

Ashes of Empire

Robert W. Chambers
1898

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ASHES OF EMPIRE

A Romance

BY
ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

*Author of "Lorraine," "The Red Republic," "The King in Yellow,"
"The Haunts of Men," etc.*

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TO

ETHEL AND WALTER

ACKNOWLEDGMENT.

The author desires to acknowledge his indebtedness to the valuable works of M. le Commandant Rousset and “Un Officier de Marine.” The name of one fort, one gate and two streets have been changed.

R. W. C.

BROADALBIN, Oct. 11, 1897.

ASHES OF EMPIRE.

Behind black ramparts where an angry sun
Bedded on ashes, smoulders in the West,
Against a sky of fire I see the crest
Of battlements, deep-terraced, gun on gun.

A towered Cathedral burns athwart the rays,
A maze of windows kindle in the blaze;
Chimney and dome and belfry, one by one,
Redden to cinders through the crimson haze.

Gigantic shadows fall on roof and wall,
Black shapes of shade, fantastic, wax and fade,
Graded in grey; the phantom day is laid,
Where night's pale sister, twilight, smoothes the pall.

The double-thundered din of shotted guns
Rumbles, resounds, rolling from fort to fort;
Fringing the powder-gloom, from port to port
The fretted lightning of the cannon runs.

Ashes of years of sin, the sacrifice,
Ashes of oaths and vows and prayers and lies,
Ashes of fool and knave and worldly wise,
Ashes of empire under ashen skies.

R. W. C.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

The author's intention was to write a series of three novels covering the period of the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune. The last of the series, "The Red Republic," was written first; the first of the series, "Lorraine," was next written. The present volume, "Ashes of Empire," is the middle volume of the triad, dealing with the period of the siege of Paris from the disaster at Sedan to the surrender of the city. As "Lorraine" began with the first rumours and then the declaration of war, and, foreshadowing the siege of Paris, ended with Sedan, so the present volume foreshadows the communistic outbreak that was certain to follow the surrender of the city, and ends just as the red rag of revolt is hoisted over the war-sick capital.

A fourth volume, dealing with the southern invasion of France, coeval with the siege, and concerning the operations of the famous Army of the Loire, will be added to the series at a later date, thus completing the entire period between June, 1870, and May, 1871.

THE AUTHOR.

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ASHES OF EMPIRE.

CHAPTER I.

THE FLIGHT OF THE EMPRESS.

The throng outside the palace had swelled to menacing proportions; the gay cocked hats of the police glittered above a sombre sea of heads, threading the packed square with double strands of colour. The throng was not yet a mob; there were no rushes, no sullen retreats, no capricious stampedes, but it grew denser. Again and again the Imperial police pushed into the square only to be crushed back against the park railings by the sheer weight of the people. From the river a battalion of mutinous Mobiles advanced singing a deep swinging chorus through which the treble voices of the newsboys soared piercingly: "Extra! Extra! Frightful disaster in the north. Defeat of the French army at Sedan! Capture of the Emperor! Surrender of the army of Châlons! Terrible battle at Sedan! Extra! Extra!"

Across the bridge the people surged against the Palais Bourbon, receding, advancing, retreating, only to dash back again on the steel-barbed grille, a deluge of eager human beings, a chaos of white, tense faces and outstretched hands. And now over all swept a whirlwind of sound—of splendid sonorous song—the Marseillaise!

The crowd had become a mob. The Empire was at an end.

A short, fierce howl broke from the crowd which filled the rue de Rivoli from the Louvre to the Place de la Concorde, as an officer of the Imperial Guard appeared for a moment on the terrace above the Orangerie and attempted to speak. "Go back, go back!" shouted the mob. "Down with the Empire! Long live Republic! The Empress has

betrayed Paris! Shame! Shame!” Somebody in the crush raised a gilded wooden eagle on a fragment of broken flagstaff and shook it derisively at the palace. “Burn it!” cried the mob; “we want no eagles now!”

In a moment the gilded eagle was on fire. A drummer of the National Guard reversed his drum and beat the charge; a young girl marched beside him, also beating a drum, her thin, white face set with a hard smile, her eyes flashing under knit brows. A compact mass of people hurled themselves against the garden grille, the iron eagle and the Imperial N were torn from the gilt gates amid a tempest of cheers; the railing crashed in, the mob was loose.

At that moment, through the alley of trees, a detachment of the Garde Impériale marched silently up and massed itself before the great gate of the Tuileries, waiting there, solid, motionless, with rifles at parade rest. The mob came to a sudden halt.

“Down with the Imperial Guard! Hurrah for the National Guard!” shouted the man with the blazing eagle, and he swung the flaming emblem of empire till it crackled and showered the air with sparks and burning flakes of tinsel.

The girl with the drum, sitting beside the parapet of the Orangerie, beat the rappel and laughed down at the Imperial Guard.

“Are you afraid?” she called in a clear, bantering voice. “I’ll give you a shot at my drum—you there, with the Crimea medal!”

A young ruffian from the outer boulevards climbed to the parapet beside her. “Silence!” shouted the crowd. “Listen to the Mouse!”

The Mouse, however, contented himself with thrusting out his tongue and making frightful grimaces at the Imperial Guard, while his two companions, “Mon Oncle” and “Bibi la Goutte,” alternately laughed and proffered menaces. Twice an officer advanced a little way along the alley of trees, summoning the crowd to fall back. The second time a young fellow in the uniform of the National Guard dragged himself from the crowd and nimbly mounted the parapet.

“You tell us to disperse,” he shouted in reply; “I tell you that we’ll go as soon as that flag comes down from the Tuileries.” Then he turned to the mob with violent gestures;

“Do you know why that flag is flying? It is because the Empress is still in the Tuileries. Is she to stay there?”

“No, no! Down with the Empress! To the palace, to the palace!” howled the mob.

The Mouse, who had climbed down inside the gardens, began to yell for pillage, but a drummer of the Imperial Guard kicked him headlong through the gate and burst out laughing. The crowd surged forward, only to fall back again before the levelled rifles of the troops.

“Get off the wall!” cried the officers, angrily, “you gamine there with your drum! Go back, or we fire!”

The girl with the drum regarded them ironically and clicked her drum-sticks; the young officer of the National Guard beside her cursed the troops and shouted: “Tell your Empress to go! Who is she to sit in the Tuileries? Who sent the army to Sedan? Who betrayed the nation to the Prussians? Tell your Empress to go while she can! Do you think the people are blind and deaf? Do you think the people forget? Tell her to take herself and family out of the land she sold to Bismarck! Then let her remember the city she betrayed—the people who watch and wait for Prussian shells cowering in the cellars of devastated homes—here in the city she sold!”

The crowd shouted hoarsely and pressed to the gate again. The young orator’s fierce eyes shone with a hate so intense that the troops thought him mad. And perhaps he was, this fanatic who in days to come would prove his brainless bravery to an insurgent city and die under the merciless sabres of Thiers’ gendarmes.

“Capt Flourens,” said an officer of the Imperial Guard, “if you do not call off your mob, their blood will be on your head. Shame on you! You disgrace your uniform!”

“Captain de Sellier,” replied Flourens fiercely, “to-morrow, if the Prussian army halts before Paris, I will be the first to face it, for the honour of France. But I will not face it for the Empire. Shall Paris fight for the woman who sold France? Shall France do battle for a rotten dynasty tottering to ruin?—a dynasty that seeks to pull down the motherland with it into the abyss of corruption and cowardice and

treachery. The Prussians are here! Let them come. But before we face them let us cleanse ourselves from that which brought us to destruction. Down with the Empire!”

He ceased and stepped back. The girl beside him swung her drum to her hip, sprang up, and, facing the troops, began to sing:

“Ça ira! Ça ira!”

A thunder of cheering answered her; the steel stanchions of gate and grille were wrenched out; the mob was armed.

The Imperial Guard hesitated, then fell back slowly, as old General Mellinet galloped up, glittering with orders, sashed and spurred, his face crimson with anger.

“It is well,” he shouted, shaking his clenched fist at the crowd; —“it is well for you that her gracious Majesty commands that not one drop of blood shall be spilled to protect this palace! Cowards, go back to your kennels! The Empress is leaving the palace!”

He walked his splendid bay horse straight up to the shattered gate; a straw in the balance would decide his fate and he knew it.

“You, gentlemen,” he said violently, “are here on a vile errand. Are you not blushing for your uniform, Captain Flourens? And you, Monsieur Victorien Sardou, with your clay mask of a face,—and you Armand Gouzien—”

For a second rage choked him.

“What do you want of me, gentlemen?” he said, controlling his passion with an effort. “I have made a promise and you will find that I will keep it. If General Trochu has deserted the Empress, make the most of it. Let God deal with him. As for me, I am here to stay. Say so to your mob.”

At this moment came a roar from the crowd outside; “The Empress has gone! The Empress has gone! To the palace! To the palace! The Empress has gone!”

The crowd started forward. Then, as the soldiers silently brought their rifles to a charge, the people fell back, crushing and trampling in their hurry to regain the pavement.

“Look out, Bourke,” said a young man, in English, dragging his

companion away from the gate: "there'll be a panic if the troops fire. Come on; let's get out of this."

"Look," said his comrade, eagerly, "look, they've lowered the flag on the cupola! Do you see, Jim? The Empress has left the Tuileries!"

The crowd saw it too, and a tumult arose, answered by vociferous cheering from the packed masses in the rue de Rivoli;

"Vive la Republique! Down with the Empire!"

"Hurrah for the republic!" shouted Bourke, laughing and waving his hat. "Harewood, why the devil don't you cheer?"

Malet and Shannon, two fellow correspondents, passed and called out to them in English: "Hello, you fellows; it's all over. The Empress has gone!"

"Wait for us," motioned Bourke. But already the others were lost in the crowd, which now began to pour along the face of the park parapets towards the river.

Bourke, his arm linked in Harewood's, struggled for a while to keep his course to the rue Royale, but the pressure and shouting and torrents of dust confused him and he let himself go.

"Confound it!" he gasped, "this is almost a stampede. Keep your feet, Jim, if you want to live to get out. I hope the Empress is safe."

"Where are our horses?" asked Harewood, struggling to keep with his comrade.

"In the arcade of the Continental. Good heavens, Jim, this crush is frightful," he said, seizing a bar of the railing behind them. "Climb up and over: it is the only way!"

"They'll shoot you from the palace!" cried a dozen voices.

"I rather be shot than squashed!" replied Bourke, clambering up and over the gilded railing.

In a moment Harewood sprang to the turf beside him, panting and perspiring.

"Now!" motioned Bourke, and they glided across the terrace of the Orangerie, and let themselves down into the street, dirty, bruised and breathless.

At the end of the street toward the Place de la Concorde, a mob,

flourishing clubs and knives, was vainly trying to scale the parapets of the gardens, shouting: "Death! Death to the Empress!" But a squad of police held the parapets and hammered the more venturesome of the people with the flats of their swords. Several line soldiers and Mobile officers joined the police; on the other hand the throngs increased every moment, and their angry shouts swelled to a solid roar: "Death to the Empress! Remember Sedan!"

Among a group of frightened pedestrians who had been blocked on the quay between both mobs, were two ladies. Bourke caught a glimpse of their light summer gowns as he crept along by the quay wall. One of the ladies carried a covered basket, which she held close to her breast. Both were in helpless consternation, daring neither to proceed nor to return to the quay alone, where already the mob had seized the *Bateau Mouche*, crying, "On to Saint Cloud!"

"See those girls!" cried Bourke. "They'll get into that crush in a moment. Jim, they'll be trampled!"

Harewood started across the street just as the young lady who carried the basket turned and hastened toward the Louvre, where a cab stood near the gutter. Her companion followed, running ahead in her anxiety and calling to the cab driver, who, however, shook his head, refusing to move.

As Harewood came up, the girl who carried the basket shrank back, looking at him with startled eyes, but he raised his hat, and then turned to the cabman. "We want you," he said, sharply.

"I am engaged. I was told to wait for the Austrian ambassador," said the driver, adding impudently: "Are you his excellency, Monsieur Metternich?"

"You must take these ladies," said Harewood. "They can't stay here—the police may fire at any moment."

"Monsieur," said the cabby, sarcastically, "can I pass that mob with my cab?"

"You can pass," insisted Bourke, "to the Place Saint Germain—l'Auxerrois. We'll lead the horse." He laid one hand on the bit.

Before the cabman could protest, Harewood flung open the door,

saying; “Mesdames, there is no time to lose!”—while Bourke scowled back at the driver and shook his fist. “Pig of a cabman,” he whispered, “drive slowly or I’ll push you into the river.”

Harewood was laughing as he closed the cab door and stepped to the other side of the horse.

“Now, Bourke,” he said, “touch up your jehu!”

Bourke uttered another awful threat and signalled the cabby. The latter obeyed with a despairing grimace, and the horse moved off along the quay, the two young fellows walking on either side of the horse’s head.

