to his doom; he felt, he knew, as certainly as though an angel had spoken to him trumpet-tongued, that the wheel at Nancy would never be his fate. It was not thus that Philip's shade was to be mulcted of its revenge!

Once more he slept, thanking God each time that he awoke for His mercy in permitting him to so forget his captivity for long periods at a time, and then, when he again returned to wakefulness, he put out his hand for the sparse meal the woman had brought him.

"Though I would," he murmured, "that I might find such another boon as I found in my good

sword. With my pistols, now, and they well charged, I could do much when they come for me--if they ever come--could slay one or two more ere the chain should be taken from my leg and I dragged forth--not to the Duke of whom she speaks--that is impossible!--but to some ignoble death."

He did not find his pistols; yet, even as he muttered those last words, his hand touched something that was not there before, something which caused him to utter so loud an exclamation that, a second after he had done so, he could have cursed himself for his folly in making a noise which might have been heard by anyone happening to be below the garret.

He had found that which was worth to him a thousand pistols fully charged and primed! He had found something which would do more than ever they could have done! Would give him his liberty from this garret; enable him to once more search the lower part of the mansion--to once more make a bold bid for escape.

His hand had touched a file!

"Heaven bless her!" he muttered. "Mad or sane, Heaven bless her! For this is no trap, no *guet-apens*, no lure to set me loose from where I am, only to plunge me into a state worse than my present; I shall be free and out of this house with Marion Wyatt ere many hours are passed. Free--since she, this heaven-sent friend, will doubtless aid me--will, it may be, set open the door which leads to that freedom. She must have placed this file here when she changed the food and water; therefore, again I say, Heaven bless her. Even though it may be but a portion of a deep-laid snare, 'tis a good portion. It gives me one more chance."

Wasting no further time in thought or meditation, he set to work to obtain his, now near, release. Set to work to--as silently as might be--file through the shackle-bolt that encircled his ankle. Worked hard at it, with the sweat dropping from his face as he bent over his foot in a terribly cramped position; yet never faltered, and only stopped to change sometimes his hands.

Worked hard in the dark, paying no heed to anything but that into which he had now thrown his whole heart and soul; worked until, at last, the chain was off his leg and he was free. Free to stand up, to hook on his sword once more to his belt, to make his way from out that prison. To find and save Marion Wyatt and himself, or perish in the attempt.

As he did thus stand up and feel his feet once more unbound, and moved towards where the ladder-head was--avoiding, for sure, the deadly shaft so near at hand--a woman who, unknown to him, had been crouching for the last two hours on that ladder in the darkness, rose and went swiftly away from it towards the room to which Marion Wyatt had been taken back after the fight below.

A woman who had sat crouched upon that ladder for so long, listening eagerly to the harsh grating of the file, and who, as she listened, had held her breath and stared with wild eyes into the darkness all around.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A TRAPPED WOLF

His first idea was to remove his boots, which had been on his feet when he recovered consciousness and had remained there since; but, after a moment's reflection, he decided to still keep them on. It was impossible, he thought, that he could quit the house without another encounter taking place; therefore, it was best to be booted. Also, if he did by good fortune so quit it, and could get well outside, they would be necessary, since otherwise he could scarcely reach Remiremont, not to consider Plombières.

Then, having decided this, he made his way at once to the room where he had previously found Marion Wyatt, and tapped lightly on the door.

It was opened--to his astonishment--not by her, but by the woman he deemed mad!

"So," she said, "you are free." Then laughed under her breath, and as low as she had spoken--laughed a weird, witchlike laugh. Adding a second later: "So far!"

"So far at present, thanks be to God and to you," and as he spoke he touched her hand with his--noticing, however, even as he did so, that she drew back shuddering from the touch. "Now, where is the lady?"

"Here!" whereon Marion Wyatt came through the hangings that fell before the square embrasure in front of the window.

If it were possible that she could have been whiter, more ghastly pale than when he had first seen her, she was so now; her face being absolutely devoid of colour. Yet it seemed almost as if some tinge came to it as, swiftly, she advanced across the room to him, while, grasping both hands, she whispered:

"You are free again. Free! Oh God in His mercy be thanked. Yet--yet--I know--she, Clemence, said it should be so," and she gazed at the fateful woman standing by. "It is heaven's grace that has turned her heart to us!"

That woman's eyes, deep, mysterious, unfathomable as ever--puzzling Andrew as they had done before; irritating him, almost, in his desire to know what lay behind them and what thoughts they concealed--blazed forth from their sombre depths; yet she answered nothing. Only, standing there before them, her bosom heaved, her mouth became drawn downwards with some spasm that seemed to express the deepest misery, and a gust of breath that was more than a sigh came from her lips.

"It is by heaven's grace," Andrew re-echoed. "Yet, much as we owe her, now is no fitting time to pay our thanks." Then, turning to her whom Marion had called Clemence, he said:

"Madame, being, so far free, enable us, I beseech you in your goodness, to finish our task. Put us in the way to quit this accursed house, without bloodshed if possible, yet--no matter how--to quit it."

She repeated the words, "this accursed house," twice, letting her left hand fall heavily to her side as she spoke; then a moment later she quivered, drew herself up, and said: "It shall be so, if possible. I will go down and unbar the door. Yet you say 'without bloodshed.' What"--and now she stood so tall and erect that, almost, her height equalled that of the great man before her--"What are you then in this accursed house for? Why hangs that once more upon your thigh?" and she pointed to the long scabbard of his sword. "Are you not come here from your own land to shed his, Camille De Bois-Vallée's, blood?"

"To shed it--yes!" Andrew replied, wondering why his words came hoarse and raucous from his throat; "yet not to-night, if it may be prevented. Nor in his own house; on his own hearth! But, afterwards, in fair open fight; to right a deep wrong to one unable to right himself."

"I go," she said, "to open the door, if may be. Follow me later--in five minutes hence. Yet--yet remember; I deem it a vow, a sacred pledge: you slay him when the time comes. Swear that, or I do no more."

And all amazed, almost appalled, Andrew muttered: "When the time comes. I have said it."

An instant later she was gone, had passed through the door into the darkness of the house, gliding out as some dark spectre might have glided from light to shadow, and those two were alone.

"In five minutes, she said," Andrew whispered in Marion's ear. "In five minutes. Yet, what means it? Is she in truth mad? I thought she loved him; had loved his father. Was his faithful slave and worshipped him. Yet, now, she inclines to us."

From the white lips of the woman by his side there came the answer, the words falling quick and rapid from those lips; she knowing how few were the moments in which to tell the meaning of Clemence's manner.

"It was so," she answered, "once. She loved him, worshipped him, until--until--her madness growing on her, she began to hate him. For he, in his turn, loved and worshipped the memory of his mother--it is the one pure thing remaining to him--his love for me was never pure, was engendered in desire; is turned now to hate and fear of my escape. And his love for that mother and that memory for her whom Clemence hates, even though she has long lain in her grave, explains all. Because she hates the woman who was his mother, also she now hates him. Hopes, prays, you will kill him. Said to me to-night that, when he lies dead below from your thrust, she will stamp upon the features that are so like what hers were."

As she told him thus rapidly the meaning of the woman's frenzy, and as she concluded her story, she saw Andrew's face change. Saw, too, a stare come into his eyes; his attitude denoting that of one who listened intently.

"You hear?" he asked.

"What?"

Yet, even as she spoke, she heard, too. Heard a distant hum--a something indefinite on the night air--a murmur that, all intangible as it was at present, resolved itself in another moment into something else that she understood. It was the hum of human voices--the voices of a great crowd somewhere in the vicinity--of a crowd that drew nearer and nearer every moment.

"You hear--you understand?" he asked, grasping her arm.

"God help me! No. What is it?"

"As I hope, as I think, a rescue. It may be that those in this neighbourhood have risen against him at last; that our path to safety is open. Come, Marion, if 'tis as I believe, our freedom is at hand, should we be able to reach them. Yet, be sure, he will bar our exit--and their entrance; we--I--shall have to fight our way out. Come." And swift as lightning his arm was round her waist, while he prepared to lift her to his shoulder, knowing that, ere long, all in the house would hear those sounds--if they had not done so already; would be aroused. Also, he knew--divined in a moment--that their way out would be barred. And, recognizing this, his sword leapt from its scabbard, drawn forth by his right hand.

"Come," he said again. "We must descend. Be brave and fear nothing. I shall be with you always. We escape together, or--or stay here together."

Then, bearing her on his shoulder, he went towards the door.

Yet, ere he reached it, it was flung wide open; once more Clemence stood before them.

"All hope is gone--for you--for all--for him," she said, her lips flecked with foam, her eyes staring with the madness of despair and frenzy, her grey-streaked black hair hanging down below her shoulders. "Undone! Undone! Undone!"

"What mean you?" Andrew asked. "The house is besieged, yet one may struggle out of it. May yet escape. Is the door open?"

"None can escape," she almost shrieked. "It is surrounded. The Lorrainers are here, outside. They swear to burn him in his den; I have heard them--seen the glint of their weapons--they swear to shoot down all who rush forth. The death of Laurent has maddened them."

"The death of Laurent! My God! Is he dead?"

"He is dead. He slew him--he--he--De Bois-Vallée: He found him there watching for you--he never returned home without visiting the chasm to see if all was safe--and ran him through, then hurled his body to the courtyard below. And they have learnt he did it--there was another one who knew the work you and Laurent were upon--they are here. God none can escape. There are more than a hundred of them. See!"

As she spoke, she rushed through the embrasure and flung open the diamond-paned window.

"See," she said again, drawing Andrew to the window. "They are there below. You can perceive their firelocks gleam in the moonlight from here."

Peering forth, glancing out into the night, he saw beneath the rays of the watery moon, as the light breeze blew the clouds from under it, that what the woman said was true. He could observe the beams glancing on musket barrels and other arms--almost, he thought, that sometimes they glistened on upturned eyes!--could perceive men lurking all round the fringe of the copse which bordered the enormous flagged court in front of the mansion.

Moreover, he knew soon enough that they, too, were seen by the midnight foe--also that that foe was ruthless. As the light of the lamp streamed out into the darkness, it being no more veiled by the heavy curtains of the embrasure within, it served to show the besiegers those two faces at the window. An instant later there was the crack of musketry and three balls hurtled against the stone frame, splintering it, and cutting each of their faces with those splinters.

"Come away," Andrew said, dragging her back and noticing that one of the fragments had struck her cheek, from which the blood began to trickle. "Come away. All in this house are deemed enemies. How should they know there is one here who hates its owner as much as they do."

"How should they know that there are *two*?" the woman muttered hoarsely in reply. Then she added: "Doubtless, they deem you dead. Since he slew Laurent they would not think he would spare you."

Her words caused Andrew to start. It was true; they must deem him dead! His own instructions had been that, if he came not back in three days, they were to consider him as fallen--murdered--and with Laurent slain they could suppose nothing else. All in that house were enemies, therefore, since few knew of Marion's existence; all to be exterminated as such.

"There must be a truce to our feud for a time at least," he muttered beneath his moustache, while he smiled grimly; "a truce for a time. No need for De Bois-Vallée and me to be fighting with one another, like rats in a pit, while the dogs are outside ready to tear us to pieces. No need for that! Come," he said, addressing the two women. "Come. We must descend. There is no way out here."

Then, all together, they left the room and, making their way to the head of the stairs, looked down over it into the hall below.

And in a moment he knew--as the women knew, too, that neither was there any exit there.

Below, in that hall, were mustered De Bois-Vallée and some men--Beaujos being absent. Upon the huge table which had stood for unnumbered years within it, were laid all the firearms which they could hastily gather together; muskets and musketoons, fuzils and fuzees, pistols and petronels. Also other arms, halberds, axes, swords--they meant to make a stand for it!

As for De Bois-Vallée himself--his look appalled the women, if not Andrew, as they gazed down on him. His face was white--was it with fear or rage!--as he bent over the table, and, selecting two carbines, loaded them carefully; upon it, as he turned towards the great porte, outside which the murmurs had now increased to a roar, accompanied by heavy knocks and thumps--there was the grin of a devil at bay. Then, suddenly, they saw him point to a spot away down one of the passages leading out of the hall, saw the man Brach disappear, and, a moment or two later, come back, bearing in his arms a long ladder which he placed against the door. While, casting his eyes up over that door, Andrew saw that, above it, was a little window unnoticed hitherto by him--a window a foot square, but covered inside with a close-fitting shutter. And, since a few moments later he saw there was no glass to it, he judged that it was used only to admit air.

As he watched thus the trapped man in his own house, he saw him slowly mount half-way up that ladder, so that, at last, the top of his head was almost level with the lower part of the shutter, and take the carbines from his servitor's hands--then saw him suddenly stop in his upward progress. Stop, clinging to the ladder posts, his face half-turned round to those in the hall, the grin upon that face horribly intensified. For, even as he had thus half-mounted it, the beatings on the door against which the ladder leant had been redoubled.

"Surely," whispered Andrew, "they are using some tree-trunk as battering ram"--and it seemed as if the next moment must see that door fall in from the tremendous blows administered from the outside.

Next, a babel of voices and a shouting arose.

"Is the wolf there?" one called, while even as he did so another answered: "Be very sure he is"; and others were heard shouting: "Bring him forth. Give him to us, and we spare the house. Otherwise all are doomed."

And again the beatings and the buffetings were renewed, while now a part of the door a few feet from the ground was burst in, and through it there protruded the jagged edge of a hastily-chopped-down tree.

Andrew had guessed aright! They were using roughly-improvised battering rams!

For a moment the hunted wretch--the man caught like a rat in a trap--glared round his hall; even in the dim light and gloom Andrew could see his tongue rolling over his lips as though to moisten their feverish burning, then, urged by God knows what desperation--the desperation perhaps of despair, perhaps of tigerish rage and ferocity!--he leapt up the last remaining rungs of the ladder, carrying the carbines in his hand.

Leapt up, as the wild cat leaps up the branches of forest trees, until he was level with the little shutter, flung it open with one hand, and, in an instant, had discharged both carbines into the midst of whatever crowd might be without.

And he shrieked:

"Hounds, *bélistres*, scum, he is here!" then flung the shutter to again and descended the ladder swiftly.

'Twas well that he did so; 'twas well he wasted no time. Ere he had reached the hall's stone floor that shutter fell in splinters after him, shattered by a score of bullets from without; also at this moment the upper part of the door was beaten in amidst terrible roars and howls and curses from the attackers. Fortunately for those in that hall, there were still some seven feet of the lower part left standing to protect them from the besiegers' shot.