In a moment they were in the crowd that surrounded the gate of the Carrousel, but the crowd was not very compact and they threaded their way slowly, amid cheering and singing and savage yells, “Death! Death to the Empress!”

“Poor thing!” said Harewood. “Hang these ragamuffin cutthroats! Go slowly, Bourke. Hello, what’s up now?”

From a stairway on the south colonnade of the Louvre a group of ladies and gentlemen were issuing. Hurriedly they traversed the court to the street gate, where a mob of loungers stood, staring up at the gray façade. As one of the party, a lady heavily veiled in crêpe, stepped out to the sidewalk, a gamin clinging to the gate piped up shrilly:

“That’s the Empress!”

Instantly one of the gentleman in attendance seized the urchin by one ear and boxed the other soundly, saying, “I’ll teach you to shout, ‘Vive la Prusse!’ ”

For a moment the knot of idlers laughed. Then some one in the crowd said distinctly: “All the same, that is the Empress.”

A silence followed, broken by a single voice, low but perfectly distinct: “Death to the Empress!”

There was a restless movement, a quick pressing forward of wicked faces, a shuffle of heavy shoes. In a second the crowd doubled itself as if by magic; voices rose, harsh and ominous. Somebody struck the iron railing with a steel-banded club. Bourke, standing close to the gutter by the cab, felt the door pushed outward and he turned, alarmed, as

both young girls sprang out. One of them ran to the Empress and motioned toward the cab.

“Hasten, madame,” she said, “here is a cab.”

Before the crowd comprehended what was being done the Empress had passed them, followed by another lady and two gentlemen.

“Good heavens,” muttered Harewood to Bourke, “it is the Empress and Madame Le Breton.”

The Empress laid one hand on the cab window, then drew back and said: “I would not wish to take your cab if you also are in danger.”

With one foot on the carriage step she looked back at the young girls, appearing utterly oblivious of the risk she herself ran.

“Hasten, madame,” they cried. “We are in no danger! Ah, hasten, madame!”

Both of the gentlemen in waiting urged the Empress to enter, but she refused, and looked steadily at the crowd, which was now closing round the little group. Then she quietly stooped and kissed the girls.

“Thank you,” she said, “I accept, my children.”

Bourke and Harewood had recognized her two escorts as the Italian minister and the Austrian ambassador. And, while the Empress and her lady in waiting entered the cab, Bourke said in English:

“Go quickly, gentlemen; these young ladies are safe with us. God knows why the mob does not attack you!”

Monsieur de Metternich turned, cool and collected, and bowed to Bourke. The Empress leaned from the cab window and looked at the young girls standing together, white and frightened.

“Will you tell me your name?”

They seemed not to understand, and Harewood said:

“Quick, the Empress asks your names?”

“I—I—am Yvette Chalais—and this is Hildé, my sister,” stammered one of the girls. As she spoke, in her embarrassment the basket dropped from her hands, the lid flew open, and three white pigeons whirled out, fluttering through the crowd, that scattered for a moment, trying to see what had happened.

“Now!” cried Bourke, as the two diplomats jumped into the cab

and slammed the door. The cabman seized his reins and lashed savagely at his horse, the crowd stumbled back shrieking, and, before they understood, the cab dashed away in a torrent of dust and flying pebbles.

In his excitement Bourke laughed aloud, crying: "Jim! Jim! What a fool of a mob! Well, of all the bloodless revolutions I ever heard of! Look! Here come some troops, too. The thing is over!"

The thing was nearly over. Even the Saint Germain omnibuses were running now, halting as usual for passengers in front of the beautiful church opposite, and to one of these omnibuses Bourke and Harewood conducted the two young ladies who had given up their cab to the Empress of France. Nobody interfered with them, nobody seemed to notice them except a pasty-visaged young man with pale, pig-like eyes who nodded hastily to Bourke and walked away.

"That was Speyer, the war correspondent for that German-American sheet," said Bourke to Harewood. "I didn't know he was in Paris."

Harewood frowned and said nothing until their disconcerted but grateful charges were safely seated in the omnibus. Then Bourke said several civil things in well-intentioned French.

Both young men offered to act as further escort, were timidly thanked but unmistakably discouraged, and they finally stood back, raising their hats as the omnibus started.

"Thank you again for all you have done," said Hildé. Yolette inclined her head with pretty reticence; the driver cracked his whip and the three horses moved off at a trot.

Harewood stared after the vehicle until it disappeared. Bourke lighted a cigarette, smiled quietly, and said: "Come on, Jim."

As they turned into the rue de Rivoli Harewood began: "Hildé Chalais—that's one of them—I don't know which. Pretty, isn't she? I mean the one with the dark eyes. Wonder whether we'll see them again. Sorry they lost their pigeons. Nice girls—don't you think so? They live out on the rue d'Ypres. We'll pass their house next week when we go to Saint Cloud by the Porte Rouge."

Harewood laughed easily and walked on in silence. Life was very

pleasant at times—even delightful when lighted by a pair of deep hazel eyes.

“I wonder—I wonder—” he muttered.

“What?” asked Bourke.

“Nothing—only that one with the brown eyes—plucky little thing to give up her cab—eh, Cecil?”

“Yes.”

“Well, if we go to Saint Cloud, we’ll go by way of the rue d’Ypres.”

“And there you’ll stay?” asked Bourke, scornfully.

“What? I? What for?”

Bourke yawned in his face and said wearily: “Because, Jim, I never knew you to miss making an ass of yourself when the devil sent the opportunity.”

CHAPTER II.

“THE MOUSE.”

In the heated silence of afternoon the tap, tap, tap of a drum came up from the southwest, now indistinct and smothered, now louder as the sound approached the Porte Rouge, waking soft echoes along the sodded fortifications.

A dozing sentry in front of the Prince Murat barracks sauntered out to the gutter, shading his face with one tanned hand. At the end of the rue d'Ypres sunlight sparkled on the brass of a drum, bayonets twinkled through the dust haze, a single bugle blew long and faintly.

When the red trousers of the gate patrol had passed and the dull rumble of the drum had softened to a vibration in the dazzling stillness, the sentinel strolled back to loaf, blinking, in his shadowy sentry-box, leaning on the chassepot rifle which he did not know how to use. For the sentinel was a National Guardsman, and they had taken away his Gras rifle and given him a chassepot, and set him to guard empty barracks in a street inhabited principally by sparrows.

At that moment, however, the rue d'Ypres, which, with its single row of weather-battered houses, faced the fortifications of the Porte Rouge secteur, was not entirely deserted. Beside the sentinel and the sparrows, some one else was moving aimlessly about in the sunshine with his hands thrust into the pockets of a stained jacket.

As he passed the barrack grille he raised his hard face and fixed a pair of narrow, uncertain eyes on the sentinel. One of his eyes was very bright—almost luminous, like the eyes of small animals at night; the other eye was sightless and seared.

There is something ominous in the upward gaze of a startled animal; there was something more sinister in the glance of “The Mouse” as it fell before the frowning, suspicious face of the sentinel.

“Passez au large!” growled the sentinel, straightening up.

“C’est ça; et ta sœur!” retorted the Mouse, with a frightful leer. Then he passed on, his mouth distorted in a smile, for he was thinking

of the future and of destiny, and the market value of petroleum. He was a philosopher at all times, occasionally, perhaps, a prophet.

The Mouse enjoyed the hot September sunshine. As he slouched past the passage de l'Ombre and across the rue d'Ypres he yawned with semi-torpid satisfaction, and shuffled his worn shoes luxuriously through the taller grass below the glacis. Exertion disagreed with the Mouse; unnecessary effort was abhorrent to him. Under his insolent eyelids his shifty eyes searched the talus of the fortifications for a grassy, sun-warmed nook, created by Providence and the Imperial engineers for such as he.

Across the street the afternoon sun blazed on the shabby houses. The iron gateway of the Prince Murat barracks was closed, the National Guard sentinel now leaned in the shadow of his box, drowsy and motionless. Not a soul was stirring in the street; there was no sound, no movement except when a dusty sparrow raised its head from the hot grass, beak agape as though parched.

The Mouse contemplated the sparrow with his solitary eye. He, too, was thirsty. He clacked his tongue twice, spat upon the grass, scratched one large ear, and yawned. Presently he drew a pipe from some recess beneath his jacket, filled it, rammed one dirty finger into the bowl, and gazed trustfully toward heaven for a match. Neither matches nor manna were falling that year in Paris; there were to be other showers from the autumn skies.

With one finger in the bowl of his pipe and the dingy stem in his mouth he gazed heavenward until the sun made him blink. Then he shifted his glance along the glacis of the fortifications. Across the rue d'Ypres, where there were houses, a caged canary bird twittered, trilled and ceased as suddenly as it had begun. Without turning his head the Mouse's eye searched the other side of the street until it rested on a sign:

Chalais Dealer in Birds.

Under this hung another sign;

Apartment to Let,
Inquire Within.

After a minute's restless contemplation of the signs and the open door, the Mouse sauntered over to the bird store, slouched up to the window and pressed his insignificant nose against it. Little by little the dim interior of the bird store became visible. He leisurely surveyed the rows of wire and wicker cages, drumming on the window glass with grimy fingers. A grey and scarlet parrot, dozing on a perch, woke up and turned a penetrating look on him.

The Mouse flattened his face against the window and thrust his tongue out at the parrot.

At first the bird paid little attention to this insult, but, as the Mouse persevered, the parrot eyed him with increasing animosity.

"Coco! Coco! Salaud! Tiens pour toi, vieux crétin!" sneered the Mouse, tapping on the window with his pipestem and distorting his mouth in derision until the parrot flapped its wings and screamed, the feathers on its head erect with excitement and irritation. One by one the other birds, now also greatly agitated, joined in; the jackdaw croaked and chattered, and the finches, thrushes and canaries chorused a shrill treble. A young monkey in a corner set up an ear-piercing shriek and a red squirrel rushed madly around in his wire wheel.

The Mouse was amused. With sneers and jibes and jeering gestures he excited the parrot; he made awful faces at the monkey until the little creature clung to the cage wires, shivering and screaming; he frightened the smaller birds by waving his dirty fingers to and fro before the window frames. Presently, however, he tired of the sport; his restless eye roamed about the interior of the shop; he pressed his pitted face closer to the glass, with now and then a rapid sidelong glance peculiar to the chevalier of industry the world over.

There was nobody in the outer shop, that was clear. There seemed to be nothing to steal there, either: the Mouse did not consider birds worth stealing. Still, nobody seemed to be about, and it was the instinct of the Mouse to rummage. He withdrew from the window,

assured himself that the street was deserted, then slouched silently around to the open door and entered.

As he set his worn shoe upon the threshold the feathers on the parrot's neck flattened in alarm, the monkey crouched trembling in a corner of his cage, every little bird became mute and motionless.

For a minute the Mouse peered about the shop. The squirrel still scrambled madly in his wheel, and the narrow eye of the Mouse followed the whirling spokes.

There was a closed door at the further end of the room; the Mouse fixed his eye upon it and stepped softly across the floor, one hand outstretched toward the knob. When he had it in his hand he paused, undecided, then turned the handle in silence. Instantly something moved on the other side—something heavy and soft—the door was pushed open with a steady, resistless pressure that forced the Mouse back flat against the wall.

It was then that the Mouse, peering over his shoulder, felt his blood freeze and his shabby knees give way. For, staring up into his face, stood a full-grown lioness with her brilliant eyes fixed on his. He would have shrieked if he could, but terror paralyzed him; he felt that he was going to swoon. Suddenly there came the sound of voices, a distant door opened, steps echoed across a tiled hallway, and two girls entered the shop from the further room. The lioness turned her head at the sound, hesitated, glanced back at the Mouse and finally slunk hastily away, only to be seized and held by one of the girls, while the other alternately slapped, cuffed and kissed her.

"Schéhèrazade ought to be slapped instead of kissed," cried the taller girl, shoving the anxious but docile lioness towards the doorway; "really, Yolette, you spoil her; some day she'll run out into the street, and then they'll shoot her."

"Poor darling," said Yolette, "she didn't mean to be naughty. Somebody must have left the door open—Schéhèrazade can't turn the knob, you know." As she spoke she laid one hand on the neck of the lioness.

"Come, naughty one," she said, and urged the great creature

towards the inner room, calling back to her sister: "Hildé, dear, shut the door!"

"I've a mind to shut it on Schéhérazade's tail," said Hildé: "she's frightened the birds and animals nearly to death. Our squirrel is going mad, I believe."

The parrot clamoured on its perch, and she went over to quiet it, talking all the while.

"Poor little Mehemet Ali, did the big lion frighten him? There! There! and poor little Rocco, too!" turning towards the shivering monkey. "It's a perfect shame—it is, indeed!"

"Hildé! Do shut the door!" called Yolette from the inner room; "I'm going to give Schéhérazade her ball to play with and then I'll come out."

Hildé gave one last pat to the parrot's head and went towards the door. As she laid her hand on the knob her eyes encountered a pair of dusty, flat shoes, protruding beneath the sill. The shoes covered the feet of the Mouse, and, as she threw back the door with a startled exclamation, the Mouse himself stood revealed, terribly haggard from the effects of his recent fright, but now sufficiently recovered to bound with much agility into the street.

"What are you doing here?" stammered Hildé, following him to the outer door.

"I?" said the Mouse, recovering his composure a little and crossing one foot before the other. "I, mademoiselle, am an authorized agent for the public defense."

"If you are soliciting subscriptions, why did you not ring the doorbell or knock?" asked Hildé, as Yolette entered and stood at her side.

"Why, to tell the truth," said the Mouse, bowing impudently, "I only intended to ask for a match. I knocked, politely, as I was taught to do in my youth, but—"

"If you please, will you go away?" interrupted Yolette, quickly.

"I have the honour," said the Mouse, removing his greasy, peaked cap with a flourish, and smoothing the lovelocks plastered over each

ear, "I have the honour to obey. Always at the service of ladies—always devoted"—he flourished his pipe with dignity—"although I had hoped for the small courtesy of a match."

"Hildé," whispered Yolette, "he will go away if you give him a match."

Hildé stepped to the counter, found a card of matches, and returned to the door. The Mouse's small eye followed every expression on the two girlish faces. He took the matches with condescension, smirked, and continued impudently: "Ladies, in the present unfortunate condition of public affairs, in the face of a revolution which, within a week, has changed the government of France from an empire to a republic, in the face of the impending advance of the Prussian armies and the ultimate investment of the city of Paris, may I venture to solicit a small contribution for the purpose of adding to the patriotic fund, destined to arm the fortifications yonder with new and improved breech-loading cannon?"

He glanced from Hildé to Yolette, his wary eye narrowing to a slit.

"I don't believe he's an agent," whispered Hildé; "don't give him anything."

Yolette drew a small purse from her gown and looked at the Mouse with sincere eyes.

"Will you really give it to the public defense?" she asked. "Or—if you are hungry and need it for yourself—"

"Don't do it," murmured Hildé; "he is not honest."

The Mouse's eyes filled with tears, his lips quivered.

"Honesty is often clothed in rags," he sniveled, drawing himself up. "I thank you for your courtesy. I will go."

He moved away, furtively brushing a tear from his cheek. Yolette stepped across the threshold and touched his ragged elbow impulsively. He turned with a dramatic start, accepted the small silver coin, then stalked across the street, his head on his breast, his arms folded. Presently the stalk relapsed into a walk, then into a shuffle, then into a slouch. The sunshine lay warm on the grass-grown fortifications; where it lay warmest the Mouse sat him down and

crossed his legs.

When he had lighted his pipe he stretched out at full length, both arms behind his head, cap tilted to shade his single eye. Under the peak of the cap he could see the pipe-smoke curl; he could also see the long yellow road, stretching away into the country from the Porte Rouge. Out there somewhere—perhaps very far, perhaps very near—the Prussian armies were moving across France toward Paris. The thought amused the Mouse. He scratched one large ear and speculated. With the Prussians would come bombardment, with bombardment would come panic, with panic might come anarchy, and with anarchy would come pillage!

The Mouse smacked his lips over the pipe-stem. He reflected that the revolution, accomplished five days previous, had brought with it no plunder so far as he was concerned. It had been a stupid revolution—shouting, jostling the bourgeoisie, a rush at the Tuileries, a whack over the head from a rifle-stock, but no pillage. In vain had he, the Mouse, in company with two ambitious companions, Bibi la Goutte and Mon Oncle, descended from the shady nooks of Montparnasse with the frank intention of rummaging the Tuileries—and perhaps some houses of the stupid citizens. In vain had Bibi la Goutte bawled anarchy and treason, in vain had Mon Oncle demanded to be led to the sack of palaces. The brutal guards had thumped Mon Oncle with their rifle-butts, the Imperial police had mauled Bibi la Goutte, and, as for the Mouse, he had gained nothing but an abrasion of the scalp from contact with an officer's sword-hilt.

But now the Mouse truly hoped that, with the advent of the victorious Prussian armies before the walls of Paris, things might be different. When the big shells began to sail over the Seine and knock houses and churches into kindling wood, the Mouse intended to do a little exploring on his private account, and he acknowledged with enthusiasm that it would be a degenerate knight of leisure who should fail to amass a pretty competency.

So the Mouse lay musing and smoking in the warm September sun, one eye half closed, but still fixed on the yellow road which crawled

across the plain at his feet. He was absolutely contented; he had tobacco, sunshine—and 50 centimes in silver in his pocket, to spend on food or drink, as he chose. Once he thought of the lion, and shuddered at the thought. Some day when he had time he would find a way to poison the creature, he hoped, and incidentally to rob the bird store.

As he lay diverted by these pleasant thoughts, he became aware of a cloud of dust on the road below. He watched it; it came nearer and nearer; he could distinguish the red trousers of French infantry; a gun boomed from some distant bastion; another, still more distant, answered the signal. The Mouse sat up. He could see that the dust cloud enveloped heavy moving columns of troops, advancing slowly toward the walls of Paris. At the Porte Rouge drums were beating.

The Mouse rose, stretched, yawned and slouched off down the embankment to the street. As he passed the bird store, Yolette and Hildé came to the door, gazing anxiously toward the fortifications.

The Mouse leered at them, removed his cap, laying a dirty hand on his heart. “Always the ladies’ slave,” he called across the street, and shuffled on toward the Porte Rouge.

At the gate he shoved and elbowed his way through the increasing throng until he reached the pont-levis. The line sentinels drove him back again, but he managed to crawl up to the grille and hang on to the steel bars. Here he found himself in company with two bosom friends, Bibi la Goutte and Mon Oncle.

“Mince!” observed Bibi, as a column of dusty hussars galloped up to the drawbridge and drew bridle, “they’ve seen uncomfortable things out yonder—those hussars. It’s Vinoy’s 13th corps back from Badinguet’s fête champêtre.”

Mon Oncle sneered and mimicked the officer’s commands as a close column of infantry came plodding through the gate, haggard, ghastly, beneath their coat of tan and dust.

“Bigre!” observed Bibi, under his breath, but the Mouse climbed up on the grille and hurled insults at the exhausted troops: “Malheur, si ça fait pas gueler! On dirait des chaouchs de Biribi! Ah! mince, on

prend des airs déjà! Mort aux crétins! On n'est pas sur l'pavé de Badinguet, tas de sergots!"

Then he spat upon the ground, shook his fist at the sky, shrugged and slouched out of the crowd, followed closely by Bibi la Goutte and Mon Oncle.

The latter was somewhat puzzled at the Mouse's sudden outburst, and looked doubtfully at Bibi.

"The Mouse is capricious," he observed.

"No," said Bibi, scornfully, "the Mouse doesn't care, except that there's another army corps in Paris now; and when the hour comes to do a little pillaging—these imbecile soldiers may annoy us."

The Mouse remained mute, but, as he trudged over the glacis, he cast a glance of horrible malignity at the battered, sun-scorched soldiers, toiling across the drawbridge below.

Then, with a gesture, he turned his back, closed his sightless eye and sat down on the grass. Bibi regarded him in breathless admiration, his lean jaws working with emotion.

"What a general he would make!" he whispered to Mon Oncle.

"Or what an assassin!" replied Mon Oncle, aloud, mopping his fat face.

The Mouse felt the compliment, but said nothing. The drums beat continuously down by the gate, the dull cries of the officers came up to them from below mingled with the murmur of the throng at the pont-levis.

Bibi, sitting on the grass, nodded drowsily in the hot sunshine. Mon Oncle stretched his short bandy legs out under an acacia bush, and presently fell asleep. The Mouse, too, appeared to slumber, except when a breeze moved the brim of his cap, and a stray spot of sunlight glimmered on the iris of his sightless eye.

CHAPTER III.

APARTMENT TO LET.

Yolette, standing at the door of the bird store, with her arm around Hildé's waist, and one hand shading her face, could see the exhausted infantry tramping through the Porte Rouge, between the steadily increasing throngs of people.

The crowd at first was silent but gravely attentive. Little by little, however, they realised what it meant; they began to understand that this entry of Blanchard's division from Mézières, intact, was nothing less than the first actual triumph for French strategy since the Uhlan vanguard galloped over the frontier and the Prussian needle-guns cracked across the Spicheren in the early days of August. For, when Blanchard's division of Vinoy's 13th corps stole out of Mézières at dawn on September 2, 1870, with the furnace breath of Sedan in their faces and the German cavalry at their heels, nobody, not even General Vinoy himself, dared hope to turn a retreat into victory or to bring back one soldier out of ten again under the guns of Paris.

Yet now it was done. On September 5 Blanchard's division joined Maud'huy's at Laon, and the 13th corps was reunited. And here they were; it was Guilhem's brigade, the 6th Hussars and the 42nd and 35th line infantry that surged in at the Porte Rouge, drums beating, beating, beating, through the pulsating dust waves, bayonets crimsoned by the red level rays of the setting sun.

Suddenly on the forts of Issy, Vanves, Montrouge and Bicêtre the siege guns boomed their welcome to the returning troops. Fort after fort took up the salute, bastion after bastion, until from the fort d'Ivry to the battery of the Double Crown, and from Fontenay to the Fortress of the East, the thunder rolled in one majestic reverberation, dominated by the tremendous shocks from Mont-Valérien.

When the roar from the sixteen forts had ceased and the immense waves of sound rolled further and further away, leaving in the ears of the people nothing but the drum taps of marching columns, a

sentiment, long unknown, stirred every heart in Paris. The sentiment was hope. At the Porte Rouge they were cheering now; Montparnasse heard the unaccustomed sound, and the streets swarmed from the Luxembourg to the Montrouge gate. They were cheering, too, in the north, across the river, where the artillery of Maud'huy's division was parking along the avenue de la Grande-Armée.

Down at the Porte Rouge the hussars entered at a trot, trumpeters sounding the regimental march, while the crowd broke into frantic cheering, and tear-choked voices blessed them and tear-stained faces were raised to the hard, bright sky, burnished with a fiercer radiance where the sun hung over the smoking Meudon woods, like a disk of polished copper.

And so after all they had returned, this army given up for lost; they had returned singed by the flames in the north, stained with northern rain and mud and dust, exhausted, starving, reeling under the weight of their knapsacks and rifles, but saved from annihilation.

Paris forgot everything except that—forgot the red trail of butchery from Forbach to Metz; forgot the smoking debris of battles lost and battles worse than lost; forgot Strassebourg, crumbling under German shells; forgot Metz, drenched with blood, cowering under the spectre of famine; forgot Toul and Belfort and the imbecile manœuvres of an ironclad fleet—all this was forgotten in the joy of the moment. What if three German armies were even then on the march toward Paris? Paris would be ready; Paris would arm; nothing should withstand her; nothing could penetrate her cuirassed armour of enormous forts—sixteen forts strung outside the walls on a circle of lesser redoubts and batteries, sixty kilometres in circumference. A necklace of steel, a double necklace, for inside the ring of forts lay the city fortifications proper—the enormous enceinte forty-one kilometres long, encircling the city from the Seine to the Marne. The forts and the ninety-four bastions mounted two thousand two hundred cannon, huge pieces of fifteen and twelve, and even a few thirteen ton, marine monsters of nineteen and sixteen. The people had heard their voices from Mont-Valérien, setting the whole city rocking with the

earthquake of their welcome to the 13th corps. And how the throngs cheered!

Hildé and Yolette leaned together from their door and saw a pillar of dust, dyed crimson in the sun's last level rays, moving up the rue d'Ypres.

"They are coming—they will pass here," cried Hildé; "look, Yolette!"

"I see," said Yolette, her voice unsteady with excitement: "I am going to get all our bread and the three bottles of wine!"

She dropped her sister's hand and ran back through the shop to the kitchen, talking all the while excitedly to herself; "quick! quick! first the wine—then a glass—no, three glasses—now, the bread—all of it—now a little basket—ah, mon dieu! where is my little basket? Oh, there you are; and there is a brioche in you, too! It shall be eaten by one of our brave soldiers!" Schéhérazade, the lioness, sprawling on a rug in the small square parlour, blinked amiably up into Yolette's flushed face. The girl stooped and gave her a hasty kiss in passing—then ran out with the basket, closing the door quickly behind her.

The street was a turmoil. A torrent of dust flooded with sunset light rolled and eddied above the red caps of the passing troops. Strange timid eyes sought hers, strange eager faces rose up before her and passed on, blotted out in the whirls of crimsoned dust. The tears sprang to her eyes; she could not speak, but she held out her basket to the passing troops. A soldier somewhere in the throng cried: "Is the wine for us, madame?" and another close beside her wiped the red wine from his lips with the sleeve of a stained overcoat and passed the bottle to a comrade, laughing from sheer weakness.