"Save yourselves," cried De Bois-Vallée to his men. "Save yourselves. They may spare you. Me they will never spare. I must find a way."

And, flinging the lamp upon the flames of the fire--so that, after one brief moment of explosive brightness, the hall became all dark but for the remaining flames which glistened amidst the gloom like fiery eyes--he and all below were instantly obscured from the sight of those above.

NEARER AND NEARER

"How can he escape?" Andrew whispered in Marion's ear. "The house is surrounded. There is no other outlet but the great door. Or do you know of aught?"

Yet, as he asked the girl that question, he told himself it was impossible there could be any such outlet known to her. Had there been she would have apprized him of it on the night when they made their first attempt to fly; would never have let the risk be encountered of endeavouring to unbar the great door while all round the hall lay the sleeping servants, ready to spring out on them at the first alarm. The question was useless!

It was answered, however, by a sound that caused him to start and look round--a sound that was, indeed, a laugh; yet one of so strange and sinister a nature that he almost shuddered as he heard it.

It came from the woman, Clemence. Then she spoke, while as she did so her great eyes gleamed and sparkled in so wild a manner that he imagined she had now become entirely demented.

"There is a way out," she said, "but none know it except he. Not even I--though often enough I tried to learn it from his father; have even in later days tried to make him tell it to me. Yet neither ever would! The wolves of Lorraine have expected to-night's work for generations--they have kept the secret to themselves."

"Sdeath!" exclaimed Andrew, though the oath he used was stronger than this, "but he shall share his secret with us to-night. Where he goes forth we three go also--or he goes not at all. Quick, let us get near and stay near him. Ha! see, he comes this way. Mounts the stairs. Observe--stand by. We must keep him in sight."

It was as he had said. De Bois-Vallée was creeping up the stairs now--they could see a dark form against the balustrades coming up and up and up--once the dying embers of the fire in the hall below flickered into a fresh blaze--they could see, too, that he had discarded his pistols and carried in his hand his bare sword. Even saw the steel scintillating now and again in the faint glow sent up while he mounted.

Watching him coming towards them and, for certain, never dreaming of whom he would encounter above, it seemed to those three as though some hunted wild beast was fleeing for its life. Crawling up with one hand on the balustrade, the other grasping his weapon, they observed his bright red hair--for he was wigless--as he mounted. Watched, and saw also the terror-stricken glances he flung over his shoulder as, reaching the first landing, he knew that he could be seen over the top of the shattered door by those who might be standing in, or near, the doorway.

And that he was seen they learnt at once; there came two spits of flame from firelocks discharged outside, and, through the rent space, the sharp crack of the weapons; then, next, the splinters flying from two of the balustrade posts. And they saw the savage grin of hate and fury on his face--saw his white teeth gleam like a hunted wolf's, as he, himself the Wolf of Lorraine, ran round the landing and began to mount the next flight. The flight that would bring him to where they were!

From outside, too, they could hear the shouts of the avengers; hear harsh calls and cries in both the French and German tongues, derisive laughter, voices that called out, "the wolf is trapped! He can never escape! Fire not at him, let him find death in his own house of evil!" while, above all, the soft, silvery voice of a boy sang the strain, "*Lorraine, Lorraine, ma douce patrie.*"

He turned once more--his foot on the first stair, a look of horror in his eyes as that sweet voice arose, turned and glared back again to the ruined door whence the sound entered. It almost seemed to those so close above him as though they heard him groan.

"Kill him," Clemence hissed in Andrew's ear. "Dead!"

Then, even as she spoke, the man fleeing from below sprang up the stairs that led to where they were, and so came full upon them.

Upon Clemence, regarding him with sparkling eyes, and with, on her face, a hideous smile; upon Marion Wyatt a little behind her.

Upon Andrew Vause standing also regarding him, his arms folded, but in his right hand his sword!

He reeled back gasping, astonished, perhaps terrified at the sight of those three figures standing at the top of the stairs.

Staggered back, though as he did so he shifted the sword he carried, so that he no longer held

it by the blade in his left hand, but grasped its handle with his right. Yet, even as he thus reeled, and with even, as they observed by the light of the moon now streaming in through an upper window, the look upon his face of a hunted creature at bay doubly intensified, so, too, they saw the bewilderment he experienced at finding them there together.

"You are free!" He hissed; "and you, too!" while, as he spoke, he lifted his left arm and pointed with his forefinger up the few steps that separated him from them. "Free! No need to ask how. By her--the traitress!"

As he spoke he leapt up the remaining stairs, and, in the eyes of all of them there flashed a bright ray as though of phosphorus--a ray that seemed to be met and entwined with another. Then, a hiss of steel grating against steel and a clang, and the sword he had held a moment before in his hand, and had thrust out with murderous intent against the mad woman, slid down the steps hilt first.

"Not yet," said Andrew, lowering now his own point. "This is no time for murder nor--for execution. That comes later. Pick up your blade, Monsieur De Bois-Vallée, and sheathe it. Otherwise I take it away from you. There is something else to be done, ere you use it again--against me."

"Curse you! What?" yet as he spoke he obeyed Andrew, in so far that he reclaimed his fallen weapon. Also, as he did so--as he picked up the sword--he mounted the stairs one step higher.

"This; listen. There is a secret exit known to you from this doomed house--nay, deny it not, I know full well 'tis so--by that exit you are about to escape. So be it. 'Tis no intention of mine to prevent you. Only----"

"Only?" repeated De Bois-Vallée in a whisper. "Only?"

"You take us with you. Then, when we are outside, free from these howling Lorrainers who justly seek your life, you shall use that sword--against me. At once you shall use it. But, now, be quick, waste no time. Hark, see, look over, they are almost in your hall. There is, I say, no time to waste."

It was true! There was no time to waste! He, De Bois-Vallée, could see that as well as Andrew; glancing down through the rude-carved mediæval balustrades, he recognized the swift impending doom of his house.

For the door was almost down now--the shouts of the Lorrainers would have told that if nothing else had done so. Also the beating of axes and sledges on it, the clatter of countless feet outside on the stones, the glare of lights from torches and flambeaux that sent gleams through the windows, and winked and trembled on the carved beams of the stairs, and the armour and arms with which the ancient hall was hung, and lit up all their faces above.

Also, still, above all the noise outside, above the yells and execrations and curses of the Lorrainers, above their shouts and cries, and the firing of their weapons over the broken-down door into dark upper corners, there rose the sweet, clear voice of the boy singing, "*Lorraine, Lorraine, ma douce patrie.*"

"You hear, you see!" Andrew said. "The end of you and of your vile house is at hand. All escape below is long since past. Lead us to the secret exit you know of."

He stood there before them; before the woman he had deeply wronged, though, as yet, Andrew knew not how; before the mad woman whose love had turned to gall and hate and treachery; before that huge avenger in whom he saw, and, seeing, recognized his doom. Stood before them, a shadow almost, in the fitful light which illuminated the darkness, as they, too, stood shadows before him.

"Quick," Andrew exclaimed again. "Quick. Or we all die together in this house. Only--you first. If you tarry longer--another moment--while I count ten--I fling you over to those men below," and as he spoke he advanced towards De Bois-Vallée.

Unheeding his actions, in truth not valuing these actions sufficiently to oppose them, his attention too much occupied by the awful destruction going on below, Andrew had let the villain surmount the topmost stair--gradually, and step by step--there being but three of them--so that now he stood on a level with the others. And in his hand was his sword.

Then, in answer, he spoke, while still his form was indistinct to them and he loomed a blurred figure near them.

"There is," he said, "no exit to this house. All here are doomed, all must die----"

"You lie," Clemence hissed, "you lie. Your father knew of one, you know it too."

"Quick," again said Andrew, "trifle no longer." And now he advanced to him, his own sword raised level with the other's breast. "Lead us to it, or this through you."

"Come then," the other said. "Come. Yet," he continued, muttering to himself, as though he

meant them not to hear the savage words which he could not repress in his hate, "yet, if I had my way as I hoped to have had it, you should all have perished. All. All."

In truth, neither Andrew nor Marion Wyatt did hear these words, while if Clemence caught them she gave no sign. But still those marvellous eyes shone and sparkled, and the full liquid orbs never ceased their endeavour to pierce the darkness. Why did she watch him so?

But, in spite of Andrew not having caught his mutterings, he knew full well that this acquiescence might be a ruse of his enemy to take him unawares, wherefore he bent his face nearer to him--for, now (so great were the roars and the thunderings below) ordinary tones were of no avail--and said:

"Go first and turn not. If you do, I will run you through without hesitation. Also, sheathe your sword. Do as I say. Obey me."

He was obeyed; through the darkness he saw the other act as he commanded. Then, without another word, he again gave De Bois-Vallée the signal to go forwards. And, touching both the women by his side, he indicated that they too should follow the owner of the soon-to-be-destroyed house.

His arms stretched out in front of him as though groping his way, as indeed he was, De Bois-Vallée moved on now, one hand sometimes upon the rail that protected the uppermost landing from the well of the house, the other against the wall of the rooms opening from that landing. And, so, they reached at last the arched doorway that led to the steps by which the ascent to the garret was made.

"How escape thus?" asked Andrew, "there is no outlet there. This leads alone to the roof and to the oubliette. Beware, man, what you do! Your life is in my hands. Play me false and you lose it on the instant."

"The way is here," the other muttered, though loud enough for Andrew to hear him very well. "I know my own house."

"The way for all--not you alone?" and Andrew's voice sounded sinister and threatening to the other.

"Ay, for all."

Even as he spoke there came an increased din from below, and, though none spoke to the other, all knew, or imagined, what had happened.

The door was down--the besiegers in the house!

Soon--who could doubt it?--what else was there for those men of vengeance to do?--it would be in flames! Nothing could save it!

Or only one thing. The yielding up of De Bois-Vallée to their ire.

"Stop," he said, addressing him, "stop. You know what will, what must, happen next. It can be but one thing, the destruction of your house. Retrace your steps if you choose, defend the house singly if you desire--since I do believe that they come partly to rescue me, expect from me no help--give yourself up to them. Thereby the flames may be avoided. And--and--I grant you that respite."

For answer, the other snarled at him--Andrew could plainly see that he did so in the added light which now streamed up from the hall, illuminating all the balconies and corridors.

Then he spoke.

"It may be that they come to save you. Yet there can be few to whom you are known. Therefore, being here, they deem you my friend--or will when they see you."

"Your friend!" the tone contemptuous and full of loathing as Andrew answered him.

"Ay. If you doubt it--and since you are so bold and brave a man--show yourself to them and see."

For a moment, stung by the taunt of even such as he, Andrew was disposed to take him at his word. To descend towards those rioters, to thrust his head over the balcony. To call to them and say who he was and what he did in the house.

Another moment's reflection, and he decided against that resolve.

"Nay," he said, "nay. They may not know me--there are but one or two who have ever seen my face--a dozen bullets in my body would reward me for my pains and foolhardiness. Also, vagabond, you would be alone with the women. Even though I returned in safety it would be to find them dead at your hands--and you gone! Lead on, show us the way. We go together."

And, touching him none too gently, he urged him forward.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ESCAPE

Andrew shortened his sword at this time, for, since he could not doubt that De Bois-Vallée intended treachery, he meant to slay him at the first moment that treachery became apparent; meant to use the sword as a dagger and, striking down swiftly under the other's left shoulder, end him. That there should be no doubt of his intention, and because his action might not be perceptible in the obscurity around them, he whispered in De Bois-Vallée's ear a word to that effect. Took, too, his hand and placed it against his own where it grasped the blade low down, and ran that hand along it till it touched the point.

"He must know full well now," thought Andrew to himself, "what awaits him if he plays me false."

Then, as the other withdrew his own hand from the blade, they went on again.

By this time they were at the foot of the steps leading up to the garret; the garret where Andrew had lain a prisoner for so many days.

Behind him, encouraged now and again by a whispered word, and, in Marion Wyatt's case, by a gentle touch or so from his great hand, the women came--she next to him, Clemence behind.

As for the former, it seemed that the time had come when she could persevere no more. Her face was almost invisible, but her actions and her drooping attitude showed Andrew, as he peered through the darkness at her, that she could struggle little longer. Already she leant half-fainting, half in a stupor, on the woman, Clemence--it seemed that there was scarce any life or strength left in her.

"Courage, courage!" He whispered to the girl. "Courage. He must know some way out--there must be some secret doorway here leading to hidden stairs behind. Courage, I say. Lean on me. See, he mounts the stairs--once there he shows us the way, or dies."

But Marion could not answer now--her breath came in terrible gasps from her, she seemed choking, while at the same time almost incapable of further motion, although still she forced one foot after the other as, supported by Clemence, they stood at the bottom of the garret ladder. As for her, Clemence, she appeared to have superhuman strength; her arms around the tottering woman she helped her to mount those steps up which all went following De Bois-Vallée, whose almost indistinct figure crept forward in front of them. And now they stood within the garret itself, when Andrew, putting out his hand, laid it on the other man's shoulder.

"Go not so fast," he whispered in his ear. "The darkness is intense. We must not lose you. And," tightening his grasp on De Bois-Vallée's sleeve, "direct not your steps this way. The oubliette is here. Is it to that you lead us?"

From the man whom his hand clutched there came no word, only Andrew heard him catch his breath suddenly with a hoarse gasp; from the woman behind it seemed to him as though there came once more that low, gurgling laugh he had before remarked. Then he heard her whisper in his ear. "'Tis that--'tis that! Beware of---"

Her words were drowned by another roar from below--something fresh had occurred. What was it?

Their ears told them--sight was unnecessary, though that too aided them ere long.

They could hear the trampling of the men beneath, hear huge weighty things being thrown down in the hall, which fell with a sound resembling the fall of tons of lead, and they knew--Andrew and Clemence--perhaps, too, De Bois-Vallée--that they were trees being brought in and cast on the hall as fuel; they heard orders being given. Orders for powder-flasks and horns to be ignited beneath kindlings--another order that none should rush up the stairs to seek for the wolf.

"It is enough that he is here," a fierce, strident voice cried. "We know it. We will burn him in his hole as we burnt the bear last year. Pray God we see him rush out in flames as Bruin rushed."

And, even above the voice, pealed that of the boy singing:

"Lorraine, Lorraine, ma douce patrie."