"Our poor soldiers! Our poor soldiers!" repeated Hildé, holding to Yolette's apron; "See! Look! Everybody is bringing them bread and wine now! But you were the first, Yolette, you thought of it first, my darling!"

Yolette saw nothing distinctly in the surging crowd around, but from every side spectral faces appeared through the dust, sad, boyish eyes grew brighter as they met hers—grimy, calloused hands reached

out for a morsel of bread or a drop of wine.

Already Hildé had run back to the kitchen and returned with a big china bowl, into which she poured their last bottle of wine; and now the bowl passed from lip to lip until it was lost to sight in the dust cloud.

"Everybody is bringing bread and wine—look, Yolette," cried Hildé; "Oh, the poor things—the poor sick things! Do you believe they will all get a little wine? There are so many—so many—"

"The bowl is empty," began Yolette; but at that moment the dust cloud wavered, grew thinner, whirled up in one last flurry as a mounted officer galloped by, then slowly settled and sifted back into the roadway.

The regiment had passed.

Yolette watched the vanishing column down the street until the dust hid the last straggler and the tap, tap, tap of the drum died away. Hildé, standing beside her, dried the tears from her cheeks.

After a silence Yolette said: "If we are going to have war—here—near Paris—nobody will want to rent our apartment—"

"I don't know," replied Hildé; "it is a very nice apartment, and not at all dear." Yolette came back to the doorstep, touching the corner of her apron to her eyes.

"I mean that if the Germans do come, their cannon balls might fly over the rampart there, and hit our house. Perhaps nobody would care to take an apartment so near the fortifications, if they knew that."

"Of course we will explain the danger before accepting anybody's money," added Yolette, "but I do hope somebody may like the apartment. I don't know what we shall do if it is not rented by October."

She stood a moment on the door-step, thinking, saddened by the memory of the regiment that had just passed.

Hildé clasped both hands behind her and looked up at the sky. It was not yet dusk, although the sun had gone down behind the blue forest of Meudon, but the fresh sweetness of twilight was in the air. Soft lights lay across the grassy glacis opposite; the shrubs on the

talus moved in the evening breeze.

Something else was moving over there, too—three sinister figures, shuffling across the grass. The Mouse and his two familiars were going back to the passage de l'Ombre.

As the Mouse passed he flourished his cap again and called across the street something about being a slave to the ladies, but that speech had well-nigh been his last, for just as the shabby trio started to traverse the roadway two horsemen wheeled at a gallop out of the rue Pandore, and one of them hustled Bibi la Goutte into the arms of Mon Oncle, who collapsed with a muffled shriek, dragging down the Mouse as he fell.

There is a Providence for drunkards; there is also Hermes, the god of thieves, otherwise nothing could have saved the Mouse and Bibi from the horses' hoofs.

The two riders drew bridle, wheeled and turned to see what damage had been done, as the Mouse picked himself out of the dust with a frightful imprecation.

One of the horsemen, who had impulsively dismounted, was immediately set upon by Bibi and Mon Oncle. Taken by surprise he knocked them both flat with his loaded riding crop, and, jumping back, called out in English:

"For heaven's sake, Bourke, ride that one-eyed fellow down,—he's got a knife!"

The other horseman set spurs to his mount and sprang at the Mouse. That ornamental bandit took to his heels, lunging out viciously with his knife as he passed the dismounted man. The latter slashed the Mouse twice with his riding crop, and, in turn, was felled by a blow with a club wielded by the fat hands of Mon Oncle.

"Harewood!" cried Bourke, hastily dismounting, "have they hurt you badly?"

The fallen man scrambled to his feet. There were two red streaks on his face; his hair was wet and matted.

"No; where have they gone?"

"Into that dark alley. Do you want to follow them? Hold on, man,

don't tumble!—wait—I'll give you an arm. Are you badly hurt? By Jove! I believe you are!"

"I'm not; I'm all right. I'll—I'll just go over and sit down a moment. Is there a cut on my head?"

"Yes," said Bourke. "Come over to that house. I'll ask for a little cold water."

He slung the bridles of both horses under his left elbow, and with his right arm supported his dazed comrade to the bird store, where Hildé and Yolette stood watching them in silent consternation.

"Well," said Harewood faintly, "there are our little friends of the pigeons."

Yolette recognized them as they reached the sidewalk; Hildé took one hesitating step forward, leaned on Yolette's shoulder and fixed her frightened eyes on Harewood. That young man was so dizzy that he could only accomplish the bow he attempted by holding on to Bourke. Bourke took off his hat and asked for water; Yolette, outwardly self-possessed, brought a basin of water, a towel, and her own smelling salts, while Hildé dragged out a chair and seated Harewood upon it.

And now, the feminine instinct of consolation being fully awakened in both Hildé and Yolette, Harewood was requested to smell the smelling salts, and rest in the chair, and sip a little brandy from a glass. He did as he was bidden. Bourke expressed his obligations, and Harewood's, in sincere if not fluent terms; Hildé and Yolette said that he and Harewood were very welcome.

After that Bourke was too diffident and Harewood too dazed to continue conversation in the French language, so they were silent.

Yolette tore strips from a cambric handkerchief, and soaked them in water, and looked at Harewood's damaged head. Hildé turned away. She could not bear to see suffering, and she felt that the young man in the chair was probably enduring unheard-of agony.

Bourke repeated at intervals, "How is it, old fellow? Better?" until he remembered that politeness required him to say what he had to say in French. He stood on the sidewalk, and looked up at the façade of

the grimy house where the two signs hung.

"Apartment to let," he repeated aloud. Then a thought struck him. "Harewood, here's an apartment to let directly over our heads. It's what we're looking for—good view from the fortifications, you know, and close to the Porte Rouge. What do you say? Shall I look at it?"

"If you like," said Harewood with an effort; "Bourke, I believe—I believe I'm going to ask you to take me to a hotel. My noddle goes round and round, you know. I don't think I should care about riding out to Saint Cloud to-night."

Bourke examined his comrade's head anxiously.

"We'll have to ride back to the Luxembourg quarter to find a hotel," he observed, "there are no hotels out here. Can you stand the jolting?"

"Oh, yes," replied Harewood.

"If you choose," continued Bourke, "we might take that apartment now—if it's furnished—and I could bundle you into bed and ride the horses back and have our traps sent up to-morrow."

He turned to Hildé and made his excuses for using English instead of French:

"I do not speak French fluently; we were talking about the apartment which, I notice, is to rent on the top floor. Could you tell me where I might find the concierge or the landlord?"

"The landlord?" repeated Hildé; "why—why—I—and my sister are the landlords."

She smiled very prettily as she spoke. Yolette's eyes brightened. Could it be that after all they were actually going to rent their apartment?

"It is furnished," said Yolette, looking at Harewood.

She spoke with reserve, but her heart beat high and two spots of colour deepened in her cheeks.

"We should be very glad to rent it," said Hildé in a grave voice; "it is not at all dear, I think."

She mentioned the price diffidently.

"That, of course, includes heat, light, and attendance," added

Yollette, turning to Harewood.

“Gas?” asked Bourke.

“No, candles, monsieur. The fireplaces burn wood.”

“And the attendance?” asked Bourke, curiously.

“My sister and I—you see—we are the attendants,” said Yollette, without embarrassment.

“Will you show me the apartment now?” asked Bourke.

“With pleasure, monsieur.”

He glanced at Harewood. Harewood nodded back. Hildé brought a lighted candle to the stairway, and Yollette took it, inviting Bourke, with a gesture, to follow.

When they had gone away up the stairs, Hildé returned to Harewood and stood a moment, silent. Presently she went out to the street and caressed the two horses. They turned their gentle heads and looked at her with dark, liquid eyes.

“Are you fond of horses?” asked Harewood, sitting upright, and touching the bandage on his throbbing head.

“I love all animals,” said Hildé, seriously.

She came back to the chair where he was seated.

“Does your head hurt very much?”

“Why, no, thank you, it is nothing at all.”

After a moment she said: “I ought to tell you, monsieur, before you decide to take the apartment, there is one very serious drawback to it.”

“What is that?” enquired Harewood, absently.

“The location.”

“The location?”

“Yes. If the Germans should come and fire cannon at the city, I—I fear that our house is very much exposed.” Harewood looked narrowly at the girl beside him. Her clear brown eyes met his quite simply.

“In that event, what would you yourself do, mademoiselle?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she replied.

Bourke came down the stairs, holding the candle for Yollette.

“It’s very nice, very nice indeed,” he said. “I think we ought to

take it, Harewood—I do, indeed.”

Harewood raised his eyes at Bourke’s somewhat enthusiastic recital of the charms of a top-floor apartment in the shabbiest quarter of Paris.

“Very well,” he said, “we will take it.”

“But—but we must tell you something first—a drawback to the location,” began Yolette, and then stopped. She was fearful that if the new tenants were warned of the danger of German shells they might reconsider the matter. But she was bound in honour to tell, and she set her lips resolutely and looked at Hildé.

“Oh,” said Harewood, quietly, glancing at Bourke, “*Mademoiselle* means that we stand a chance of being shelled when the Germans come. Do you think that might be a drawback, Bourke?”

“Pooh!” said the latter, briskly; “Come on, old fellow, I’ll help you up to bed—and a jolly good bed it is, too—and then I’ll ride the horses over to the *Vaugirard*. I’ll be back in an hour.”

“Do—do you really mean to take the apartment, now?” asked Yolette, breathless.

“With your permission,” said Harewood, rising from his chair with a polite inclination of his bandaged head.

Hildé flushed with happiness.

“Our permission,” repeated Yolette. “O, we are very, very glad to give it. And I hope, *monsieur*, you will like the house, and I hope that the cannon balls will not come at all.”

Bourke repressed a smile and said he hoped they wouldn’t.

Harewood added seriously: “I am sure we shall be delighted—even with the cannon balls.”

Yolette ventured to smile a little; Hildé laughed outright. Bourke gave his arm to Harewood, saying good-night to Hildé and Yolette.

When he had put Harewood to bed and tucked him in, he came down stairs again, two at a jump, and vaulted into his saddle.

As he galloped toward the *rue de Vaugirard*, leading Harewood’s horse, far away on the horizon a rocket mounted toward the stars, higher, higher, until the wake, showering the night with nebulous

radiance, wavered, faded and went out. And, as he looked, another rocket whizzed upward from the Point-du-Jour, leaving a double trail of incandescent dust crowned with clustered lights which drifted eastward and went out, one by one. Then night blotted the last live spark from the sky.

Bourke turned in his saddle.

Over the forts of the south the rim of a crimson disk appeared—a circle of smouldering fire, slowly rising like a danger signal, red as blood.

It was the harvest moon of September.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOUSE ON THE RAMPARTS.

The sun was shining through the blinds when Harewood awoke. He lay quite still examining his new surroundings, trying to remember where he was. The bandage on his head had stiffened; he untied it, and was gratified to discover that no serious damage had been accomplished by Mon Oncle.

As he lay there, winking amiably in the sunlight, he heard somebody tramping about in the next room. Without moving, he opened his mouth and called:

“Bourke!”

“Hello!” came the answer.

“What time is it?”

“Half past seven! I’m nearly dressed.”

“Is to-day Saturday?”

“Saturday, tenth of September, eighteen hundred and seventy,” replied Bourke. A moment later he appeared at the door and enquired, “How’s your noddle?”

“All right,” yawned Harewood, “how’s your own?”

Bourke sat down at the foot of the bed and buttoned his collar, whistling gaily.

“I saw Shannon and Malet last night,” he said; “I met them on the boulevard Montparnasse after I stabled the horses. They are coming this morning. I asked them to wire Stauffer and Speyer.”

Harewood sniffed.

“Stauffer seems to be all right,” he observed, “but I can’t stand Speyer.”

“I don’t like Speyer any better than you do, but we can’t leave him out of a conference. What we’ve got to do is to hold a conference; I’ve telegraphed Winston and Sutherland; the whole crowd is to meet here at ten o’clock this morning.” Harewood rubbed his battered head thoughtfully.

"As for me," continued Bourke, "I know what I shall say."

"What?"

"This. I'm going to stay in Paris. The Times has sent me out to get all the news I can—and get it as soon as I can."

"And transmit it as soon as you get it—"

"Exactly."

"Which you can't do if you're cooped up in Paris! You'd better come to Saint Cloud."

"Nobody is going to be cooped up in Paris. The fighting will be done here, and the fellows who leave Paris will miss the whole show. You will be badly fooled, my son, if you let Winston or old Sutherland persuade you to leave Paris."

"Shannon and Malet won't stay."

"Yes, they will. I don't care what Speyer does—I hope he gets out. But, Jim, your precious Syndicate won't thank you for leaving Paris just as the orchestra is tuning up for the overture."

"But," persisted the other, "if we make our headquarters at Saint Cloud or Versailles we can see the entire circus and also have the wires when we want them."

"No, we can't," replied Bourke; "if Paris is surrounded by the German armies, Versailles will lie directly in the path of investment. Your instructions and mine are to stay with the French army. How can we, if we go to Versailles?"

"Well," said Harewood, "I want to hear what the other fellows say, and that ought to carry some weight with you, too," he added; "every big journal in New York will be represented."

"And some little ones, too."

"O, you mean Speyer's?"

Bourke nodded and rose.

"Come, jump up," he said, "here's your tub. I had all our things brought over last night. Shall I pour the water in? There you are! Now hurry—and I forgot to tell you that I have made arrangements to take our meals in the house. It saves time."

Harewood looked at him.

“Yes—it saves time. Where do we take our breakfast, for example, —with our hostesses?”

“Downstairs, of course,” said Bourke, briskly; “it will be ready before you are. Get up.” He went into his own room, whistling, and Harewood sprang out of bed and looked at his maltreated head in the mirror.

“Lucky it wasn’t my nose,” he reflected, “since I’m to breakfast with young ladies.”

When he had bathed and dressed, and stood again before the looking glass, parting and reparting his hair, Bourke came and stood in the doorway. He was particularly well groomed, and evidently aware of it.

“The one,” said Harewood, making a mathematically equal division of his hair—“the one with the dark eyes, you know—what is her name, Bourke?”

“Hildé,” said Bourke, reflectively.

“Hildé—what?”

“Hildé Chalais. Don’t pretend you’ve forgotten.”

“Is she the older or the younger?”

“They’re twins.”

“How the devil did you find all that out?”

“I don’t know,” said Bourke sincerely, “really I don’t know. Somehow or other they told me. I saw them last night when I came back from the Vaugirard. We stood chatting on the stairs. You were asleep up here.”

There was a silence, then Harewood spoke up impatiently, “Well, what did they say?”

“I don’t know. The whole thing is funny, anyway. It seems we are living over a bird store. They told me the story. Do you want to hear it?”

“Go on.”

“Well, it appears that those two young girls have been keeping house here for a year. Before that their uncle kept it. His name was Chalais; he was erratic, I believe—a sort of soured savant. Anyway, he

died a year ago, and these two girls had to leave their convent school and come here and run the place. I guess they haven't any too much money; I believe old Chalais left nothing but debts and birds and a few curses for the government that refused him a berth. Two young German students had this apartment for several months, but they left without paying their rent, and I fancy nobody has been here since. That's all I know."

Harewood tied his necktie twice before it satisfied him.

"Rather tough on them, wasn't it?" he said. "You say they are poor?"

"Yes. I'm glad we took the apartment."

"The—the one with brown eyes—what did you say her name is?" asked Harewood, without turning.

"I said her name is Hildé," said Bourke, drily. "The other is named Yolette. They are both pretty."

"Yes. They're both extremely ornamental," admitted Harewood.

Bourke looked at him sharply, saying:

"And they're as innocent as two kittens. You might as well know that. I don't mean wishy-washy. I mean they're really absolutely and deliciously good. O, you can see it at a glance. By the way, did you ever see such a perfect combination of deep blue eyes and silky purple-black hair, with a skin like snow—"

"As—?"

"As Yolette's."

"O, I've seen that in Ireland—often," replied Harewood, "but I never before assisted at the colour symphony which her sister presents—brown eyes, and gilt-coloured hair."

"Gilt!" laughed Bourke; "nice way you have of putting things."

"O, well, come on, I'm ready. Does this bump on my head show much?"

When they reached the stairway that led into the bird store, Hildé met them with shy reserve, and led the way across the hall. They followed her to the parlour, which was also the dining-room. Yolette sat at a small mahogany table, solemnly watching the steaming kettle.

She raised her clear eyes as they entered and said good-morning with a smile that was at once apprehensive and confiding. The two young men made their bows. Then Yolette poured the café-au-lait. Her manner was that of a very young person unexpectedly burdened with tremendous responsibilities, which must be borne with self-possession.

“My sister and I,” began Yolette, “dine at seven—would that hour suit you, messieurs?”

She spoke to both, looking at Bourke, perhaps because Harewood was looking at Hildé.

The two young men became at once very fluent in the French language. They explained with one voice that the régime of the house should be established on one basis, namely, the convenience of their hostesses. They explained that neither of them was to be considered for one moment, and they added that they desired to make some amends for the trouble they would give by placing their services at the disposal of their hostesses. Perhaps this was not the usual method of settling a business relation, but it answered to perfection, and before long the young girls felt their formality and shyness melting like frost at sunrise.

And how prettily they laughed at the young men’s discomfiture when Schéhérazade, the lioness, bounded silently into the room and sprang on to the sofa.

She lay there purring and licking her padded paws, her tawny eyes mildly blinking at the company. Yolette ran over and leaned on the sofa beside her, one cheek pressed against the creature’s velvety head.

“Her ancestors for generations have been born in captivity,” explained Hildé to Harewood. “There is no more harm in her than in any house cat. My uncle brought her up; my sister and I have always played with her.”

“Were you startled,” Yolette said to Bourke. “Won’t you come and be introduced?” Bourke went a little slowly; the lioness, pleasantly indifferent, suffered him to pat her head.

Harewood contented himself with a distant observation of the splendid animal, and remained where, without seeming to, he could

watch Hildé moving swiftly back and forth between the kitchen and parlour, removing cups and saucers and laying a cloth over the mahogany table.

“This room is also the smoking-room,” she said, gravely, as she passed the table with her arms full of cups and plates; “it was my uncle’s custom to smoke here at all times.”

She stood looking down at Harewood, a faint smile in her brown eyes. Then she glanced at her sister.

“Of course,” said Yolette, “it will be pleasant to have the odour of tobacco in the house again.” As before she looked at Bourke when she spoke, and he, accepting the permission as a command, lighted his cigarette with a cheerful alacrity that made them all laugh.

The morning sun poured into the room; from the shop outside came the twittering of the birds, the chatter of the squirrel and sharp screams from the parrot.

“Would you care to see them?” asked Hildé, still looking down at Harewood. “I will go with you when I have taken away the cups.”

“Never mind the cups,” said Yolette; “I will take them. It is time to change the water for the birds, Hildé.”

Hildé went into the kitchen with the cups, and returned carrying a pitcher of fresh water. Harewood followed her, bowing to Yolette. She and Bourke were standing on either side of the lioness, pulling her ears and rubbing her hair the wrong way—attentions which Schéhèrazade majestically ignored.

Presently Yolette laid her head against the creature’s cheek, murmuring alternate terms of endearment and reproof. The lioness closed her eyes and purred ecstatically.

“What is her name?” asked Bourke.

“Schéhèrazade. Her father’s name was Djebe. His father’s name was Ghenghis Kahn. I have the pedigree in a book. I will show it to you some day. I am sure you think this is a strange household—full of lions and monkeys and birds. As for me, I should be very lonely without them; I have lived in the midst of them ever since I can remember, except when Hildé and I were at the Ursalines,” she

continued, pulling Schéhérazade's toes. "Although we keep a bird store, Hildé and I can't bear to sell our birds. We grow so fond of them—but, of course, we are obliged to sell them. We have sold none at all since the war began, although every week we have a place at the bird market by the Hôtel de Ville. Tell me, monsieur, were you frightened when you first saw Schéhérazade?"

"Scared to death," admitted Bourke gravely.

Yolette dragged Schéhérazade's big lazy head up to her own face and laughed gaily. "I meant to tell you about my lion, but I forgot. You must like her—won't you?"

Bourke patted the lion's paws discreetly. He was pleased to find that she had no claws.

"Of course I shall like her; I am quite in love with her now," he said with a little more confidence for this discovery—"only—I hope she'll know me in the dark—"

Yolette laughed again.

"Perhaps you and Monsieur Harewood had better give me back the latchkeys, then—"

"No," said Bourke, "I think we'll retain them, if you will just remind her that late suppers produce indigestion. And—er—will you show me where she keeps herself at night?"

Yolette, greatly amused, assented, rising lightly, and dragging Schéhérazade with her. Bourke followed through the kitchen, along a hallway and out into a garden full of trees and paths, surrounded by high stucco walls. A stone trough filled with very clear running water stood in the deep grass under the shadow of the wall. Beyond this stretched a tangle of grass, roses and fruit trees.

"This is Schéhérazade's playground," said the girl, picking up a big painted rubber ball. Straightening up, she tossed the ball out into the grass with the charming awkwardness that attacks the gentler sex when throwing or catching anything.

The lioness, much gratified, bounded after the ball, seized it, patted it first with one paw, then with the other, and finally lay down, biting the ball and scratching it with her hind toes.

Bourke observed this pleasing performance in silence. When Schéhérazade gambolled and frisked he nodded approval; when she loped heavily off to a thicket of rose bushes, carrying the ball in her mouth, he expressed himself as edified. But, to tell the truth, he was far from experiencing that sense of repose in the company of Schéhérazade that he felt was expected of him.

“It’s a fine lion,” he said after a moment or two; “but perhaps one needs time to appreciate lions. Shall we go and examine the birds?”

Yolette smiled and said yes, and led the way into the bird store.

Harewood and Hildé, standing together by the window, looked up quickly as Yolette entered. At the same moment Hildé dropped the pitcher of water.

“Why, Hildé,” exclaimed Yolette, “you have broken our blue pitcher! Dear me! Look at the floor!”

Hildé’s consternation and Harewood’s forced gaiety jarred on Bourke. He looked at Hildé’s flushed face, then at his comrade, who returned his glance mutinously. Yolette brought a mop: Hildé, with a breathless smile at her sister, picked up a fragment of the pitcher’s handle and held it at arm’s length until Harewood took it and set himself to gather up the other scattered bits of blue china.

“You see,” he said lightly. “I’ve just been bitten by the squirrel and the monkey, and I was courting further mutilation from the parrot yonder when the pitcher fell and saved me. Mademoiselle, I am very sorry that my salvation was at the expense of your pitcher.”

“Your salvation is expensive, but we must have it,” said Bourke; there was a touch of sarcasm in his voice that made Harewood’s ears tingle. Yolette said, innocently: “Monsieur Harewood, the birds and creatures did not know you; therefore, they were frightened and they bit. My sister should have told you about the parrot.”

“I can’t help it,” said Hildé, avoiding Bourke’s eyes. “Monsieur Harewood will not wait to become acquainted; he attempts to conquer everything at once, and birds and squirrels don’t like that.”

Bourke transferred his gaze to Harewood.

At that moment Mehemet Ali, the gray and scarlet African parrot,

climbed down from his perch, bit Harewood, and climbed back again, flapping his wings and shrieking with joy.

“Now,” said Harewood, “I suppose I may be received into the family circle. Everything has bitten me—except that jackdaw. Does he bite, mademoiselle?”

Hildé seemed more distressed than there appeared reason for, and said “No” in such a discouraged voice that both Yolette and Bourke laughed outright.

“Won’t you introduce me, too?” said Bourke. “Won’t you take me around to be bitten?”

“Not now,” said Yolette. “I must find Red Riding Hood and go to the kitchen.” She took Hildé’s hand and they moved towards the door.

“Luncheon at one?” asked Bourke.

“At one, monsieur,” and they vanished with a light swish of skirts, closing the door that led to the kitchen beyond.

Bourke and Harewood walked out to the front door and sat down on the step.

After a short period of meditation Bourke said: “Jim, do you agree with me in saying that our hostesses are as innocent as two white kittens?”

“Why white kittens?” asked Harewood, argumentatively, and added, “of course they are.”

“Well,” continued Bourke, “because they are so innocent, it would be a shame to disturb them—I mean to attempt any fool flirtation. Wouldn’t it?”

“I don’t see why you say that to me,” said Harewood, sharply.

“I only meant—for myself as well as you—that we’ve got to be careful. You know as well as I do that what is called flirtation in America is not understood in France. They would take anything like that seriously.”

Harewood was silent.

“Of course, I’m more or less susceptible to a pretty face,” continued Bourke; “so are you, if your reputation doesn’t belie you—”

“Let my reputation alone,” interrupted Harewood.

“Yes, it’s not a subject for analytical discussion. As I say, I’m not insensible myself; but in this case we—in short—we absolutely must not make asses of ourselves.”

“What’s the matter with you,” enquired Harewood, crossly.

“The matter is, that I think we had better be clear about this situation from the beginning. Heaven knows we shall be busy enough with our own affairs—and they will be with theirs, and as for our leisure hours, if we have any, don’t you think we can employ them more safely than in hanging around two dangerously pretty girls?”

“Can’t a man talk to them without making love to them?” demanded Harewood, hotly.

“Can you?” asked Bourke in his turn.

Harewood shrugged his shoulders. “I can behave myself,” he observed, “if I try.”

“You never have,” retorted Bourke. “It’s as natural to you to make love as it is to breathe. You never are serious and you usually make mischief some way or other. You can’t say I ever interfered before, but I tell you, Jim, I think it would be a damned shame to trouble the peace of mind of Hildé Chalais.”