From Marion there came at this added horror a shriek, long, wailing, piteous to hear, the shriek of one in mortal dread; Andrew's ears caught once again a hoarse whisper from Clemence, and the words, "this is death. So best!" In his grasp he felt the man whom he held shaking with terror, and then, suddenly, as he turned to speak another word of encouragement to Marion, he knew that De Bois-Vallée had escaped him Either in his terror, or in the quickly acquired knowledge that, as Andrew so turned, the grasp relaxed somewhat, he shook himself free.

He was gone! Escaped! There was nothing before Andrew but empty darkness! His sword told him that, as he plunged it furiously into the empty space in all directions, except where the women were.

"He has escaped," he whispered to Clemente. "Escaped, and left us here. Has reached the exit, and left us to die."

"Escaped?" she screamed. "Escaped? How? How? How?"

Yet in another moment it seemed as if her rage at this was swallowed up by some new idea.

"If he is gone," she said, "why let them destroy the house? And--surely if they know women are in it--they will spare us. She," and the woman cast her eyes upon the almost insensible form of Marion, "cannot descend to them. I will go myself."

"Nay, nay," said Andrew, "it will be useless. They will not believe. Will think 'tis but a ruse to save him and his house. 'Twill not avail."

Also he remembered, though he could not say so to her, that Jean and Laurent had hinted, even if they had not said so in as many words, that this woman was as unpopular in all the country round as the owner of Bois-le-Vaux himself, was regarded as an evil creature of his. What likelihood, therefore, that they would desist from glutting the passions now aroused in their breasts, or from their determination to destroy the house, should she show herself?

"I will come with you," he said a moment later, seeing that nothing could turn her from this newly arrived at determination. "There may be none who know me, and can thereby stay their comrades' hands, but, at least, one glance will show that I am not he. There is no resemblance betwixt us. We will go together."

"No! no! no!" she said, stopping in the descent she had already commenced on the stairs. "Man! are you mad? If there are none who know you they will deem, must deem, you his friend, accomplice. And," she went on, almost imperiously, "I bid you stay--for her sake," pointing to Marion as she spoke. "If a bullet find your heart or brain, what of her? She will be burnt to a cinder in this house."

It was true! He must not leave her; never leave her now. Death had threatened them, the end was very near--another hour and the mansion would be in flames; his place was by her side. Either in life or death! Henceforth, come what might--safety or destruction--they must find it together.

Even as he recognized that this was so, Clemence was gone, had descended the upper flight of stairs, was about to descend the lower. And as he, peering over once more, looked down, he knew the awful risk to which the woman had exposed herself.

Up from the hall floor, as they saw her above, came a shout of many voices. In an instant the crack of half a dozen muskets came, too, also shrieks and ribald cries.

"The witch, Clemence. The hell-cat. The beldam. His mother's rival. The curse of all her days. At her! At her! Tear her to pieces."

"Nay!" roared out that harsh, strident voice he had heard before. "Nay. Not so. And come you back," its owner cried to three others who had already begun to rush up the stairs, as though to seize on her. "Come back, I say. Nor fire on her more. There is a better way. He is here and she is with him. Let them burn together!"

The shots had missed her--every one!--though Andrew, watching, had seen her stagger back as they struck the stairs and the wall around her; now she turned and retraced her steps to where he stood.

"Are you wounded?" he gasped when she had rejoined him, noticing that her face was bloodless, white as that of a corpse--that the great pendulous lips--in years gone by, doubtless, so full and ruddy--shook and trembled.

"No," she said, "unharméd. Yet doomed. Doomed! Still, there is a chance. If I go back to them, fling my body from this landing to the stone floor below, they may cease."

"Are you also mad?" he asked hoarsely; "Are you mad? You think I shall permit that?"

"'Tis the only way to stop them."

"Bah!" Andrew exclaimed. "Nothing will stop them. You forget. They know he is here. Also they cannot know of any secret escape--even though there be one."

Her hands fell in despair by her side, her eyes rolled piteously, she recognized that it was as he had said. It was the wolf they sought first and chiefly--her next.

"We are lost!" she muttered. "Lost! Lost!"

It was impossible to doubt that such was the case.

Looking over once more, down into that great well beneath them, he saw that the floor was piled the height of a man's head with saplings and trees, both green and dry, and with kindlings formed from wrenched-down tapestry, broken chairs and stools and other things, chopped up small; even the great table itself was being hacked into firewood. All hope was gone!

Likewise, he saw three men standing close together, the palms of two of them placed side by side, so as to form a bowl, while the third emptied all their powder-horns into those hands; after which they placed the heap beneath the accumulated fuel. No need to doubt that the fire would blaze fiercely! Then one strode forward--the man with the great raucous voice--and said some words of gloating, while, as he did so, he bent his knees and stooped down, and peered into the mass collected together, and nodded approbation of the heap of powder beneath. Then rose and stood back some yards and drew a great pistol from his belt.

Drew it, gave one look to the priming and his flint-fired, and ignited the heap. And as the powder leapt up a mass of green and yellow flames, as the kindlings and the logs caught, even as the report rang through the house of the De Bois-Vallées, so, too, there rang cheer after cheer, howl after howl, as though hell itself had let loose all its fiends. Also they danced and capered round and round that pyre, Andrew seeing two men clasp hands and waists and execute a grim fantastic dance about the hall! They stirred, too, with pikes and halberds wrenched from off the walls, the logs; some even thrust the swords they carried into the flames to make the fire burn more fiercely. Then, all stood away from the great open doorway, from which the door had long since been torn, so that the breeze of morning--for the day was nigh at hand--might blow in and fan those flames. The great door itself as well was lifted up upon their shoulders, carried in, and flung upon them.

"To the leads! To the leads!" Clemence muttered. "To the leads. Better die there than here, as we must if we stay longer. See! See!" and she pointed down. "The lower stairs are on fire; already the way--that way--is cut off. We are trapped. To the leads."

"Ay," said Andrew, "to the leads. After that--death, unless some portions of the house stand firm. How is it with her?"

"She is insensible--not dead. Not yet."

"Not yet, I pray God. Give her to me. Come--if we can find the opening to the roof the air may revive her." Whereon, stooping down, he lifted the girl once more to his shoulder.

267

"Go carefully," he said to Clemence, "carefully--beware the oubliette. For God's sake, avoid that."

Thus they returned to the garret, groping their way in the dense blackness.

"Give me your hand," she answered, putting out her own and finding his. "I have been here in the dark before, and know where the exit is. Now come."

And, following her, with his burden clasped to his breast with one arm, he let her guide him slowly and step by step--each one made sure of ere another was taken--through the darkness and the ever-increasing atmosphere of suffocation, towards where stood the ladder leading to the roof.

And so, feeling their way inch by inch, Clemence first, with Andrew following, he bearing Marion in his arms, and having at the same time to keep touch with the former and also to carry his drawn sword--since he knew not if, even now, De Bois-Vallée might not be lurking somewhere close by in that dark garret, ready to thrust his own weapon through him, or, indeed, through all of them--they reached shortly the ladder that led to the roof. And, then, a few moments more and they had emerged on to the leads.

The rain, that had been falling at intervals (though sometimes it had been clear moonlight) since the wintry sun had set amidst a bank of deep blood-coloured clouds, backed up and surrounded by still deeper leaden ones, had ceased now--up from the south-west, as they gained the roof, there blew a soft, warm breeze that was as the breath of heaven to them after the reeking interior from which they had escaped. Yet--escaped for how long, Andrew and Clemence wondered inwardly? For how long? How long would it be ere that portion of the house on which they stood might be alight, and, thus destroyed, engulf them below? Below, where it was easy enough to see that already the house was in flames--and whence there reached their nostrils the

fumes of smoke. Already, too, by gazing over the parapet Andrew could see the red tongues of fire shooting out from windows, and volumes of dun-coloured smoke emerging. Could hear, also, those windows bursting and the sound of rent glass as it fell on the stones of the courtyard.

Heard, too, and saw other things ere an hour had elapsed--an hour in which Clemence had sat on the ladder giving to the roof, with Marion lying in her arms. For, at the end of that hour, a terrible roar and rending sound reached his ears from beneath, and, looking once more over the parapet, he saw the left side of the house rent open; knew that a portion of one of the wings had fallen inwards. The north wing, and that the one which joined the part of the house above which they all were.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE LAST CHANCE

Another hour passed--the dawn was close at hand--and the ruin of the greater part of the fabric was almost accomplished. For that was what Andrew perceived now, as still he kept his vigil above and listened still to the cries of those below, who were all by this time outside in the courtyard and the fringe of the copse, revelling in their handiwork and the accomplishment of their long-thirsted-for vengeance.

Beneath him the fire still raged and burned, though by God's mercy it had even now left untouched that side of the building on which they were--the side that was nearest to the slope of the mountain from which he had originally crossed: untouched at least at present! Therefore, he knew that for some time they were safe; below where they stood there was still the floor of more or less solid masonry, then the other floor from which they had escaped--the one that was beneath the leads on which they were. In the front, also, the fire had not yet got a hold, it was on the two sides that its fury seemed to have been most expended. Of them, the north wing had already fallen in, as has been said; the south one looked as though it would do so at any moment. And, gazing at the gap made by that destroyed on the other side, Andrew could not but shudder, for had it so happened that they had been there when it gave way, had it so happened that the way to the leads had lain through the north wing, they would have gone with it in its fall, have all been lying crushed to death beneath the stonework and woodwork which had been hurled into the great hall.

Yet, even as he looked across the gap left by that fallen wing, as he peered down into the now blocked-up hall, so blocked up, indeed, that the *débris* of the north side rose almost level with the top floors of the sides still standing, he saw that here was something which would prevent the total annihilation of the house, and deprive the Lorrainers of their vengeance in its entirety; would also prevent the whole of the building from being razed to the ground.

Something, too, that would, perhaps, save those who were upon the roof, render it unlikely that that roof should sink beneath them, and, in so sinking, carry them with it to destruction.

He saw that, as the northern side had crashed in, the lower, or stone, portion had fallen upon the mass of burning matter, and, thereby, had beaten out much of the fire, which now only smouldered beneath the masonry and wreckage of that lower portion, which, in its turn, had received above it the wooden part. The flames from below--even if not totally extinguished--could never, therefore, reach the woodwork above; it was as likely as not that, soon, they would be entirely pressed out by the weight. If, therefore, the foundations of that portion of the house over which they now stood were not injured, if that wing did not fall in, they were saved. The fire would die out, and, when it had done so, surely some means of descending to earth again could be found, even though there were now no stairs left.

"There is yet a chance for us," he said, going back to where Clemence was, and telling her briefly what he had observed, and what he deduced from that observation. "Still a chance--that is, if the Lorrainers are content with what they have done. Will they be, or will nothing satisfy them but the total destruction of the house? If so, they will set it alight again on the other sides. Then nothing can save us."

"They may be content," the woman answered, glancing up at him, "if they suppose that he is dead. Otherwise they will not. And more than one half of the house still stands secure. Therefore, they may think he is safe somewhere. They will begin again; they will never desist until he is slain."

"Our danger is not then over," Andrew said quietly. "It seems--if you guess aright--that we are

doomed. How is it now with her?" and he glanced down at Marion as she lay in the woman's arms.

"She is more peaceful. And she breathes easily. Yet, the shock has been too much for her. She will not live."

"You are sure of that?"

"I fear so."

"Therefore," said Andrew more to himself than to her, "my determination to kill him is greater than ever. Two lives now to demand expiation for, besides his other crimes." Then, turning to Clemence, and bending down to her, he asked: "What think you? Has he escaped? Oh! that I should have let him--let him go without me at his heels."

"I know not," she muttered, "yet, as I have said, there is some way out of this house. His father knew it--I have heard him speak of it--though he kept the secret well. But, even though he escapes you, he is a doomed man if he stays in this land. They have begun," and she waved her hand to the depths below, where still the Lorrainers could be heard calling to each other and--sometimes, it seemed--from the sounds which arose in the early morning air--gloating over the ruin they had wrought: "now there can be but one end. I know my own people."

"He will not escape me," Andrew replied. "As you know your own people, so I know myself. If I live through this night--this day which is now dawning--I will find him. And then his last chance is gone. I spared him once when he lay stretched at my feet--I saved his life--to-night I have let him trick me and so save himself. Well! 'tis the last. When next we stand face to face I slay him like some poisonous reptile."

While, as he spoke, he gazed down on Clemence, and saw her great starry eyes gleaming out at him through what was not, now, all the darkness of night.

And they had lived through it! For he had said truly--the dawn of another day was come--that night of horror had passed.

Far away to the east, away to the side of the slope from which he had crossed to the roof of this now ruined house, there was a light in the sky--dim at present, yet gradually becoming clearer, which told that the night was indeed over; also the tree-tops were beginning to be visible, other objects to stand out and be recognizable. And as Andrew on that roof gazed towards the coming day--wondering if, with it, would come also safety and escape; if the next night would find all or any of them alive--he knew that he, too, had become visible to those below. He heard a shout from the fringe of copse beyond the great courtyard, and, turning his eyes down, saw the danger which threatened him.

Observed the gleam of a dozen musketoons pointed his way, and, as he sprang back behind the buttress of an angle close to where the women were, saw their puffs of smoke and darts of flame, followed half a second after by the reports, and heard some of the bullets hurtle against that buttress while others sang through the air over the very spot he had just quitted.

In a moment he knew and understood!

"They take me for him," he said, turning to Clemence, who had half sprung from the ladder where she sat supporting Marion, while the girl moaned, either at being disturbed, or at the falling pieces of brick and stone that scattered round her, "take me for him. 'Tis not strange in this half light. Yet, how to make them understand? Even if there are any there who have known me--Jean, to wit--they think me dead. They knew I was within this house."

"See," the woman interrupted, and scarce listening to his words, "see, the fire breaks out again. On the south side now--and it has reached the top floor. Soon all that will be in flames. There is no hope."

It was true. From the parapet that ran beneath the leads of the south side, and which was at a left angle to that portion of the roof on which they were, there sprang a long thin line of flame--flame that bubbled out accompanied by white, clear smoke, but which, thin as it was, yet grew thicker every moment Both flame and smoke were finding a vent from below; they could not doubt that, underneath, a large portion of the south wing was burning fiercely.

"There is one hope," Andrew said, "still one. Observe. The volumes of smoke from the hall no longer roll up as they did; there the fire is almost extinguished by the masonry and *débris* that has fallen on it. Also, the trap leading here from the garret is open, yet none comes forth either. I will back to the garret. I may find the secret way. The way he went."

"Impossible. Others have sought for it, even though only to gratify curiosity--I myself have done so all over the house. You will never find it."

"Yet will I try. If that fresh fire spreads and we cannot escape, we shall be roasted alive. I will go," and as he spoke he went towards the trap opening below (shielding himself behind buttress and chimney base as he did so, so that no bullet from the Lorrainers should find its mark), and

descended.

Yet, when he had spent half an hour looking round the garret in all directions, he had to give up his search, had to acknowledge that it was unavailing. No use to look under the bare, uncovered rafters, to see if there was any entrance, however small, to some descent--there was none a cat could have crept down; no use to stamp upon the boards of the floor on which he had lain so many days and nights; they were solid oak planks, affixed to the joists below with great clove-headed nails. It would have taken an hour to get one of them from its place. Yet, fearing to miss any chance, he tried and tested each one separately.

Once he advanced to the horrid shaft--the "oubliette"--and peered down that, wondering if there, might be the secret way. Yet, he felt sure and told himself, the way out could not be there. The great mouth of the shaft gaped black and cavernous, while, as he laid himself on the floor, and, with face over the edge, peered down into it, there came up a damp odour which seemed to tell for certain that its depth was terrible. And if it were not an "oubliette"--a "*guet-apens*," as he had once termed it--wherefore that mounting block which they had all had to use so recently, and why that treacherous staircase, or ladder, from above, which ended abruptly, so that the hastening victim should be plunged blindly into the abyss of the shaft below?

Yet he sounded it as well as he was able; leant over and, with his sword in his extended hand, thrust down to see if there were any ledge or bottom within reach--and found none! He discovered, too, a link of the chain which had bound him, and hurled it down, listening for the sound of its fall. But heard nothing--except that it struck once against the side, owing to his not throwing it precisely straight. Then, nothing more.

"There is no way there, except to death!" He muttered. "It is useless. As well return to the roof and await what comes. At least, Marion Wyatt will not die alone."

The flames of the south side had increased to a great extent as he regained the spot where the women were--also a soft wind was fanning them, so that now they leapt up some feet from the roof, burning clear and bright against what was still half night, half day. Standing there watching them, and watching also the direction in which the wind came, he knew that it would not be long--not an hour perhaps--ere those flames had spread to the wing where they all were.

Then the end would be very near. Well! it must be borne. There was nothing for it but that.

From these thoughts he was startled by the action of the woman, Clemence, at this moment. Startled! Amazed!

She had been sitting gazing heedlessly, almost, it might have seemed, indifferently, at those flames towards which he had at that instant turned his back to look down on Marion, when, suddenly, she removed the girl's head from her lap and rose swiftly to her feet--heedless of whether she might be seen or not by the besiegers below. Then she raised her hand--her eyes gleaming strangely as ever--and pointed away towards where the road to Remiremont ran behind the woods. The road along which Andrew had come on that night when he paid his visit of observation.

"Look," she said, and he noticed how firm and unshaken her voice was, "Look, what is that? There are none to help us; none here; not one of the Duke's men would raise a finger to help him--also they come not from where the Duke is. Yet, look. Look, I say."

Following her glance, Andrew did look. And saw that which, at first, he could not understand the meaning of. Amongst the trees, over which the wintry day had now broken, the trees which separated Bois-le-Vaux from the Remiremont road, he saw a long cavalcade of horsemen winding down from the mountain slopes. A cavalcade of horsemen which stretched on and on until several hundreds of them had descended and were still descending to the plains of Lorraine--horsemen on whose glittering corselets and backs-and-breasts and headpieces, as well as bridles and stirrups (though over many of them their long riding cloaks were thrown) the now rising winter sun sparkled. He saw, too, from the roof of the ruined house on which he stood, that, in the morning light, there fluttered the pennons of lances and banners, bearing on them devices of many kinds, guidons also, having on them a large and glittering sun; flags bearing emblems, crests, and coats-of-arms.

Overmastered by that which he observed--for the shining splendour of that great sun upon a purple silk ground told him plainly enough who were those men streaming down from the Vosges--overmastered by the certainty of their safety being at last assured, he threw prudence to the winds, and, boldly exposing himself to the Lorrainers below, he shouted:

"Look! Look! Behold! Your hour is past--you have missed your chance. Behold the army of France is in your land."

Whether surprise at seeing him there--for now none could believe that it was De Bois-Vallée himself--prevented one single shot from being fired at him, or whether it was that, as they saw that army streaming down into Lorraine, they became paralyzed with consternation, Andrew could not tell. Yet one of these it must have been, for soon, from all below, there came a babel of shouts and cries, from all their throats there rose the words:

"The army of France! the army of France! Lorraine is lost to all eternity!" And, even as they so cried, they dispersed and sped away. Sped, too, as fast as they could go, for now it was evident that the burning house had been observed by some in the ranks of the advancing cavalry. Already more than one troop had been detached and was breaking off from the main body, and seeking for a road that should bring them to it.

While Clemence, white now to the lips, white as the woman whose face lay once more on her lap, muttered hoarsely:

"What? What does it mean? What portend?"

"It means," replied Andrew, "that Turenne has crossed the Vosges, that your fair Lorraine will be wrenched from out your Duke's hands for ever--that the Imperialists are in a trap. Also--it means that we are saved."

CHAPTER XXX.

FREE!

Andrew had divined aright. That was what, in truth, it did mean.

Turenne had performed the greatest military feat of Louis' reign, had set the chief seal upon a long career of glory.

Weary of lying inert in winter quarters for weeks after the battle of Entzheim, he had suddenly conceived, and afterwards carefully matured, the achievement which he had now carried through. The whole of his army had left Alsace in three different brigades, and, passing over the Vosges in the depth of a winter remarkable for its inclemency and particularly for the amount of rain which fell--progressing through roads and mountain paths rendered almost impassable by the mud and water with which they were soaked--had reached Lorraine. There remained nothing now but to fall upon the unsuspecting Imperialists at Belfort, Mühlhausen, and elsewhere, to hunt them from Lorraine and, once more and finally, to make Louis master of that much disputed province. How this was done countless other pens have told.

Of those three brigades which had so wondrously and rapidly crossed the mountains, the one that had met the eyes of Clemence first and of Andrew afterwards, on this winter morning and after that night of horror, was led by the great captain himself--it taking possession of Remiremont ere many more hours had passed. Amongst those who had been detached towards the still burning house, the moment that the flames were seen, were some that formed the brigade of cavalry under the Count de Lusignan, with also several of the English and Scotch auxiliaries, under the command for the moment of the Marquis De La Fare.

They rode into that great courtyard half an hour after the Lorrainers had deserted the place, and, used though they were--God knows the devastation of the Palatinate had made them so!--to the sight of burning houses, even of burning towns and cities, they could not but stare in amazement at what met their eyes.

For, still, from the south wing of that great house the flames poured forth in fury--that side of it having now caught well alight; upon the roof of the west wing they saw, clear against the threatening sky, the form of a great man standing looking down upon them, his arms folded.

Then, from the midst of those rescuers, there rode forward one who was, undoubtedly, in command of them--the rich justaucorps with its gold gallooning and *flammes d'or* showing that he who wore it belonged to the nobility--who called up to Andrew standing above.

"Sir, are you the owner of this unfortunate house?" while, as he spoke, he raised his hand to his thick, three-cornered felt hat.

"Nay, sir. Yet am I the last man left alive in it. But if you will, or can, rescue us from our perilous position, for there are two women here as well as I---"

But, as he spoke, he noticed that his questioner's attention had been withdrawn from him by several of his followers, all of whom appeared to be speaking earnestly to their leader, while at the same time they directed their eyes up to Andrew, as did that leader also a moment later. Then the latter said, or rather called up to him again:

"Sir, my men here tell me strange news. I cannot think but that they are mistaken. Yet they

aver it is not so, and you can soon decide. They say that you are of our army, of the English auxiliary force, and fought for us recently."

"'Tis true, sir. I was of the English Regiment under Colonel Churchill, and am on leave of absence. And," pointing to where some of the English and Scotch were now making their way towards the house, "there are some who should know me, seeing that we fought side by side. But, monsieur, the fire gains rapidly, if the wind shifts a point it will soon reach here; I beseech you lose no time in effecting our rescue. We have had a terrible night of it, and--once I am with you--I have a marvellous story to tell."

The rescue was not effected for still some two hours, while, during the passage of that time, the fire in the south wing crept ever nearer and nearer towards the one on which Andrew and the two others were. At last, however, it was accomplished. And thus it was done.

Leaving Marion in the charge of Clemence, and observing that she seemed somewhat easier now, though all that she had gone through during the night, the excitement of the past few days, the terror of the burning house, and the exposure to the cold of the early morning, had undoubtedly brought her very near her end, he descended once more to the garret and, through it, to the floor below. This was still untouched by the fire, and it seemed indeed as though, should the flames from the south wing be prevented from spreading, or should they by any chance become extinguished, that portion of the house would not be destroyed. Then he went on farther down, reaching at last the top of the first floor, and standing over the gulf left yawning by the falling in of the great oak stairs.

It was here that his further descent was impeded, though, had the fire not still been smouldering below, he could perhaps have escaped easily enough: could have leaped down on to all the fallen *débris* that was heaped up a dozen feet beneath him, have attempted a way across it to the open doorway--bereft now of its huge double-door, which had been chopped off its hinges by the besiegers and hurled on as fresh fuel to feed the flames--have possibly forced his way out thus to safety and freedom.

But, now, at this time, no such attempt was wise--not wise, even had he been alone and unencumbered with Marion Wyatt and Clemence.

For, although the fire no longer blazed up from the centre of that hall, although from the vast heap beneath him there rose only the slow-curling, grey smoke that told of what was smouldering beneath, he knew that, to spring into its midst yet, would be to spring into a seething, still burning mass, to hurl himself into a vast heap of charred embers--to be choked, burnt, suffocated beyond any hope of recovery.

The way was not to be found there!

He went, therefore, rapidly along the gallery of that floor on the west side in hopes of finding, perhaps, some other descent, some *escalier de service*, or back stairs, by which escape might be made. But there was none, or, if there had ever been any, it must have existed in the north wing, which was long since entirely destroyed, or in the south, which was on fire--or perhaps the front, which was unreachable.

"There is but one way," he told himself, "one way left. From some window. I must bring the women down here, find somehow the opportunity of lowering them to the ground. Yet 'twill be no easy task. This stone basement is high, was once the whole height of the house--was the house itself. Laurent told me--'tis far to the ground from here."

It was, indeed; the windows of the rooms that opened off the corridor he was now on being fully thirty-five feet from the ground. A height to appal a man who had to lower two almost helpless women--one certainly helpless--from it to the earth; a man who had also not so much as a cord in his possession wherewith to do so. Yet that, he thought, could be overcome, provided for. The cavalry men outside might catch the women in their arms as he lowered them; if they sat close upon their horses and near together under the windows from which he let down Marion and Clemence, at his--and their--full arms' length, the distance would not be so much to fall. But entering the room nearest to him, in which, to his horror, he found Beaujos, the steward, lying dead in a bed--no doubt he had been keeping that bed since the injuries he had received in Andrew's encounter with him when he and Marion made their first attempt to escape, and had been suffocated while lying there forgotten--another obstacle presented itself. Outside the small diamond-paned lattice windows, themselves a strong barrier to any exit, with their leaden framework for the small panes, and with small stone columns dividing each window into three compartments, he noticed at once that they were strongly guarded by iron bars crossed both horizontally and perpendicularly. He tried another room--it was the same, both as regarded bars outside and stone columns within; was indeed a counterpart of the first. They offered no chance.

"Curse these Lorraine wolves," he muttered to himself, as he rushed to a third room, "they protected themselves well. Did indeed mean that none should get into their house, or, being in, should ever get out again."

The third room was as useless as the first for his purpose, and--there was but one more left! If that was the same, God only knew how the escape could ever be made, unless it was back across

the chasm, the way he had come. Could that be done, he mused, as now he approached the fourth room. Was that possible? If one, or a dozen, of the men outside should proceed to the brink of the chasm, fasten a rope to the tree as he and Laurent had done--if---

"Ha! the chance is here," he exclaimed, breaking off in his calculations. "Here. Here. It must be."

He had entered the fourth room--in this case he had to burst the door open by hurling himself against its stout oak panels, since it was locked--and, in doing so, found the chance of which he spoke.

The window was of the same form as the others, but it had been subjected to some great violence and was much damaged by the shock; the slim columns were broken quite out of base and socket, the shattered fragments of the stone lay on the floor and, with them, lay, too, the leaden framework of the diamond panes, and most of the panes themselves. The violence had come from outside--later on, Andrew learnt that, during the night attack, a petard carried by the besieging Lorrainers--one of a number brought by them to assist in destroying the house--had been hurled against that window and had blown it in. Yet, when this had been accomplished, their object had failed. The window was too high from the ground to allow of their obtaining entry, and the petard, after bursting it open, had fallen back, doing no further damage.

Still, it had performed a service never dreamt of by the Lorrainers--it had provided a way for the escape of those three prisoners in the burning house.

The cavalry men, who had by now been joined by those belonging to the English and Scotch auxiliaries, were all upon that side of the mansion--since 'twas there, above, that they had first perceived the form of Andrew outlined against the threatening morning clouds--and as his head appeared through the shattered window they hailed him with a shout. Also from those of his own countrymen, as well as from the Scotch, came noisy greetings. Some had stood side by side with him in other campaigns than these; all had seen his prowess at Entzheim and honoured him for it.

"Yet," called up the young Marquis De La Fare, he being the officer in command, "the height is great. How to descend; how bring the ladies you speak of?" While, as he himself spoke, he bade some of the men search the outhouses they observed near by. Perchance some ladder might be there, by which the window could be reached.

"It may happen," said Andrew, "that I can drop the women to you--yet the distance is almost too great--if they should be missed by your soldiers it would be instant death."

"It is impossible," the other replied. "Yet, have patience--my men seek even now for some means to reach you--if a ladder can be found all will be well. Meanwhile, I counsel you, go bring the ladies to the window. By then the way may have been found."

The advice was good, and Andrew lost no time in following it. Ere a quarter of an hour had passed, Clemence and Marion had been brought down from the roof, and were with him in the room. But, almost he feared that ere they should be rescued Marion would be a dead woman. She was nearly helpless now--nay, quite so, and half insensible; it was in those great, untiring arms that she had to be carried from the roof below.