“So do I,” said Harewood. “Let’s drop the subject.”

They stood up, looking at each other. Harewood coloured and laughed.

“I can’t help it,” he said, “I’ve gone too far already, Cecil.”

“Already?” cried Bourke, incredulously.

“Yes!”

“Good heavens!” groaned Bourke, “you don’t mean to say you’ve begun already?”

“Yes, I’m sorry; it was thoughtless—”

“You—you haven’t made love to her in these few minutes? Jim, it’s impossible!”

Harewood moved uneasily.

“Have you?”

“Yes, I have.”

“Seriously?”

“Not very.”

“You—you didn’t kiss her?”

Harewood was silent.

Bourke looked at him in amazement.

“Not Hildé?”

Harewood did not answer.

After a moment’s silence Bourke sat down on the steps and swore under his breath. Harewood stood by, restless and ashamed.

“You understand, Cecil,” he said, in a low voice, “that was a confession—not a boast. I’m damned sorry—she looked so dainty and sweet—you know how thoughtless I am about such things—”

“O, hang it all!” burst out Bourke, “what do I care! If a girl lets a man kiss her like that—by Jove, she can take the consequences!”

Harewood wanted to speak, but Bourke interrupted him.

“I was mistaken in the girl, that’s all. She looks as innocent as a white kitten behind a milk jug—and she is—just as innocent. They’re all alike, anyway. Go on and spoon, if you choose; it’s none of my business.”

Harewood murmured; “Cecil, you don’t think—”

“No,” interrupted Bourke, “I don’t think you’re a blackguard, Jim, but it’s a selfish pastime, this useless awakening of a woman’s heart. What I fear is that you and Hildé will get into a desperate love affair, and it will perhaps leave one of you unhappy. And that won’t be you, you know, Jim.”

“I don’t know,” said the other: a queer light flashed in his eyes for a moment, then he laughed. “Anyway, don’t take it seriously. We were standing close together when that damned monkey bit me. Hildé cried ‘Oh!’ so prettily and looked so grieved—and I—I just put my arm around her waist; then she looked at me so—well—so—so—O, the devil! how do I know; let’s forget it, won’t you? There are some things a man ought to shut up about.”

“I don’t ask your confidence,” said Cecil, morosely.

“You’re the only man who has ever had it. As for this child—the whole incident was innocent and harmless enough. I’ve half forgotten

it; and she will, completely, in no time at all.”

“All right,” said Bourke; “here come Winston and Sutherland. They’re on time; it’s just ten.”

CHAPTER V.

THE MIRRORED FACE.

The household duties finished, the birds regaled with seed and water, Yolette went out, as she always did, into the tangled garden for a romp with Schéhérazade, calling Hildé to follow. But Hildé had slipped away to her own silent chamber, where, in the half light, pale sunspots moved on the lowered curtains and one dusty sunbeam slanted through the dusk.

She sank into an easy-chair, head thrown back, eyes wide open, gazing at nothing—at the motes sifting through the bands of sunlight—at the tracery of a vine outside the window-sill, shadowed on the lowered curtain, that moved when breezes swayed the leaves. But she saw neither shadow nor sunlight, nor the white walls of the room, nor the white curtains of the bed. There was but one thing before her eyes—Harewood's face, bending close to hers—closer still—and she lay back in the chair, breathless, fascinated.

Consternation for what she had done gave place to wonder. She strove to understand why—she attempted to begin at the beginning of things. The beginning of things, for her, was not far away—scarcely an hour back. And yet it was no use—no use to try to remember how it had happened.

A passing cloud blotted the dappled sunshine from the curtains; the room grew very dim and still. An apathy, mental and physical, fell upon her; her eyes drooped until the dark lashes rested on her cheeks, her limbs seemed heavy and numb.

Presently the shaft of sunlight stole across the dusk again; she raised one hand, touching her face with listless fingers. Her eyes and cheeks were wet with tears.

There was a niche in the wall over the bed where a faïence figure of Sainte Hildé of Carhaix stood, robed in blue and gold. She turned her eyes to the Sainte and leaned forward in the dusk; but perhaps she had nothing to say to this other Hildé of Carhaix; perhaps she did not

know what to say, for her head drooped and she sank back in the arm-chair, idly twisting her white fingers. The tears dried quickly, for there was nothing of bitterness in her heart, only a constant wonder, an eternal childish question, "Why?" And always before her she saw Harewood's face, touched with an indefinable smile, bending close, closer yet to her own.

Up stairs Harewood himself was sitting on the edge of Bourke's bed, dispensing tobacco and liquid nourishment to half a dozen fellow countrymen who filled the room with pipe smoke and sprawled on the furniture, listening to Bourke.

Bourke finished speaking, modestly, looking at Sutherland for approval. The latter touched his grizzled moustache thoughtfully and gazed at the carpetless floor.

Speyer began to speak, but subsided when Sutherland looked up at him.

"What Bourke says," began Sutherland, "is something I can neither deny nor approve. He affirms that it is not possible for the German armies to isolate Paris from the outside world; he says that if we remain in Paris we shall be able to communicate with our respective journals. Whether or not this turns out to be the case, I myself have decided to leave the city. Personally I don't care whether I'm with the French or German army. If the Germans invest Paris and enter Versailles, I fancy it will change nothing as far as the censorship is concerned."

"German censors are worse than French—if any one should ask you," observed Winston.

"They're all of a stripe," grumbled Harewood, who had more red pencil on his despatches than the rest of the foreign correspondents put together.

Sutherland laughed, returning his pipe to the morocco case, and looked at Bourke with kindly eyes.

"As long as you and Harewood are expected to stick to the French army," he said, "I suppose you ought to stay in Paris. As for Winston, and Shannon, and George Malet—they are free to go where they please, and if I'm anything of a prophet they had better steer clear of

Paris.”

“You mean you think that there’ll be nothing much to see in Paris?” asked Harewood, anxiously.

Sutherland caressed his double chin.

“There will be plenty to see—perhaps more to see than there will be to eat,” he replied slowly.

Bourke raised his glass impatiently, saying; “Well, here’s to you, prophet of evil!”

Sutherland smiled at him, and picked up his hat.

“I’m an old codger,” said the great war correspondent. “I need the luxury of a meal at least once a week. Perhaps I’m unreasonable, but I’m not fond of horse flesh, either. Bourke, if you think you ought to stay in Paris”—he held out a heavy, sunburned hand—“I’ll say good-bye, and good luck to you and to Harewood, the hare-brained suckling of journalism.”

In the laughter and shouts of “Here’s to you, Jim! Don’t let the censor bully you! Take away his red pencil!” Bourke jumped to his feet, and shook hands with them all, including Speyer.

“Good luck, all of you!” he cried heartily. “Jim and I will take our chances.”

“I don’t get my stuff through anyway, so if we’re blocked up here it won’t matter,” said Harewood. As he followed them to the door Speyer offered him a flabby hand.

“I wish you luck,” he said with a furtive sneer; “I know this house; you will be well lodged; the ladies are delightful.”

Harewood withdrew his hand roughly.

“What’s that?” he demanded. But Speyer hurried away down the stairs, arm in arm with Stauffer, whose weak blonde face was convulsed with laughter.

“Did you hear what he said, Bourke?” asked Harewood. “I didn’t know he’d ever been here. What a sneaking, sneering brute he is!”

“Who cares,” said Bourke, “we’re not obliged to see him, are we? Well, Jim, what do you think, shall we stay here or go with the others?”

"O, of course, if you insist on staying—"

"But I don't," laughed Bourke.

"You don't? What about our instructions to remain with the French army?"

"Pooh!" said Bourke. "We can cable that it's impossible. Shall we, Jim? You were so anxious to go, you know—yesterday?"

"I wish," said Harewood, in sudden irritation, "that you'd stop grinning. No, I won't go! I'm not a confounded weather vane—"

"Except in love," observed Bourke. "Don't lose your temper, Jim, and don't dangle around Hildé Chalais. Now I'm going down to the city to see what's up. Want to come?"

"No," said Harewood, shortly.

Bourke nodded, with unimpaired cheerfulness, and put on his hat.

"Anything I can do for you? No? Well, tell our hostesses I'm lunching en ville. I'll be back to dinner at seven. By the way, I think I'd better sell our horses now, don't you?"

"I don't care a damn what you do," said Harewood, sulkily.

Bourke nodded again, and went out whistling. He understood the younger man, and he would have laid down his life for him any hour in the day, knowing that Harewood would not do the same for him.

When he had gone, Harewood threw himself on the bed, both hands behind his head. Perhaps he was interested in the single fly that circled above the bed, sometimes darting off at a tangent, sometimes cutting the circles into abrupt angles, but always swinging back again as though suspended from the ceiling on an invisible thread.

He thought of Bourke—already wondering at his own bad temper; he thought of the war—the folly of Saarbrücken, the never-to-be-forgotten shambles of Mars-la-Tour, at least he imagined he was thinking of these things. In reality, a vague shape was haunting him, vague fingers touched his own, shadowy eyes questioned his, a name sounded in his ears, again and again, until the quiet beating of his heart took up the persistent cadence.

He roused himself, went over to the mirror and stared at his own reflection. Self-disgust seized him; he was sick of himself, of his own

futility, of his life—so utterly useless because so absolutely selfish. That was the strange part of it to him; nobody else seemed to be aware how selfish he was. He himself knew it, but there was one thing he had not known, namely, that selfishness is the first step toward cowardice. True, he was cool enough under fire—he never hesitated to risk his skin when it came in the routine of his profession. He even risked it needlessly from sheer perverseness, and his reputation for recklessness was a proverb among his fellows. He had been known to bring a stricken comrade in from the fighting line. Thinking over the episode later, he knew that he had been actuated by no high motives of self-sacrifice; he had done it simply as part of the circus. He was rather surprised when they praised him, for everybody else was under fire at the same time, and he knew that if he had not been there in the line of his own profession, and any one had asked him to go out and risk his life in that way, he would have indignantly refused.

At times his recklessness amounted to imbecility in the eyes of his confreres. Sutherland, commenting on it one evening, observed that Harewood was troubled with an annoying malady called “youth.” But this recklessness, when he showed it, was not ignorance of fear; it was self-disgust. There were many other occasions when, being on good terms with himself, he had taken the tenderest care of his precious person. This self-solicitude was not normal prudence—it was a form of fierce selfishness that attacked him like an intermittent disease. Some day, he was thinking now, it might attack him at the wrong moment; and at such moments the hesitation of selfishness is known as cowardice.

As he leaned there, before the mirror, looking blankly into his own handsome eyes, something of this came to him in a sudden flash that shocked him; for the idea of personal cowardice had never entered his mind.

The bare possibility of such a thing made him loathe himself. He gazed, startled, at that other face in the mirror as though he had detected a criminal—a secret assassin of himself who had fawned and flattered him through all those years—a treacherous thing that now

suddenly leered at him, unmasked, malignant, triumphant.

In that bitter moment, as he stared back at the face in the mirror, he realised for the first time in his life that he had detected himself. Hitherto his fits of depression and repentance had been followed by nothing but self-contempt, which led to recklessness. Now he saw more; he saw his own soul, warped and twisted with egotism; he saw the danger of the future, the possibilities of ruin and disgrace, the end of everything for a man in this world—detected cowardice!

And he realised something else, something still more amazing; he realised that for the last ten minutes there had been two faces in the mirror before him—one, his own, sombre and marred with boyish cynicism, the other a vaguer face, a face of shadows faintly tinged with colour—a dim, wistful face, pure and sensitive as a child's—a face whose wide, brown eyes were fixed on his, asking a question that his soul alone could answer.

He straightened up with an effort. Presently he began to pace the room. Who was this girl—this child that haunted the solitude of his egotism—whose memory persisted among all the other memories? Had he harmed her? Had the idle caress of a moment left him responsible? In the impulse to answer this he turned to cynicism for aid, but it gave him no aid, and when he tried to understand why this thought should occupy him, it suddenly occurred to him that there existed such a thing as moral obligation. When he had clearly established this in his mind, he went further, and found that he himself was amenable to the moral law—and this surprised and attracted him. A girl, then, had certain moral rights which a man was bound to respect! The proposition was novel and interesting.

“If that is so,” he said aloud, “life is not an impromptu performance, but a devilish serious rehearsal!”

He lighted a cigarette and walked to the door. “If that is the proper solution of life,” he thought, “it’s not as amusing as my solution, but perhaps it wasn’t meant to be.” He blew a succession of smoke rings toward the ceiling. “Any way, seeing in that light, there does not appear to be much opportunity for introducing side steps of one’s

own.”

By this time he had reached the head of the stairs outside the landing. “No side steps,” he repeated; “no gags, no specialties. I’m to keep time to the fiddle—that’s my business.”

His mind was clear now—his heart lighter than the zephyrs that blew fitfully through the open shop door. Life in earnest should begin for him—a life of renunciation, self-suppression, an even, equitable life, orderly, decent, and, above all, morally unselfish.