And behind them had followed Clemence, muttering:

"She will die. She will die." While as she so said she wept.

That she would die, Andrew could not doubt; this last shock, following on the long detention she had been subjected to by her deceiver, De Bois-Vallée; following on, too, the agony of mind she must have suffered in musing on what those at home would feel at her disappearance; had brought her to her end. He could not doubt it.

"And still," he murmured to himself, "Philip is unavenged. Soon there will be two victims of his villainy. God! how I have failed. Failed to avenge him, to save her--failed even to learn how the evil was wrought. And if she dies now--to-day--to-night--I shall never know."

Yet, even as he so spoke, there came into his face a look which would have told plainly enough to anyone observing it, that, in one thing, at least, he would not fail. If ever De Bois-Vallée stood face to face with Andrew Vause again, he would escape no more with life--the hour when he did so would be his last. Only--would he ever so stand? Might he not by now have put leagues between them; might he not ere long put the mountains, the seas, between him and the avenger who sought for him!

As Andrew gazed below from the window of the room in which they were now, he learnt that no ladder was to be found, either in outhouse or elsewhere. If there had ever been one it had been removed, probably by the Lorrainers; had possibly been used by them to furnish fresh fuel for the flames inside. But, even as the men who returned from the search told the Marquis De La Fare of their failure, from another group who had wandered further into the woods around the house there came a shout--it seemed of triumph and rejoicing. Then, quickly, one came running back, breathless, and soon the story was told of what they had lit upon.

A shed not far from the mansion, hidden in one of the copses of Bois-le-Vaux; a house used by the woodmen for storing the felled logs of trees--a house piled full of what was, doubtless, the winter store of fuel--doubtless, also, overlooked by and unknown to the besiegers. Otherwise, for sure, all in that but would have gone to swell the flames--the attackers would not have laboured to hew down saplings and branches had they known of that store so near to their hands.

Now, it was to be directed to a vastly different purpose--to save instead of to destroy. By twos and threes, by squads as well, those men who, for nights, had scarce rested during that weary and rough passage of the mountains, set to work once more, bringing one by one, or half a dozen at a time between them, the logs to the spot beneath where those three prisoners were; untiringly they worked. And so they placed them against the window from which Andrew gazed, making first a deep base of the larger billets, edged round and secured by fallen masses of stone and beams from the old house, and then building others above, pyramid-wise, until, at last, the work was done.

Until, at last, the stage was erected on to which those three could step forth to safety and salvation. To which two of them, at least, could step forth, but on to which the other, the dying woman, had to be lifted.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE STORY OF MARION WYATT

For three days the rain--when it was not a damp snow that melted ere it reached the earth--had fallen, had been falling incessantly since Andrew and his companions were rescued; and now, in the best room of the inn at Plombières, Marion Wyatt lay slowly dying.

Andrew had caused her to be brought here for more reasons than one: firstly, because it was the best inn of the neighbourhood; and, secondly, because at Remiremont, on the morning of their escape, every room in the place had been occupied by the first brigade of Turenne's army, the brigade of cavalry eighteen hundred strong, accompanied by two companies of the Auxiliaries, which had crossed the Vosges with him.

Now, all were gone--the war had rolled towards Mühlhausen and Belfort, the junction was being made with the brigades which had passed the mountains by other routes; soon, this night, perhaps--the army of France would fall upon the unsuspecting Imperialists.

Yet, of that army, one member, at least, remained behind--one who, feeble and unable to take the field, though no longer with his brain clouded or his speech impaired, had been on his way into Lorraine under the protection of his countrymen--Valentin, Marquis Debrasques. The news of the rescue of two women and a man from the burning house which the brigade had observed on its downward march from the mountains, had reached his ears almost before he had found quarters--he having also been sent on to Plombières to do so; ere another hour had passed he, standing at the door of the inn, had seen them approaching, Marion and Clemence in a *calèche* that had been obtained at Remiremont, Andrew walking by their side on foot. Also, he had heard--nay, knew well enough, for in his aunt's life he had been here with her--whose house it was from which the flames streamed forth on the wintry morning air.

"You have saved her from him, at least," he said, his eye glancing into the *calèche*, where he saw Marion lying inert, her head on Clemence's shoulder. Then, sinking his voice even lower than it had been, he asked:

"And he. Is he dead?"

"Not yet," answered Andrew. "Not yet. He has evaded me so far!"

"Where is he?"

Later in the day--when Marion had been put into a warm and comfortable bed, in which she lay in a stupor for hour after hour--Andrew told him, and gave the Marquis the history of all that had occurred since he quitted the army for a time, after having obtained leave from Turenne to do so.

"And now, Valentin," he said, "since you have recovered sufficiently to do so, and since, also, it seems, poor girl! that Marion will pass away without being able to throw any light on all the mystery which surrounds her abduction from England--her long detention in that house of his--I ask you, I call upon you to tell me----"

But, ere he could proceed further in his demand, they were interrupted by the entrance of Clemence into the room in which they sat--the room in which, a month, ago, he and Jean had meditated on how he should gain admission into the now ruined house of the Wolf of Lorraine.

"She desires to see you," she said, addressing Andrew; "she is now entirely herself again. Yet," and, as she spoke, both the others could see that she had been weeping; that, also, it was with difficulty she kept back her tears. "Yet, it will not, cannot be for long. My God! My God!" she exclaimed, with a sudden wail of anguish, while the great full lips trembled with emotion, and from her large eyes the drops ran down to her cheeks, "she is dying. Will not live through the night! Come to her. Come at once!"

Bidding Debrasques await his return, Andrew arose and followed her. Followed her, recognizing that, if he ever was to hear the whole story of De Bois-Vallée's villainy, it must be now. If what Clemence said was true--if she was not mistaken, and the unhappy girl was close to her end--he must learn all now or never.

He found her sitting up in her bed, her fair hair streaming down behind her back, her eyes sunk deep in their sockets, with, round them, an awful purple blackness; upon her face that look which even those who have never previously seen the signs of swift advancing death understand in a moment. And one quick glance at her from him, who had been so often face to face with death, was sufficient now. No need to speak, to ask any question--that look told all.

He stood before her, by her side--this man who had striven so hard to save her, this rough, valiant soldier, whose life had been risked a dozen times within the last month in the hope that he should bear her off to freedom again; stood before her gazing down on that pallid face, then turned his own away as once--how long ago it seemed now!--he had turned it away from the brother whom he had also seen stretched upon what was soon to be his death-bed.

"Nay," she said, looking up at him--and he was startled, he knew not why, at the calmness of her tones--"Nay! do not turn away. Ah!" for as at her bidding he faced round again, she saw that his eyes were wet with tears, "do not weep. You have been so bold, so strong, so brave, have struggled so hard for me, on my behalf, on Philip's behalf. Do not weep!" and she put out her hand--he felt the clamminess of death upon it!--and clasped his.

He strove to speak, to say some word--yet none came to his lips; he was mute. Yet wondered at himself for being so, remembering how rarely words failed him when wanted--whether gibe, or joke, or defiance to a foe. Could do nothing but seat himself in the deep chair by the bed-head, to which she had motioned him with a glance of her eyes, and hold her hand in his own great brown one. Nor could he think of aught except the two lives which had both been wrecked by the same man, and wonder if words--or, better still, actions--would fail him when at last, and finally (it must be finally this time, he found himself meditating), he and De Bois-Vallée met again.

Then suddenly, breaking in on his thoughts, he heard Marion Wyatt speaking again. The voice clear as before.

"You will meet Philip soon now," she was saying. "You will tell him all. Alas! that I may not see him myself ere I die."

He could not find it in his heart to tell her how near she was to meeting his brother now: how soon their souls would be together--dared not tell her that he was dead.

"Of what use to do that?" he thought. "If I inform her, she will die, thinking her disappearance slew him. Time enough to know when they meet in heaven."

"I wrote him," she said, "as I was brought through Paris. Confided my letter to a sure hand. Told him how I had been trapped, snared. Bade him come seek for me, save me. Often," she went on, "since first you made your way into that house, I have wondered why he came not himself in answer to my prayer; why sent you in his place. Was it because you are so big and powerful--or was he sick; could not come himself?"

What answer should be made? To say that his brother sent him in his place must bring her lover before the dying woman's eyes in a pitiable light; to say that he was dead would torture her last hours unnecessarily. And--how let her know that the letter she spoke of had never reached her lover's hands?--that he had died believing against his own will that she was false to him. Yet, he must say something, give her some answer. Tell her that the letter had never been received! Yes, that would be best. When, suddenly, even as he so determined--her mind, perhaps, unhinged by approaching death--she herself relieved him of the necessity for any answer.

She began dejectedly to go over the whole story of De Bois-Vallée's connection with her; his treachery to her. And he, sitting there by her bedside, piecing together one broken sentence with another, learnt at last the truth. Learnt what, before, neither Philip nor her father had ever known or he, himself, guessed at.

Discovered that De Bois-Vallée was no stranger to her when he arrived in London in the suite of Henrietta of Orleans.

"I had not seen him for four years," she murmured, lying back upon her pillows, with still her

hot, moist hand in his; "not since my father and I returned to England after the King was seated safely on his throne. Not for four years."

"You knew him, Marion?" Andrew asked astonished.

"Very well--surely I told you--I mean, told Philip. Surely! Surely! He was often at my father's lodgings in the Quartier de Picpus. It was there, he being a welcome guest of my father's, who liked him well because of his manliness, his activity, his cleverness with the sword and all arms--that he first told me he loved me, asked my love in return."

"My God!" muttered Andrew beneath his breath, so that she heard him not. "My God! Strange news this. Strange news. Philip knew naught of it."

"But," the dying girl went on, "I had none to give him. I liked him well enough then, but I had no love for him. Yet he teased me often; swore some day I should be his; vowed he would never lose me. But at that time my father had resolved to return home, to die, as he said, in his own house where he was born. It was while Camille De Bois-Vallée was absent from Paris that we left for England."

"Ha!" muttered Andrew, again to himself, and unheard by her. "Ha! And he followed?" he said aloud.

"He wrote," the girl went on--and it seemed to him, listening by her side, that her voice was growing weaker--"that, though I had put the sea between us even that should not deter him. He would find me yet; win me. He used no threat, even as he thus wrote; he contented himself with saying he loved me so fondly that he must gain his way to my heart in the end."

"Ay," Andrew said, still unheard by her, "in the end. Well, let's see for the end. He won you away from Philip, anyhow."

"Three years later," Marion continued, "I knew that he had come to London--with the Duchess of Orleans. I was in the Duke of York's garden giving on the Mall, in the suite of his Duchess, when I saw him pass. He, too, saw me. Then he left the Mall and came over to where I was and spoke to me. Said that never for an instant had he forgotten me; never ceased to love me. Now that we had met again, would I not return his love? I told him that I was affianced to Philip. To--to--Philip."

She paused a moment; lay back even more than before on her pillow. Andrew thought she would speak no further. Yet, again, she took up her story.

"Affianced to Philip. Philip, my beloved. Philip whom I shall never see in this world again. Ah! Philip! Philip! Philip!"--and she stretched out her arms before her as though calling to him.

"Heart up, poor girl," Andrew murmured. "Heart up. Ere long you may meet again."

"Never now in this world. Never. And--and--my God! how long I may have to wait in heaven for him ere he joins me. How long!"

He dared not tell her that Philip was already there awaiting her coming; dared not give her a shock which should shorten her almost closed life by one moment. The thread was nearly run out now; why snap it at the end!

Therefore, still he held his peace.

"Where was I? What saying?" she asked, staring at him, and he noticed that her eyes were more glassy than before. "What? And--and--why has it grown so dark? Is the night at hand?"

"Not yet, Marion," Andrew answered, in a broken voice. "Not yet, poor child. And--it will be lighter soon."

"I pray God. A light clear as day, in which I shall see Philip. Philip! We are affianced still--are we not?" she asked suddenly, her hot, feverish hand closing more tightly on his.

"Always. Always. Have patience, dear one. It cannot be long ere you and he meet again."

His words, though, it may be, she did not grasp their meaning, seemed to bring comfort to her as she lay dying there. Soon she grew as tranquil as before; began once more her recital.

"When he heard that, he said then all hope was gone for him; that--that he must forget he had ever known and loved me. Must go away, return to France, live for his profession of arms alone. Philip--Andrew--the light does not come."

"Patience, dear Marion."

But, as he calmed her, he knew that the end was very near at hand; feared, too, that, ere she went, her story would not be told. He doubted if she would ever speak again.

Yet once more she roused herself, the flame still flickering in the lamp of life, though, now, as

she spoke, her words were incoherent and without sequence, making it difficult for him to piece them together.

"My father could not live," she whispered: "He must see me. A night's journey, at least, to Dorchester. And no horses. No horses to be had. None! Ah! what was to do? And nigh fifty leagues--nigh fifty leagues."

"What is she telling me?" Andrew wondered, gazing at her.

"Hark how their hoofs ring upon the ground," she went on, speaking rapidly, strongly also. "Hark! See, too, how the carriage sways; listen to the crack of the whips. And he will live, he tells me; will surely live till I reach him. Live to bless me, his child! Away! On! Always on! Now across a moor, a heath; now a village; and now rest. A change of horses. Ha! we grow nearer. He brings me drink and food; drink, warm and spiced. And, see, the summer dawn is coming; the rooks leave the trees. Soon--soon we shall be there. I can feel the sea breeze on my cheek--feel it, inhale it--we are on the sea. We shall be there soon, he tells me--on the sea."

"On the sea!" muttered Andrew to himself. "On the sea! To reach Dorchester!"

"Over the sea, now. Over. Away. We draw near. Yet. Yet--I do not recognize my own country, my father's land. Why do these people speak the French tongue? What plains, what mountains are these? It is not Dorset; not--not Dorset; the door opens. See, there is Clemence--how she scowls at me--and Beaujos. Ha! look, Andrew; look, he scowls too. Look! Look! Look! Where am I? My God! a prisoner. In his power. Philip! Father! Andrew! Save me. Save me. Save---"

She fell back exhausted, her hands trembling on the coverlet, plucking and clutching at it, too; her hair dank and heavy with wet, her face as marble, and her lips flecked with foam.

"Philip! Philip," she moaned. "Philip, save me!"

"Be calm, Marion, there is none can harm you. I am by your side. Here."

"And Philip?"

"He--he is not far now!"

"Thank God! Yet Philip--Andrew--oh! I cannot see your face, know not which it is; keep him away from me. Kill him rather--kill him--kill him dead. Hark he is coming up the stairs; he is outside; listen. And Clemence, too; can you not hear her? Hark how she speaks to him. Calls him coward, villain, base, vile--ah! like his mother! You hear him?"

She raised herself by some last remaining force within her, stretched out her hands, and seemed to push away some hateful form from her, whispered once--with horror unspeakable in her glazed eyes--"Marry you! Better death!" then fell back once more. Yet still again her lips moved, again she muttered "Kill him! Kill him dead!"

After these last words she lay quietly for a considerable space of time, her breathing calm and tranquil, her bosom heaving gently, the wave of life receding peacefully. Yet once or twice she murmured to herself, also uttered Philip's name and her father's, then was quiet and still again--so still that Andrew knew not at some moments whether she was sleeping or dying; whether she was asleep or dead.

But the last change came ere long; she murmured now of the fire from which she thought they were still fleeing; of the black night, and, next, the breaking dawn. Then, half rose up in her bed once more, and held out feebly, piteously, her hands.

"Andrew," she whispered, "Andrew, how dark the night is. I can scarce see your face. Will daylight never come?"

"Soon, sweet; soon, poor one," he said, standing now close by her, his arms around her, his voice deep and low. "The light is coming fast."

"And Philip. Will he not come? I shall see him?"

"Soon. Very soon."

"Never more to part?"

"Never more to part," he answered in broken tones. "We shall be happy always? Always together?"

"Always now. For ever!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

MORE LIGHT

"Yes," Debrasques said, after Andrew told him of Marion's death and also of all that, in the delirium of her end, she had revealed. "I knew something of what she informed you. Knew that he had brought her to France, had run away with her from an Englishman of your name. Thought at first, when we met in Paris--after you helped me with those vagabonds--that you were he. You remember my agitation?"

"Yes. I remember." Then, reflectively--putting the fire logs together with the toe of his boot--he went on: "Yet--yet--do not be hurt with me, Valentin--but--such an affair as that is deemed in France only one of gallantry--deemed so, too, in England now, since Charles has returned. Why, therefore, was the agitation of which you speak so great? He was a good swordsman, could hold his own well--in our encounter 'twas chance as much as skill gave me the advantage. Was it fear for his life--of my vengeance--that unnerved you so?"

"Nay. Nay," the other said. "Nay! Rather the fear of disgrace to our family if he were exposed--the fear of the punishment Louis would mete out to him for his deception. For his lie."

"His deception! His lie! To whom--Louis?"

"Ay," Debrasques answered. "Ay. And to Turenne. Barillon, our Minister to your Court, sent over a complaint that had been made by her father--it reached Louis' ears--he sent it on to the Marshal--to Turenne. Then--then--De Bois-Vallée had to give an explanation and--nothing short of his word that he and the lady were married would have saved him from disgrace--from expulsion from Turenne's bodyguard."

"And," said Andrew quickly, "he gave that word?"

"Heaven help him! Yes. So, also, did I."

"You, Valentin?"

"Yes. Believing him. He told me--told my mother--in our own house, that she came from England with him willingly enough--that they were married when they landed at Ambleteuse."

"And every word was a lie!"

"So we knew later--so I found out. And in a marvellous way."

"How?"

"From the woman now in this house--the woman who watches ever upstairs by that poor girl's body----"

"Clemence?"

"Ay, Clemence! You know her history?"

"Something of it. Also I know--heaven grant I may never forget!--that to her it is owing that I am not lying choked to death in that garret. By a chance only that I am not also lying a mass of charred ashes. As well might that wing have caught fire as the others while I still lay shackled in it, and then farewell to Andrew Vause and his opportunity for saving Marion from that death, if no other. And 'tis to Clemence that all is owing. Yet--how ever to have believed it!"

"She is the strangest creature," Debrasques said; "a vast combination of good and evil promptings. Half woman--sometimes half tigress--demoniac! She thought his father loved her--cherished the belief that he would marry her for her wild beauty--I have heard my mother say that in her youth she was as beautiful as the Queen of Night--went mad for a time when he did marry--thought my cousin was her own son. Then--for she would never quit the house--she passed her life alternately loving him and--torturing him, so that, at last, she was never allowed to see the child for fear that she would do it mortal injury. Again, later, when both his father and mother were dead, her love for him was another change in her insanity--until he brought that poor dead one upstairs to the house----"

"And then," said Andrew--"and then?"

As he asked the question the door behind them opened slightly--had not both been sitting with their backs to it and gazing into the fire, they would have seen four long, slim fingers grasping it. Would have seen, too, a moment later, the form of Clemence standing behind them. Yet, in another instant, they knew that she was there, heard her voice give the answer to Andrew's question--heard her say:

"Then she hated him."

Springing from their seats they turned and faced her--appalled almost by the change that had come over her.

The face--always pallid since Andrew had first seen it--was livid now to the lips, the eyes dim and sunken into their sockets--the full lips shook and quivered. And--was it fancy on both their parts, or was it the case?--it seemed to them that the dark hair was now doubly streaked with grey--was far whiter than it had been a day or so ago when she and the others were saved from the ruined house.

"Then--she hated him. Listen. Let me tell the story," and as she spoke she advanced to where they were, and stood before them.

"I hated him because of what he had done to this poor helpless girl--one could not help but love her!--hated him, too, because I saw another victim to the insensate passions of all his race. Told him he was a coward, a villain, to thus betray a woman, bring her a prisoner from her own land. Yet--listen--there is one thing you do not know, neither of you know. It was no fault of his that they were not man and wife--as he tricked you into believing they had become, Valentin Debrasques. He loved the woman dearly, madly--again and again he besought her to marry him. In that respect he was no villain."

"Thank God!" broke from the Marquis's lips as he heard these words--from Andrew Vause there came no utterance. In truth, he was amazed. Had he misjudged the man after all--had---? But he paused in his reflections--remembering that the allurements of the woman from her own land, the breaking thereby of Philip's heart, the long detention of Marion, were sufficient villainy. Again Clemence went on.

"When he returned hastily from his post in Turenne's guard, but a little while ere you yourself came here"--and she directed her eyes towards Andrew--"it was to cast himself once more at her feet, to beg, to pray, to implore that she would pardon him for all the wrong he had done--that she would be his wife. Great God how he besought her. And, when she turned still a deaf ear to him--answering that, sooner would she linger out years here, sooner die here than grant what he demanded--ay! though she remained a prisoner till she was old and grey, he besought her in another manner. Told her that, already, he had suffered enough for his sin--that there was one who sought his life, who ere long would obtain it--was implacable--and that, now, worse even than loss of life threatened him. That this sin was known to more than one, that his honour was in peril--unless he could stand before his King with her for wife at his side, he was a ruined, broken man. That nothing could save him--even though he should abjure France and join with the Duke it would but forestall the King's vengeance for a time. Soon Louis would triumph over Lorraine, and then he would still be disgraced."

"And her answer?" asked Andrew. "Yet--what need the question! I know it." And to himself he muttered, "thank God, she was true to Philip. Even though he is in his grave, thank God for that," while, even as he so thought, another reflection ran swiftly through his mind.

"Perhaps--perhaps," he pondered, "he knows all now. Perhaps!"

"What more to tell!" Clemence went on, standing still before those two, controlling herself as best she could--mastering, as it seemed to Andrew, some terrible agony that racked her soul. "What more? You came here, entered his house as none have ever entered it before, your life hung on a thread a dozen times; you know not how nearly it was taken as you lay stretched in that hall ere you were carried to the garret--how nearly again--by--but no matter! And in your coming I saw her chance, recognized that you who feared nothing might open the way to freedom for that poor, injured lamb--show her the road back to him she loves. Alas! 'twas not to be."

"Alas!" also said Andrew, "it never could have been. He whom she loved had gone before her."

"Dead!" Clemence said, staring at him. "He is dead? Her lover--your brother?"

"Yes, dead."

"Did she know it?" the woman asked, almost hissed, as she bent forward and touched his arm, "did she know it--and die cursing him?"

"Nay, nay, she died cursing none--left the world with peace in her heart, upon her lips, believing that they would soon meet again now. As they will--as they have done," and he turned his face away from her and Debrasques so that they might not see his grief.

Later that night, when Andrew and the Marquis sat once more together in front of the fire, and while Clemence still watched above in the room where the dead girl lay--she was to be buried in the morning in a remote portion of the abbey grounds, the noble ladies of Remiremont having permitted that, in spite of her not being of their faith--the Marquis spoke to him and said:

"Is the feud ended now, Captain Vause, the task accomplished? Are you content?"

"Content?" Andrew said, looking up at him. "Content with what--failure?"

"Have you failed?"

"Ay, from first to last. See! Reflect! My brother lies in his grave unavenged--to-morrow she will lie in hers. Both victims to that man. And--he--is free."

"Free! Free! He is ruined, beggared, bankrupt in honour, too. His career is ended--he can never rejoin the army nor serve France again--even though you should spare him, he should not draw sword again for my country. I would prevent it. Would myself tell the King. Also he must fly Lorraine; they, his own countrymen, will never let him obtain another denier from his land. He must be an outcast--proscribed--a vagabond on the face of the earth. Will that not suffice?"

"No," Andrew said, bending across the table to look into the young man's eyes. "No, Valentin Debrasques, it cannot suffice. If it could--for your sake--I would be content. But--my brother is unavenged, Marion Wyatt is unavenged--De Bois-Vallée and Andrew Vause are alive. The feud ends when one or both are dead. Not before."

"He said to her--to Clemence," whispered Debrasques, "that you were implacable."

"He said true. In such a cause, Valentin, I am implacable. Listen to me, deem me pagan, bloodthirsty--what you will--but understand me. I was a *vaurien* from my boyhood, always in trouble, doing ever the wrong thing--yet never losing the love of two creatures on this earth. My mother--and Philip. Because of that, because when I was a man, a soldier--a bravo, some called me!--because of their love for me, because the door of our old home stood open always when I turned my wandering steps that way; because, too, there was never aught of reproach but only words of love and welcome for greeting--sweeter to the ears of him who has been homeless for weeks and months together than to any other!--I loved, I worshipped those two."

He paused a moment--and, to the younger man gazing up at him, it seemed as if the firm, strong soldier was overmastered by an emotion such as none could have ever dreamt would sway him--then went on.

"Loved, worshipped them. Became at last, through that love, I think, a better, more thoughtful man. Grew careful of my reputation, did naught that should bring discredit to them, to the old name I bore. Do you wonder, therefore, that, when I saw my brother lowered to his grave--knowing well what had driven him to it--I took the vow I did, swore that the man who was the primary cause of all should himself find his grave at my hands?"

"I do not wonder," Valentin Debrasques replied softly--"I understand."

"And," Andrew went on, "there is one other thing. I owe this man an opportunity of crossing swords with me again--villain though he is--and he shall have it."

"Yet he seeks not that reparation. Has escaped, fled. What will you do? Follow him across the world--perhaps never to find him even then?"

"No. Again listen. I do not believe I shall have far to go. Valentin, it is borne in on me that De Bois-Vallée is at no very great distance from here now."

"What!"

"I believe that he is secreted somewhere in that house of his at this moment."

"At Bois-le-Vaux?"

"Yes. At Bois-le-Vaux."

"It is impossible."

"Nay--it is most probable. Let me repeat to you what I have said happened at the moment when he escaped from my grasp. The garret was full of smoke--dense, black smoke--none could see an inch beyond themselves. Then--in an instant, he was gone. Yet--where? Not backwards to the corridor; that was impossible. There, even if he had regained it, he could not have lived ten minutes--in the garret itself, we should have been suffocated in the same space of time had I not been able to get the trap open--moreover, he could not have passed behind us. We were all together--Marion's form extended along the floor. That was impossible."

"And the roof? Might there be no way down from that?"

"There may be, yet it seems unlikely. For, see. Even though there were some opening, some descent--'tis possible--I searched not the leads as carefully as afterwards I searched the garret floor!--to where would it lead him? Back into that burning house again."

"And the shaft?"

"Ay! the shaft. The oubliette. 'Tis in truth there, I do believe, that he escaped."

"Yet you have said you probed it as far as you were able, flung down the link of chain to test its depth, and found nothing. How, therefore, is it likely that he can have escaped by that road?"

"That, I purpose to once more seek out. At best my examination was but hasty. A second search may reveal more."

"A second search. You intend to make one? In that ruined house--the walls likely enough to fall at any moment and overwhelm you, bury you beneath them. You will do that?"

"I will--and ere many hours are passed. To-morrow, when--she--has been laid in her grave I make my way to Bois-le-Vaux again. And," he continued--speaking now in a tone that, almost unknowingly to Debrasques, carried conviction to his mind, "the clue will be there to his whereabouts. The end will not be far off then."

"Let us go together."

"You wish to go? Remember, it is not the end itself--but the beginning of the end only. If he has escaped down that oubliette it may be that he is a hundred leagues away ere now, that I may have far to go ere I come up with him. Your road lies towards Paris and your mother's house, Valentin--mine leads I know not where."

"No matter. At least let me accompany you to Bois-le-Vaux."

"So be it. We will set out together."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LAST MEETING

Marion Wyatt lay in her grave under the west wall of the burying ground belonging to the Abbey of Remiremont--she was at rest for ever now.

And, on the road to Bois-le-Vaux, to the house which had been her prison for so long, Andrew Vause and the Marquis Debrasques rode together, bent upon finding out, if possible, the manner in which De Bois-Vallée had eluded the grasp of the former on that night of horror.

Strapped to their saddles they carried with them some implements which they thought might be of considerable assistance in enabling them--or at least one of them--to descend into that yawning oubliette, since down it Andrew Vause was determined to go, even though it sank into the bowels of the earth. These implements consisted of, first, a solid iron bar which would stretch easily across the diameter of the oubliette's mouth, also a couple of lanterns, then some grappling hooks which would be of use in catching hold of any projection, or side of the shaft, in their descent, if necessary, and next, a coil of rope strong as that which Andrew had previously used in his flight across the chasm, and of the same length, namely, thirty metres.

"For," said he, when overnight they made these purchases in Plombières, "the house is but half that height; therefore, by the time I have descended some fifteen mètres I shall be on the level of the earth. And, if the shaft goes below the earth as much again, and then ceases not--which is scarce likely--why, the rope must be got down, and I go on still."