As he set foot on the last stair, preoccupied, entranced, hypnotized at the spectacle of his own moral regeneration, Hildé turned the corner of the hallway. She blushed when she saw him and hesitated, a distracting picture of perturbation.

He had made up his mind to ask forgiveness, to assure her of his esteem for her, to acknowledge his inexcusable fault. That’s what he had come down stairs for. But now, when he looked at her, he realised that it was too late. There was nothing he could say which would not hurt her. The quality called tact is highly developed in the selfish. This is not a paradox; generosity has nothing to do with tact. Harewood’s regeneration had not as yet robbed him of his tact; so he said:

“I was going into the city; have you any commission that I could execute?”

“Thank you,” said Hildé, faintly.

“Perhaps mademoiselle, your sister—”

“Thank you, monsieur.”

He acquiesced with a bow. “Monsieur Bourke and I would esteem it an honour to be entrusted with any commission from you,” he said, stiffly, and marched down the steps into the street.

“But, monsieur, you have forgotten your hat!” cried Hildé.

In the absurdity of the situation his dignity collapsed, and he turned around, hot with chagrin. Hildé stood in the doorway, scarlet with confusion; for a second they faced each other, then gravity fled, and a gale of laughter swept the last traces of embarrassment away.

“Is luncheon ready?” asked Harewood, reascending the steps. “My

feelings are hurt," he insisted; "an omelette is the only balm I will consider." Hildé smiled a little, and took courage.

"The balm is ready," she said; "Yolette and I have finished luncheon. Will you come into the dining-room?"

The luncheon was a modest affair; a bottle of white wine, a frothy omelette, a bit of rye bread, nothing more. But to Harewood, sitting there opposite Hildé, it was enough. If Hildé appeared charming in embarrassment, she was delightful in her shy mirth. Moreover, he had never believed that he himself could be so witty—for surely he must have been exceedingly witty to stir Hildé to laughter as capricious and sweet as the melody of a nesting thrush.

Yolette came in from the garden, smiling and wondering a little.

"Hildé," she exclaimed, "what is so funny?"

"I suppose I am," said Harewood, "the laughter of Mademoiselle Chalais is as melodious as it is disrespectful. Ah, but now I must ask your advice on a very grave question. How are we to address you—which is Mademoiselle Chalais and which is Mademoiselle Yolette, or Mademoiselle Hildé?"

"You may take your choice," said Hildé, with a bright smile, "because you see we are twins. Only," she added, "I feel millions of years older than Yolette."

Yolette protested indignantly, and for a moment they all three chattered like sparrows in April, laughing, appealing to each other, until Yolette fled to the garden again, her hands pressed over both ears.

"Well," said Harewood, "nobody has answered my question after all."

Hildé's eyes were brilliant and her cheeks aglow as she watched Yolette through the window.

"Perhaps it would be simpler," said Hildé, "to call us both by our first names." She rose and opened the window that faced the garden.

"Yolette?" she laughed softly.

"What, dear?"

"Shall Monsieur Harewood call us both by our first names?"

“Yes,” replied Yolette, “but he must be very formal with Schéhérazade!”

Harewood looked around at the girl beside him, at her brilliant colour, at her eyes, vague and sweet under their silken fringe.

“Then I am to call you ‘Hildé,’ ” he said. He had not meant to speak tenderly.

“O,” stammered Hildé, “it is merely a matter of convenience, isn’t it?” She had not meant to say that either.

“Of course,” he replied.

They closed the window and stepped back into the room. After a moment’s silence Hildé said; “If you are going into the city, will you do something for me?”

“Indeed I will,” he answered quickly, touched by the sudden confidence. She handed him a coin—a silver franc; her face grew serious.

“It is for the ambulance,” she said, “we could not give it last week. The bureau is opposite the Luxembourg palace. Will you drop it into the box?”

“Yes,” he replied gravely.

“Thank you. Shall you come back to dinner?”

He said, “Yes,” lingering at the door. Suddenly that same impulse seized him to take her in his arms again; the blood stung his cheeks as his eyes met hers. Her head drooped a little; he knew she would not resist; he knew already she felt the caress of his eyes; the colour deepened and paled in her cheeks, but he did not stir.

Presently he heard a voice—his own voice, saying: “Then—adieu, Mademoiselle Hildé.” She answered with an effort: “Adieu, monsieur.”

A moment later he was in his own room, standing before the mirror, facing his own reflection with a lighter heart than he had carried for many a day. “Damn it,” he said, shaking his fist at the mirrored face, “I’ll show you who is master!”

The form in the glass smiled back, shaking a clenched fist.

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE CITY.

As Harewood crossed the rue d'Ypres and passed along the façade of the barracks opposite the rue Malaise, he met the Mouse face to face.

"O!" he cried, "so you're the gentleman who broke my head! Now—do you know—I think I'll break yours!"

The Mouse's face expressed not only genuine amazement, but righteous indignation, and his protestations of innocence appeared to be so sincere that Harewood hesitated, one hand twisted in the fellow's collar, the other drawn back for a hearty cuff.

"Monsieur," moaned the Mouse, in accents of pained astonishment, "what is it you do? Would you assassinate a stranger? Help! Help! Police!"

"Didn't you crack my head last night on the rue d'Ypres?" demanded Harewood.

"I, monsieur?" exclaimed the Mouse, overcome at the enormity of such an accusation, "I—a father of a family! Do you take me for some rodeur of the outer boulevards?—because my clothes are old and stained by the sweat of labour—"

Here he relapsed into a snivel.

Harewood's hand fell from the Mouse's throat. He looked at the fellow, puzzled and undecided, but not convinced. The Mouse's right hand began to move, very slowly, almost imperceptibly, toward his tattered pocket.

"Monsieur," he whined, "I am overcome—I am hurt—I am——"

Harewood sprang back in the nick of time as a knife flashed close to his eyes.

"Tiens pour toi! Va donc, crétin!" muttered the Mouse, darting at him again, and again Harewood leaped back before the broad glitter of the knife.

Then, in a moment, the Mouse turned, scuttled across the street,

and fled down the rue Malaise; after him sped two police agents, flourishing their short swords and filling the silent street with cries of “À l’assassin! à l’assassin!”

Harewood, much interested and excited, watched the flight of the Mouse with mingled feelings of uneasiness and admiration. The scanty crowd that gathered along the line of pursuit took up the cry like a pack of lank hounds, and Harewood, whose character was composed of contradictions, and whose sporting instincts were always with the under dog, found himself watching the Mouse’s flight with a sudden sympathy for the tattered creature. The Mouse ran, doubled, twisted and wriggled into the Passage de l’Ombre, the pack at his heels, and Harewood hastened back toward the rue d’Ypres, knowing that the Mouse must pass there again.

As Harewood arrived at the head of the street, suddenly the Mouse rounded the corner, and, to the young man’s surprise, came straight toward him. His face was haggard and dusty, his legs dragging, his single eye blood-shot and sunken. He had thrown away the knife, his cap was gone, and his greasy coat streamed out behind him, laying bare a bony throat. When he saw Harewood there came over his face such a look of blank despair that the young fellow’s heart melted. At the same moment they both caught the roar of the crowd, sweeping through the rue d’Ypres.

That the Mouse expected Harewood to trip him up as he passed was evident, for he swerved out into the street on the right.

“Turn to the left!” shouted Harewood; “I’ll not stop you!”

The ragged fellow hesitated, panting, his solitary eye burning in its socket.

“That way!” motioned Harewood, and he waved him toward a narrow alley separating the rue Pandore from the parade of the Prince Murat barracks. It was a cul-de-sac—a trap—and the Mouse knew it.

“Run, you fool!” urged Harewood, seizing the Mouse’s arm; “here, throw me your coat, quick! Don’t be afraid; I’ll not hurt you. Stand still!” He stripped the tattered coat from the Mouse’s back, flung it into the rue Malaise, and shoved the Mouse down the impasse Murat.

Crouching there close to the parade grille, the Mouse heard the chase pass at full speed, heard a yell as the crowd found his coat in the rue Malaise; then the clatter and trample of feet died away down the passage de l'Ombre. Harewood laughed.

"Au revoir, my innocent friend," he said; "if you can't get away now, your hide's not worth saving!"

The Mouse gazed at him with a face absolutely devoid of expression, then, without a word, he crept out of the impasse and glided away toward the city.

Whatever was capricious and contrary in Harewood's nature was now in the ascendant. He chuckled to himself over the evasion of the Mouse and the paradoxical if not unjustifiable part he himself had played in it. Why he had done it he did not stop to enquire—whether from pure perversity, or from a nobler, if equally misguided motive—or was it the impulse of a gentleman sportsman whose instinct is to save the quarry for another run? He did not trouble to ask himself. He walked on toward the boulevard Montparnasse, pleased with the memory of the exciting spectacle he had witnessed, laughing to himself now and then, until he remembered Hildé and the mission she had entrusted to him.

He felt in his pocket for the silver franc, drew it out and examined it. His face was sober now. He held the coin a moment, turning it over between his fingers, then dropped it into the other pocket along with his key and knife. And, as he had decided to keep it for himself, in its place he tossed another coin into the ambulance box, opposite the Luxembourg palace, a coin of gold instead of silver—for Hildé's sake.

The streets of Paris presented a curious spectacle for a city that was on the eve of investment by a victorious foreign army—curious because they appeared to be so absolutely normal. Omnibuses and cabs were running as usual, the terraces of the cafés were crowded with gaily dressed people, all the shops were open, children romped and played in the Luxembourg gardens, exactly as though the Emperor still sat in the Tuileries.

In the rue de Tournon an organ grinder filled the street with the

strains of “Deux Aveugles” and “Mignon”; along the rue de Medici double lines of cabs stood, the cabbies yawning on their boxes, while on every side street fakirs cried their wares, marchands de plaisir, venders of ballads, lemonade sellers with their wooden clappers, moved along the gilded iron railings of the Luxembourg, under the shade of the chestnut trees.

On the boulevard Saint Michel, however, the backwater of the human tide that ebbed and surged ceaselessly across the right bank of the Seine, bore on its surface some indications that the nation was at war. Here and there flame-coloured posters clung to kiosks and dead walls; proclamations, calls to arms, notices to the National Guard and now and then an insulting placard directed against the Emperor. Here, too, some fakirs were trying to sell scandalous pamphlets attacking the Imperial family; alleged exposures of the secrets of the Tuileries and even blackguardly verses directed against the Empress and her child. To the credit of the Latin quarter, these creatures found few customers, and were finally hustled out of the streets, even before the ordinance of the police directed confiscation of such literature and a proper punishment for the offenders. But these posters and appeals were not the only signs of war visible along the boulevard Saint Michel; battalions of the National Guard were making an unusually noisy exhibition of themselves, parading in front of the Sorbonne, drums and bugles drowning the roar of traffic on the boulevard. In the cafés, too, strangely weird uniforms began to appear—uniforms as ridiculous, for the most part, as the people who wore them—independent companies organizing for the defense of the city, styling themselves “Enfants de Montrouge,” “Vengeurs de Montparnasse,” “Scouts of Saint Sulpice”—all equally vociferous and unanimously thirsty.

As for the city itself, it was strangely tranquil after a night of celebration over the safe return of Vinoy’s 13th corps, and a morning of rejoicing at the news that the United States had instructed its minister, Mr. Washbourne, to recognise the *fait accompli*, and consider himself in future as accredited minister to the Republic of France. In

the Café Cardinal a few cocottes still wore miniature American flags in their buttonholes, and here and there, over the entrances to cafés and concert halls, the stars and stripes waved brightly in the September sun.

As for a very serious comprehension of the situation, so far as the public went, there was none. On the third of September, after the news of the Emperor's capture at Sedan had been confirmed by the Comte de Palikoa, the Parisians occupied themselves with an amusement always congenial to the true Parisian—a riot. This riot, which has passed into history as the revolution of the fourth of September, was refreshingly bloodless and amazingly decisive. It swept the dynasty of Napoleon III from France, it made the Empire a legend, and it proclaimed the Republic through the medium of Monsieur Gambetta's lusty lungs. In other words, the French people committed the enormous folly of swapping horses while crossing a stream, and, when, in the face of an enemy flushed with victory, the Parisians laid violent hands on the throat of their own government and strangled it, even Moltke must have relaxed his stern visage at the hopeless absurdity of such a people. For if the government had erred, was that the time to reckon with it? An established government represents, at least theoretically, a basis and security that a revolutionary government cannot have in time of invasion and instant need. And, after all, by what right was the Republic proclaimed? There had been no appeal, no plebiscite; no majority had exercised the right of suffrage, not a vote had been cast. Violence alone had decided the fate of a government which also had been founded upon violence.