"Yet, how for that?" asked Debrasques. "How to do it? I am resolved to follow you, even though 'tis into the bowels of the earth--how shall it be lowered, therefore, from above? We want a third, and one who is trustworthy, in our company."

"Nay," replied Andrew, "we want no third, and we will have none--trustworthy or not. Laurent was trustworthy, and he died in keeping his pledge. Jean has disappeared, dispersed into air with all the other besiegers of the ill-fated house. There is none other. Nor, if there were, would we enlist him. The work shall be done alone by us."

Marion had been laid to rest at daybreak of this wintry morning, therefore it was still very early when they drew near the half-demolished mansion, and, as they entered the estate, saw its blackened walls in which yawned the great gaps where the wings had partly fallen, and observed the still larger gap where the whole of one side was gone. Also, they saw the gable chimneys still standing on that portion of the roof to which Andrew and the women had escaped from the garret--the stack of chimneys to which he had fastened that first rope after he had taken his flight across.

The desolation was complete--was penetrating to the senses of those who now regarded it--yet this very desolation seemed an appropriate monument to the downfall of the race which had so long been known and feared as "The Wolves of Lorraine." For the family was gone, extinct now--

the last member of it, Camille De Bois-Vallée, could never build it up nor restore it again, any more than he could build up and restore the house which had sheltered that family for generations--'twas perhaps well, therefore, that it should go too. In years to come, these now blackened walls would tell the tale of how the vengeful Lorrainers had swept away at last those who had used their power to trample on and ill-treat them.

Against the side of the building, under the shattered window from which the three had eventually escaped, they found the logs and billets of wood piled up precisely as they had been left--there were none to disturb them now!--and, leaving their horses in the very outhouse where the wood had been discovered, they entered at once the ruined mansion.

"'Twill take but little time to reach the roof," Andrew said, "and as little to see if by chance he found a passage that way. Come, Valentin." Whereon, each carrying some of the necessaries they had brought with them, they entered by the window.

To the younger man the scene of ruin and devastation on which he gazed was appalling--also, it was saddening. For, as a child, and even later in his still short existence, he had been here often--had run up and down those huge staircases which were now torn from their settings and lying in ruins below; in those rooms by which they passed swiftly--and in one of which the dead body of Beaujos was stretched, as Andrew knew--he had slept many a night; from that great yawning doorway, now open to the cold wind that blew up from the west and whistled through the empty vastness of the hall, he had issued forth often enough, bent on a hawking or a hunting party.

And now--what a scene to gaze upon! What desolation and silence--what an atmosphere of death and ruin, and the decay that time would bring, prevailed over all!

They stood at last upon the roof of this remaining wing, arriving at it by the way the others had left a few nights ago, their feet embedded in the dank, decaying leaves blown on it by the autumn winds--leaves now becoming skeletons under the winter rain and frost--and made inspection of the whole to see what outlet there might be for the fugitive. Yet there was none. Upon those leads there was no opening beneath all that rotting mass--as they found quickly enough--nothing except the trapdoor leading to the garret, to which they now returned.

"As for the chimney stacks," said Andrew, "they are impossible. Observe their height; he could never have reached their summit alone and unaided--and--even though he had--what then? Come--'tis time to inspect the oubliette."

In the dull, dim light that penetrated to the garret from the open trapdoor above, they made their preparations swiftly--indeed, there were but few to make. A turn or two of the rope (already previously knotted at intervals of four feet to aid in the descent) around the iron bar was made by Andrew, he fastening it by what is known to sailors as a bowline knot, and he was ready to descend.

Then he sat down upon the edge of the oubliette, grasped the bar, and, with his two hands, worked himself immediately over the middle of it, the rope being between his legs.

"Now, Valentin," he said, "the search begins. What shall I find below?" and as he spoke he ignited his tinder, communicated the flame to the lamp attached to his belt, and peered down into the depths beneath him.

But the rays of the lamp showed nothing--nothing beyond the bare walls of the shaft, built, as was the lower part of the house itself, of stone. And from up that shaft there came a cool, damp air, that made itself perceptible even as he sat dangling over it.

"For Heaven's sake, be careful," Valentin whispered. Then--in even a lower tone, added: "If he is there below--if he should be still there--he may spring out at you."

But Andrew, glancing at him from his perch on the bar, pointed over his shoulder to where his sword was braced on to his back perpendicularly, since, had it been by his side, it might have impeded his descent. Also he showed a pistol ready to his grasp.

"Have no fear," he said.

A moment later he was going down the rope hand over hand, the knots in it assisting his feet. And Valentin Debrasques, lying on the floor of the garret, face downwards, with his head over the edge of the oubliette, saw beneath him the flame of the lamp descending further and further. Andrew was now, he calculated, twenty feet below the opening where he himself was.

Then, suddenly, he heard him call up.

"He passed this way."

"You know that?"

"Ay. I know it now."

"How?"

"He has left his traces. Also--now--I know how he descended."

"I must follow," Valentin called back. "'Tis nothing. And the rope will surely bear both."

"It needs but to bear one," Andrew replied. "I have reached a platform, a half platform--crescent-moon shaped--leaving still, however, room for the passage of a man below, to further depths. He has gone that way."

"I come," Debrasques called once more--and, heedless of Andrew's warning him to remember that he was still weak from his wounds, he seized the rope and slung his slight young form down it--the other holding up the lantern so that he might better see as he descended.

A moment later and the two men were standing side by side upon the platform mentioned by Andrew, a slab of flat stone, jutting out from one side of the oubliette's now slimy walls--for the damp was very perceptible here; the sides reeked with it, and drops of water oozed from out of them and ran down to the stone slab itself. And, at their feet, was the opening to the further depths.

But, also at their feet, was something else, something beside the coil of the lower part of the rope by which they had come.

A chain, itself lying in a coil upon the platform--with a foot or so of it hanging over into the abyss below. With, upon the ledge of the platform, an inch of brown-coloured velvet--a strip torn doubtless from a man's sleeve as he let himself down from the ledge and laid one arm along the stone, while groping with the other for the means to descend.

"His coat," said Debrasques, turning the strip over in his hand beneath the light of the lantern. "He was wearing such a one when last I saw him out of his trappings."

"And, as I think, on the night when he returned to this house; loomed up before my eyes as they struck me down. Come, Valentin, let us go on. To the end now."

"But how get there?" asked the Marquis, "how arrive? How use that chain?"

"Easy enough. A foot below the mouth of the oubliette above, there is a broken hook--I saw it as I descended. On that hook hung this chain, and he knew it--it not being broken then. He descended part way by. that--as I think--then the hook broke and he fell the rest, on to this platform--the chain coming with him, grasped in his hand. No great harm that--if he missed this smaller opening, as without doubt he did. Had he not so missed it--poof! he would be lying somewhere below a mangled corpse."

"Suppose--suppose," said Debrasques, "that, nevertheless, he did not miss it--fell through, the chain remaining behind."

"Then, 'tis as I have said. We shall find him there--dead. Yet, what use surmise? Let us on; I will go first."

As he spoke, he lifted up the coils of their own rope and let them fall down through the opening, observing that the cord did not tighten nor spin round a moment later. By that he judged that it had struck some bottom, since, otherwise, it would doubtless have done both, instead of, as now, lying against the side as though not extended its full length.

"The end of the journey is near," he muttered again, "near now," and, so speaking, he grasped the rope as it hung down through the orifice from the iron beam above, and began to descend once more. Yet, in an instant, he stopped and put out his hand in front of him, clutching the rope now with the other alone, yet still seeming as though easily supported and without effort.

"There are," he said to Debrasques, glancing up at him as though able to see his face as plainly as the Marquis could himself see his by the light of the lamp at his waist, "long staples let into the wall at short intervals. They serve the use of a ladder, being bent at the sides, thereby to enter the wall. Come, the rope is unnecessary. Let yourself down the hole, feel with your feet until they touch the staples, use the platform as a hold till your hands grasp the uppermost bar; the rest is easy. Come."

And he went lower down himself, discarding the use of the rope entirely now.

Behind, from above, followed Debrasques. Hand under hand, foot succeeding foot, they went down those staples, the air growing more chilly and damp and penetrating as still they descended, and giving sure proof that they were now below the level of the earth; were among the foundations of the great old house. Also, the feeble lamp-flicker showed this, too--showed that they had reached the vaults and actual basement on which the whole building had been placed--vaults, or dungeons, separated from each other by short, round shafts of rough, untrimmed stone, and with the earth into which they were set unlevelled. And now there was no damp; instead, only the dull mildewed smell that such places have, places to which no air has penetrated for centuries.

"He is not here," Andrew said, as they stood upon this earthen floor, the crown of his hat

touching almost the roof of the vault above him. "Not here. He has gone on. Knew a way out. We must find it." While, as he spoke, he flashed the lantern, which he had now taken in his hand, around the dark and gloomy place, it casting fantastic shadows behind the pillars and shafts as he did so.

"Come," he said once more.

So they went on--though not without obstruction either. Once his foot caught in a mass of tangled chain lying at the base of a shaft to which one end of it was attached, and, stooping to look at it, Andrew saw amidst the coils of that chain some bones, and, a little farther off, more bones--of a hand! Yet, when he put his own hand out to touch them, they lost their shape, the fingers were gone at that touch; there lay but a feathery mass of white dust upon the earth a moment later.

"That tells its own tale," he whispered to the other. "Have centuries rolled away since that poor thing gasped its last within the chain's embrace?"

"God knows!" His companion whispered back. "They never forgave! Once in their power and all hope was gone."

"It appears," said Andrew briefly.

The vault, the foundations, were as square as the house above; ere long they had gone round them--finding more proof of how the De Bois-Vallées had used it as a final prison. A knife, rusty now, yet once a long, keen blade, was sticking point downward in the earth; they asked themselves if, ages ago, it had struck, pierced something between its hilt and point that was not earth then?--something that had long since vanished away to dust. They found, also, a woman's necklace set with quaint cut stones lying near a heap of rags, black with time and perishable to the touch, and asked again what story of horror was buried and forgotten here?

At last they found the outlet from that gloomy vault--a long dark passage that led away to blackness impenetrable. A passage that, in the past, had had a thick sturdy door to bar all entrance to, and way through it, but which door now lay flat upon the earthen floor--mouldered and decayed from off its hinges.

"Come," again said Andrew, wasting no words now, "Come, Debrasques."

And on down that passage they moved, side by side, the light flickering on earthen walls shored up with old beams and rotting staves, and with the bottoms of roots of trees showing through the uppermost parts.

Also--though they scarce knew why, nor could they have told what they expected--each had in his hand his drawn sword now.

Afar off, adown that ghastly passage, they saw a gleam of light that each knew to be the light of the winter day--a gleam that was no bigger, as it seemed, than a star, yet that still told the end was there. Was the end of the outlet.

Onward they went, faster now, their footfalls sounding dull and leaden on the earthy floor, their breath coming--again they knew not why!--faster and faster.

Then--the passage traversed--the daylight now illuminating faintly a space some dozen feet square, Debrasques clutched Andrew's arm and pointed to a dark blur upon the ground before them--a heap of blackness that bore some resemblance to a crouching human form--it lying a little space outside the circle of dim light.

"Look! look!" He said, "it is a human figure. *Ciel!* is it he? Is he dead? See--the eyes glare at us!"

"Ay," replied Andrew, advancing to that blurred mass, "it is he."

While, stooping over the body of De Bois-Vallée, he added, "And he is dead."

Then he lifted his *porte épée*, and thrust back his sword into the scabbard gently, saying, "No more need for you now. Your work here is done."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ADIEU

"How has he died?" asked Debrasques, avoiding those open, glaring orbs that looked out glassily from the dead man's face, the body lying on its side, the arms extended, the head turned up so that the eyes stared down the passage. "How?"

Andrew looked round the small space into which the passage, or vault, had widened at its end, lifted high his lantern with one hand above his head, then pointed with his hat which he held in the other--almost unknowingly, both had doffed their hats in the presence of that thing at their feet--towards the opening whence the light came from without. An opening many feet above his head, of about a foot in circumference, through which the daylight streamed murky and dull.

Then, after a moment's thought, he said:

"There was an exit here--once. Observe, here was an opening, yet now there is none. Yet, 'tis easy to comprehend. Look at what that light streams over as it enters--heaps of earth with broken trunks of trees mixed in them, also great stones. You see--understand?"

"A landslip from above, perhaps?" Debrasques answered, comprehending.

"Ay, 'tis that. Washed down, loosened by winter storm or spring torrent--riven perhaps by lightning stroke--may be a month ago, may be years. Who knows? But, of one thing be sure--he," and he glanced down to his feet, "knew it not when he fled here. May not have visited these vaults for years--may never have been here before, yet was aware of this escape and thought to profit by it. Then died of frenzy--perhaps starvation, too--after learning he was snared."

He advanced towards the immense mass of earth that blocked up the hole through which the flight should have been made, and flashed his lantern on it at about a man's--at about De Bois-Vallée's--height from the ground, and called the other's attention to how the mould was scored--as though with finger clutches! and scooped away and dug into. Scratched at and scooped away until the trapped creature had given up in despair; had, perhaps, fallen fainting at his task.

Next, he went back to where the body lay, and lifted up the hands, the rings on them sparkling in the lantern's gleam, and showed Debrasques the nails all earthy, and the top joints of the fingers clogged and smeared with dirt.

"You see?" he whispered. "You see?"

"Yet, why not return?"

"You forget. The chain was broken. The way back was barred, therefore. He had no rope as we have."

* * * * *

The roads part outside Plombières, one going north, one south, one west. Behind, to the east, is the way across the Vosges.

And here, by the spring which marks their divergence, Andrew Vause and Valentin Debrasques clasped hands one bright winter morning, a few days later, and bade farewell to each other for a time.

"God send you health and fair recovery," the former said, as he stood by his horse's side; "make, too, my service to your mother. When next I pass through Paris----"

"Our house will be yours. Your home. Remember," and he glanced up at the other with a wistful look in his eyes, "we are sworn friends: sworn long ago. You will not let aught that has passed break that?"

"Fear not," Andrew replied. "Even though France and England fly at each other's throats in days to come--which Heaven forefend!--we must remember that."

"And," went on Valentin, "you said a night or so ago that you had failed in--in--what brought you here. Spoke with regret, it seemed, of that failure. Andrew," and now he laid his hand pleadingly on the other's arm, "you do not regret? Is the end not best as it is? He is in his grave--not sent there by your hand--does it not suffice?"

"It must suffice," Andrew replied. "And--Valentin, I am not so vengeful as to wish now that it could have been otherwise. Perhaps it is better so. Far better to think in after years, if I live to be old, that he died without my aid."

"I thank God that you can say so."

He gave his orders to his men who were to accompany him; slowly the dragoons fell in and set out upon their march; once more they clasped hands.

"Farewell, dear friend," he said.

"Farewell, my boy," Andrew replied, "yet courage, courage, we must meet again. Turenne has driven back Montecuculi and all the German brood; ere I reach him the war will be over. Then I, too, will come to Paris. Also I will bring you news of Clemence, tell you if she is at peace in her new home in the abbey. See, lad, your dragoons mount the hill--after them and away. Adieu--till next we meet."

"Farewell, Andrew, my friend."

"Farewell. God bless and speed you."

FOOTNOTES

[Footnote 1](#): It is an historical fact.

THE END

**PLYMOUTH
WILLIAM BRENDON AND SON
PRINTERS**

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CLASH OF ARMS: A ROMANCE ***

Updated editions will replace the previous one—the old editions will be renamed.

Creating the works from print editions not protected by U.S. copyright law means that no one owns a United States copyright in these works, so the Foundation (and you!) can copy and distribute it in the United States without permission and without paying copyright royalties. Special rules, set forth in the General Terms of Use part of this license, apply to copying and distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works to protect the PROJECT GUTENBERG™ concept and trademark. Project Gutenberg is a registered trademark, and may not be used if you charge for an eBook, except by following the terms of the trademark license, including paying royalties for use of the Project Gutenberg trademark. If you do not charge anything for copies of this eBook, complying with the trademark license is very easy. You may use this eBook for nearly any purpose such as creation of derivative works, reports, performances and research. Project Gutenberg eBooks may be modified and printed and given away—you may do practically ANYTHING in the United States with eBooks not protected by U.S. copyright law. Redistribution is subject to the trademark license, especially commercial redistribution.

**START: FULL LICENSE
THE FULL PROJECT GUTENBERG LICENSE**

To protect the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting the free distribution of electronic works, by using or distributing this work (or any other work associated in any way with the phrase “Project Gutenberg”), you agree to comply with all the terms of the Full Project Gutenberg™ License available with this file or online at www.gutenberg.org/license.

Section 1. General Terms of Use and Redistributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

1.A. By reading or using any part of this Project Gutenberg™ electronic work, you indicate that you have read, understand, agree to and accept all the terms of this license and intellectual property (trademark/copyright) agreement. If you do not agree to abide by all the terms of this agreement, you must cease using and return or destroy all copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in your possession. If you paid a fee for obtaining a copy of or access to a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work and you do not agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement, you may obtain a refund from the person or entity to whom you paid the fee as set forth in paragraph 1.E.8.

1.B. “Project Gutenberg” is a registered trademark. It may only be used on or associated in any way with an electronic work by people who agree to be bound by the terms of this agreement. There are a few things that you can do with most Project Gutenberg™ electronic works even without complying with the full terms of this agreement. See paragraph 1.C below. There are a lot of things you can do with Project Gutenberg™ electronic works if you follow the terms of this agreement and help preserve free future access to Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. See paragraph 1.E below.

1.C. The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation (“the Foundation” or PGLAF), owns a compilation copyright in the collection of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works. Nearly all the individual works in the collection are in the public domain in the United States. If an individual work is unprotected by copyright law in the United States and you are located in the United States, we do not claim a right to prevent you from copying, distributing, performing, displaying or creating derivative works based on the work as long as all references to Project Gutenberg are removed. Of course, we hope that you will support the Project Gutenberg™ mission of promoting free access to electronic works by freely sharing Project Gutenberg™ works in compliance with the terms of this agreement for keeping the Project Gutenberg™ name associated with the work. You can easily comply with the terms of this agreement by keeping this work in the same format with its attached full Project Gutenberg™ License when you share it without charge with others.

1.D. The copyright laws of the place where you are located also govern what you can do with this work. Copyright laws in most countries are in a constant state of change. If you are outside the United States, check the laws of your country in addition to the terms of this agreement before downloading, copying, displaying, performing, distributing or creating derivative works based on this work or any other Project Gutenberg™ work. The Foundation makes no representations concerning the copyright status of any work in any country other than the United States.

1.E. Unless you have removed all references to Project Gutenberg:

1.E.1. The following sentence, with active links to, or other immediate access to, the full Project Gutenberg™ License must appear prominently whenever any copy of a Project Gutenberg™ work (any work on which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” appears, or with which the phrase “Project Gutenberg” is associated) is accessed, displayed, performed, viewed, copied or distributed:

This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere in the United States and most other parts of the world at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org. If you are not located in the United States, you will have to check the laws of the country where you are located before using this eBook.

1.E.2. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is derived from texts not protected by U.S. copyright law (does not contain a notice indicating that it is posted with permission of the copyright holder), the work can be copied and distributed to anyone in the United States without paying any fees or charges. If you are redistributing or providing access to a work with the phrase “Project Gutenberg” associated with or appearing on the work, you must comply either with the requirements of paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 or obtain permission for the use of the work and the Project Gutenberg™ trademark as set forth in paragraphs 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.3. If an individual Project Gutenberg™ electronic work is posted with the permission of the copyright holder, your use and distribution must comply with both paragraphs 1.E.1 through 1.E.7 and any additional terms imposed by the copyright holder. Additional terms will be linked to the Project Gutenberg™ License for all works posted with the permission of

the copyright holder found at the beginning of this work.

1.E.4. Do not unlink or detach or remove the full Project Gutenberg™ License terms from this work, or any files containing a part of this work or any other work associated with Project Gutenberg™.

1.E.5. Do not copy, display, perform, distribute or redistribute this electronic work, or any part of this electronic work, without prominently displaying the sentence set forth in paragraph 1.E.1 with active links or immediate access to the full terms of the Project Gutenberg™ License.

1.E.6. You may convert to and distribute this work in any binary, compressed, marked up, nonproprietary or proprietary form, including any word processing or hypertext form. However, if you provide access to or distribute copies of a Project Gutenberg™ work in a format other than “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other format used in the official version posted on the official Project Gutenberg™ website (www.gutenberg.org), you must, at no additional cost, fee or expense to the user, provide a copy, a means of exporting a copy, or a means of obtaining a copy upon request, of the work in its original “Plain Vanilla ASCII” or other form. Any alternate format must include the full Project Gutenberg™ License as specified in paragraph 1.E.1.

1.E.7. Do not charge a fee for access to, viewing, displaying, performing, copying or distributing any Project Gutenberg™ works unless you comply with paragraph 1.E.8 or 1.E.9.

1.E.8. You may charge a reasonable fee for copies of or providing access to or distributing Project Gutenberg™ electronic works provided that:

- You pay a royalty fee of 20% of the gross profits you derive from the use of Project Gutenberg™ works calculated using the method you already use to calculate your applicable taxes. The fee is owed to the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, but he has agreed to donate royalties under this paragraph to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation. Royalty payments must be paid within 60 days following each date on which you prepare (or are legally required to prepare) your periodic tax returns. Royalty payments should be clearly marked as such and sent to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation at the address specified in Section 4, “Information about donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation.”
- You provide a full refund of any money paid by a user who notifies you in writing (or by e-mail) within 30 days of receipt that s/he does not agree to the terms of the full Project Gutenberg™ License. You must require such a user to return or destroy all copies of the works possessed in a physical medium and discontinue all use of and all access to other copies of Project Gutenberg™ works.
- You provide, in accordance with paragraph 1.F.3, a full refund of any money paid for a work or a replacement copy, if a defect in the electronic work is discovered and reported to you within 90 days of receipt of the work.
- You comply with all other terms of this agreement for free distribution of Project Gutenberg™ works.

1.E.9. If you wish to charge a fee or distribute a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work or group of works on different terms than are set forth in this agreement, you must obtain permission in writing from the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the manager of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark. Contact the Foundation as set forth in Section 3 below.

1.F.

1.F.1. Project Gutenberg volunteers and employees expend considerable effort to identify, do copyright research on, transcribe and proofread works not protected by U.S. copyright law in creating the Project Gutenberg™ collection. Despite these efforts, Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, and the medium on which they may be stored, may contain “Defects,” such as, but not limited to, incomplete, inaccurate or corrupt data, transcription errors, a copyright or other intellectual property infringement, a defective or damaged disk or other medium, a computer virus, or computer codes that damage or cannot be read by your equipment.

1.F.2. LIMITED WARRANTY, DISCLAIMER OF DAMAGES - Except for the “Right of Replacement or Refund” described in paragraph 1.F.3, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, the owner of the Project Gutenberg™ trademark, and any other party distributing a Project Gutenberg™ electronic work under this agreement, disclaim all liability to you for damages, costs and expenses, including legal fees. YOU AGREE THAT YOU HAVE NO REMEDIES FOR NEGLIGENCE, STRICT LIABILITY, BREACH OF WARRANTY OR BREACH OF CONTRACT EXCEPT THOSE PROVIDED IN PARAGRAPH 1.F.3. YOU AGREE THAT THE FOUNDATION, THE TRADEMARK OWNER, AND ANY DISTRIBUTOR UNDER THIS AGREEMENT WILL NOT BE LIABLE TO YOU FOR ACTUAL, DIRECT, INDIRECT, CONSEQUENTIAL, PUNITIVE OR INCIDENTAL DAMAGES EVEN IF YOU GIVE NOTICE OF

THE POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DAMAGE.

1.F.3. LIMITED RIGHT OF REPLACEMENT OR REFUND - If you discover a defect in this electronic work within 90 days of receiving it, you can receive a refund of the money (if any) you paid for it by sending a written explanation to the person you received the work from. If you received the work on a physical medium, you must return the medium with your written explanation. The person or entity that provided you with the defective work may elect to provide a replacement copy in lieu of a refund. If you received the work electronically, the person or entity providing it to you may choose to give you a second opportunity to receive the work electronically in lieu of a refund. If the second copy is also defective, you may demand a refund in writing without further opportunities to fix the problem.

1.F.4. Except for the limited right of replacement or refund set forth in paragraph 1.F.3, this work is provided to you 'AS-IS', WITH NO OTHER WARRANTIES OF ANY KIND, EXPRESS OR IMPLIED, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY OR FITNESS FOR ANY PURPOSE.

1.F.5. Some states do not allow disclaimers of certain implied warranties or the exclusion or limitation of certain types of damages. If any disclaimer or limitation set forth in this agreement violates the law of the state applicable to this agreement, the agreement shall be interpreted to make the maximum disclaimer or limitation permitted by the applicable state law. The invalidity or unenforceability of any provision of this agreement shall not void the remaining provisions.

1.F.6. INDEMNITY - You agree to indemnify and hold the Foundation, the trademark owner, any agent or employee of the Foundation, anyone providing copies of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works in accordance with this agreement, and any volunteers associated with the production, promotion and distribution of Project Gutenberg™ electronic works, harmless from all liability, costs and expenses, including legal fees, that arise directly or indirectly from any of the following which you do or cause to occur: (a) distribution of this or any Project Gutenberg™ work, (b) alteration, modification, or additions or deletions to any Project Gutenberg™ work, and (c) any Defect you cause.

Section 2. Information about the Mission of Project Gutenberg™

Project Gutenberg™ is synonymous with the free distribution of electronic works in formats readable by the widest variety of computers including obsolete, old, middle-aged and new computers. It exists because of the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and donations from people in all walks of life.

Volunteers and financial support to provide volunteers with the assistance they need are critical to reaching Project Gutenberg™'s goals and ensuring that the Project Gutenberg™ collection will remain freely available for generations to come. In 2001, the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation was created to provide a secure and permanent future for Project Gutenberg™ and future generations. To learn more about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation and how your efforts and donations can help, see Sections 3 and 4 and the Foundation information page at www.gutenberg.org.

Section 3. Information about the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

The Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)(3) educational corporation organized under the laws of the state of Mississippi and granted tax exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service. The Foundation's EIN or federal tax identification number is 64-6221541. Contributions to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by U.S. federal laws and your state's laws.

The Foundation's business office is located at 809 North 1500 West, Salt Lake City, UT 84116, (801) 596-1887. Email contact links and up to date contact information can be found at the Foundation's website and official page at www.gutenberg.org/contact

Section 4. Information about Donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation

Project Gutenberg™ depends upon and cannot survive without widespread public support and donations to carry out its mission of increasing the number of public domain and licensed works that can be freely distributed in machine-readable form accessible by the widest array of equipment including outdated equipment. Many small donations (\$1 to \$5,000) are particularly important to maintaining tax exempt status with the IRS.

The Foundation is committed to complying with the laws regulating charities and charitable donations in all 50 states of the United States. Compliance requirements are not uniform and it takes a considerable effort, much paperwork and many fees to meet and keep up with these requirements. We do not solicit donations in locations where we have not received written confirmation of compliance. To SEND DONATIONS or determine the status of compliance for

any particular state visit www.gutenberg.org/donate.

While we cannot and do not solicit contributions from states where we have not met the solicitation requirements, we know of no prohibition against accepting unsolicited donations from donors in such states who approach us with offers to donate.

International donations are gratefully accepted, but we cannot make any statements concerning tax treatment of donations received from outside the United States. U.S. laws alone swamp our small staff.

Please check the Project Gutenberg web pages for current donation methods and addresses. Donations are accepted in a number of other ways including checks, online payments and credit card donations. To donate, please visit: www.gutenberg.org/donate

Section 5. General Information About Project Gutenberg™ electronic works

Professor Michael S. Hart was the originator of the Project Gutenberg™ concept of a library of electronic works that could be freely shared with anyone. For forty years, he produced and distributed Project Gutenberg™ eBooks with only a loose network of volunteer support.

Project Gutenberg™ eBooks are often created from several printed editions, all of which are confirmed as not protected by copyright in the U.S. unless a copyright notice is included. Thus, we do not necessarily keep eBooks in compliance with any particular paper edition.

Most people start at our website which has the main PG search facility: www.gutenberg.org.

This website includes information about Project Gutenberg™, including how to make donations to the Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, how to help produce our new eBooks, and how to subscribe to our email newsletter to hear about new eBooks.