On the fatal third of September, Paris was still quiet, perhaps stunned by the news of the frightful disaster at Sedan, but, in the minds of the people, the revolution was already a thing accomplished. Nevertheless, there was still time left to save the sole prerogative of importance at that hour—the right of national representation. It was merely necessary that the deputies should frankly accept the proposition advanced;

First—Announcement of the abdication of the executive.

Second—Nomination by the Chamber of a government for the national defense.

Third—Convocation of a *constituante* as soon as circumstances permitted.

Unfortunately, dynastic considerations prevailed over sincere and enlightened patriotism, time was frittered away in mutual recriminations, and before the Chamber could agree on any plan of action the storm burst. At eleven o'clock in the morning vast masses of National Guards, Mobiles, *Franc-tireurs*, accompanied by citizens equipped with all sorts of weapons, began to gather at the *Place de la Concorde*. At three o'clock the human wave broke against the *Palais Bourbon* with a roar; "*Vive la Republique! La déchéance!*" That was the golden moment for the members of the Extreme Left, and they knew their opportunity. Like a company of comic-opera bandits they dissembled and left the Chamber by various exits, only to reunite outside. Acclaimed by the mob, they hastily transported themselves to the *Hôtel de Ville*. There they immediately made themselves into a government, the members of which were exclusively composed of the deputies of Paris, excepting General Trochu, who was to secure the Presidency, at the same time reserving for himself the title and role of Governor of Paris. Jules Favre was designed for Vice President.

During this comic-opera proceeding, the Senate, holding a solemn *séance* across the river, retired about three o'clock, after a few puerile protestations of fidelity to the captive Emperor.

But even after the invasion of the Chamber, the *Corps Legislatif* refused to consider itself worsted. Jules Favre and Jules Simon were sent to woo the prodigals at the *Hôtel de Ville*, and were snubbed for their pains. Then that wily little revolution monger, Thiers, counselled moderation and patience, and went away to sit in corners and think. As yet, even he could not foresee the red spectre of the eighteenth of March; but they who rise by violence shall fall again by violence as long as the dreary old proverb lasts.

So, on the fifth of September, 1870, the walls of Paris were covered with proclamations to the people and to the army, setting forth in

sonorous phrases that a government had been “constituted” and “ratified” by “popular acclamation.”

“Constituted” was a word as audacious as it was dangerous. Seven months later the Commune profited by the abuse of it. As for the “ratification,” that was, perhaps, true, and that was the sole excuse for the men who so impudently invested themselves with power—a power, the burden of which was destined to crush them.

However, the people liked the new government; Belleville howled joyously and dragged Rochefort from Sainte-Pélagie prison and the government dared not refuse to swallow its medicine nor deny this sop to Belleville.

Jules Favre shrugged his shoulders and said he’d rather have Rochefort in the government than outside—an epigram which pleased everybody. A few conservative people, however, cooled a little when the former farce writer, Arago, was made Mayor of Paris. Then, on the sixth of September, Jules Favre, Minister of Foreign Relations, committed the first official idiocy of his new career by publishing in a diplomatic circular note the following phrase:

“We will relinquish neither one inch of our territory nor one stone of our fortresses,” well knowing that a few days later he should go to Ferrières on that heart-breaking mission which all the world has heard of.

The proclamation of the republic stirred the masses to such an effervescence of joy that nobody thought any longer of the Prussians. Everything appeared safe under the magic name “Republic.” To a population alternately stunned and stung to fury by despatches which for six weeks past had announced one unbroken series of disasters, the situation seemed already less desperate. Toul, Belfort, Strassbourg and Metz still held out, the provinces, it was believed, were rising en masse, there were serious rumours afloat concerning the disaffection of the Saxon and Bavarian troops, particularly the latter, and the more sanguine of the Parisians looked confidently to the United States, now a sister republic, as a probable ally. Some even thanked God that there would be no more disastrous rumours concerning the army of Châlons,

because the army of Châlons had ceased to exist except as an army of prisoners.

As for the new government, no sooner had it been installed than energetic measures for the defense of Paris were pushed forward on every side. One of the most important questions of defense concerned the provisioning of the city and the forts, and had Monsieur Magnin, who succeeded Monsieur Clement Duvernois as Minister of Commerce, displayed the good judgment and activity of his predecessor, the history of the siege of Paris might have been written differently. Flour, grain, hay, straw, cattle, sheep—nothing was forgotten by Monsieur Duvernois—not even a supply of millstones for grinding cereals. As for his successor—his mania was economy, and it is a pity that he alone was not obliged to endure the consequences. Of all guilty fools, responsible for their nation's humiliation, the economical fool is the most deserving of perdition.

Under the new military reorganization, the government hastened to equip the sixteen forts and the various redoubts and batteries that surrounded Paris and Saint Denis in an oval measuring sixty kilometres in circumference. Not only was it necessary to construct emplacements, gun platforms, casemates, magazines, bomb proofs and store houses, but it was also imperative that the water supply should be assured, mines planted, electric firing communications installed, and electric lights placed. Telegraphic communication with Paris, signalling by semaphores, entrenchments and redoubts connecting the forts, all these were necessary; but, before the lines could be definitely established a whole series of suburban villages were barricaded and loopholed. Inside the first barrier of defense lay the fortifications of the city proper, divided into ninety-four bastions and nine secteurs, each of the latter commanded by an admiral or a general. The city, therefore, was divided like a pie into nine sections, each section having its commander, whose rôle was not only military but also civil, and who, in concert with the municipal authorities included in his district, was responsible for the maintenance of order, the policing of the ramparts and streets and the organization of the National Guard.

This scheme was admirable, and, had it been maintained after the end of the siege until the city resumed its normal condition, the Commune might have been impossible. The city, then, was surrounded by a double line of defense, the forts outside the walls and the fortifications proper. But this was not all. Belleville, that rabbit warren of the ragtag and bobtail, that ever simmering cauldron of anarchy, lifted up its voice and bawled for barricades. To keep the vivacious denizens of that quarter in good humour, the government permitted them to surround the outer boulevards with a third line of defense in the form of barricades. This they did with an enthusiasm and ability that was none the less suspicious because superintended by Henri Rochefort. For the defense of the forts and ramparts 2,200 cannon were mounted, and 300 held in reserve. These cannon were served by 15,000 artillerymen, including marine gunners and engineers. The garrison itself consisted of:

First—Two army corps, the 13th Vinois, the Mézières prodigals, and the 14th corps commanded by General Ducrot, about 60,000 men in all, and 150 field pieces. Vinoy's men camped on the left bank of the Seine, Ducrot's on the right bank.

Second—105,000 Mobiles, not only from the Department of the Seine, but also from every department of France. They were distributed between the forts and the city.

Third—7,000 sailors from the war ports on the coast, 5,000 customs guards, forest guards and ex-policemen.

Fourth—About 60 franc corps, more or less unruly and useless, a total of nearly 15,000 men.

Fifth—A few thousand regular troops at Saint Denis, brave, devoted men.

Sixth—The National Guard, 266 battalions of them, a nuisance to everybody except themselves, partly on account of the foolish policy pursued by their superiors, in keeping them inside the ramparts instead of habituating them to the discipline and severe régime of active service outside the city—partly on account of the elective system common to each battalion. Anybody might believe, after this long

enumeration of defensive works, that the labour of transforming Paris into a vast fortress was pushed with unexampled, not to say miraculous speed. That was not the case, and two generals of engineers, whose names it is not necessary to mention, were to blame. With the German armies within a few days' march from Paris, with the two great redoubts of Châtillon and Montretout unfinished, these generals did not think it necessary for the workmen, masons, stonecutters, terrassiers and carpenters to labour during the night. With energy, and the employment of 10,000 or 15,000 workmen, Châtillon and Montretout could have been saved before the arrival of the Germans. More than that, there existed weak points along the ramparts that were criminally neglected—especially the Bas-Meudon gate, where the moat was scarcely begun, and not a mine had been placed.

Was Moltke badly informed? Was Bismarck asleep? Where were their spies? The German, with a little audacity, could have made himself master of Paris during the first days of investment. How? It would merely have been sufficient to mass rapidly, during the night, a corps of 20,000 resolute men between Sèvres and Bas-Meudon. This corps, composed of equal divisions of cavalry, artillery and infantry, could have been hurled at the Bas-Meudon gate, where only a handful of Mobiles stood guard. At the same time, the cavalry, arriving at a gallop along the Vaugirard and Point du Jour bastions, could have sabred the cannoniers and National Guards on the ramparts, leaving the artillery to unlimber behind the Ceinture railroad tracks and hold the ground against any attack. Reinforcements could have arrived from Sèvres and Versailles unharrassed, except by the fort of Issy.

It was too simple, perhaps, for the great German masters of strategy.

If, therefore, the work on the defenses of Paris attained really splendid results, the credit was neither due to the two engineer generals nor to the apathy of the Germans; it was due—strange as it may appear—to Haussmann. Why? Because the work could never have been accomplished had not the government been able to summon to its aid the splendid army of contractors and their men, schooled, during Monsieur Haussmann's magnificent administration,

to undertake and execute vast enterprises of construction and demolition with incredible rapidity.

How the irony of history repeats itself!

CHAPTER VII.

AN ACCOUNT TO SETTLE.

It was dusk when Harewood returned to the rue d'Ypres. He stood a moment on the steps of the bird store, looking out over the country beyond the city wall. Pale stars glimmered through the veil of dun-coloured mist; below stretched the shadowy valley of the Seine, dim under its ramparts of low surrounding hills. In the northwest a pallid streak traced the sweep of the river, farther still a point of white fire, brilliant as a star of the first magnitude, flashed and paled on the horizon. It was the new electric light on the great fortress of Mont-Valérien.

As Harewood stood there, fumbling for his keys, absently watching the signal lanterns hoisted above the Porte Rouge, spots of incandescent vermilion and sapphire in the deepening twilight, the door behind unclosed, and Hildé glided out.

"Good evening," he said, turning instantly; "I suppose I am late for dinner."

The girl closed the door behind her noiselessly, returning his greeting with a troubled smile.

"I heard your keys jingle; I thought it was you. No, you are not late; Monsieur Bourke has not yet returned from the city. I—I have something to ask of you; may I?"

"Of course," he answered; and again that sudden warmth touched him at the confidence implied in her eyes and voice—a confidence he felt he deserved so little.

"Not here, then," she said, lowering her voice, "they may interrupt us." As she spoke, she stepped across the sidewalk, and he followed, wondering at the suppressed anxiety in her voice.

A breeze blew over the sodded ramparts opposite; together they mounted the gentle slope where, against the sky, each separate blade of grass stood out, trembling in the freshening wind.

On the summit of the glacis they hesitated, then, by a common

impulse, they moved on along the path together, side by side, under the million stars. He waited for her to speak; her head was turned away toward the vast stretch of country in the south where, over the valley, a haze of sombre smoke hung, touched with dull colour.

“They are trying to burn the forest of Thiais; you can see the smoke,” he said. “They can’t do it; the wood is too green. It’s a little late in the day now to think of clearing away the forests from the military zone. They should have begun a month ago. Look at the Meudon woods. There’s cover enough there for the whole Prussian army. The engineers and sappers have been trying to burn it for a week past; now they are at it with axes. They might as well try to ditch the redoubts with penknives. What a muddle-headed people!”

“You forget,” said Hildé, “that they are my people.”

She spoke so sweetly that the rebuke struck him with added force.

“I did forget,” he said; “forgive me.”

They turned again, retracing their steps along the narrow path, half over-grown with long grass.

“You are quite thoughtless,” said Hildé; “I forgive you.”

The words were simple enough, and yet to him they meant more than the mere condoning of a tactless remark. There was something almost intimate in the words, “you are thoughtless”; something that was new to him and to Hildé, a reversal of their relations, a tacit assumption of a situation as old as the beginning of creation, the mystery of an awakening, the enigma of life, the way of a maid with a man.

“Yes, I was thoughtless,” he repeated, lingering over the words that alternately thrilled and troubled him, vaguely aware of the subtle metamorphosis that was taking place before his eyes, the unconscious awakening of a child to womanhood.

The assumption of the right to chasten and forgive is a maid’s first step in love.

“Tell me,” he said, “what it is that troubles you.”

They were standing still, looking off over the valley, the night breeze blowing in their faces, bringing with it a faint aromatic odour

of burning beech-wood.

"It is that I wish to ask your advice, monsieur," she answered seriously. "Do you remember once I told you how two Germans, who had rented an apartment from my uncle, left without paying—after his death, a year ago? Well, they have returned."

"Returned!" repeated Harewood, angrily.

"Yes, to-night. They have offered to pay us what they owed to my uncle. It is not very much, Monsieur Harewood—but it—it is of some importance to us."

She continued with sensitive reserve: "At present our means do not permit us to refuse—and yet—and yet—we do not like these Germans, Yvette and I."

"That is no reason for not insisting on what is justly due you," said Harewood.

"That is true, monsieur," she answered simply, "but that is not all. These men offer to pay us, but only on condition that we allow them to rent from us another apartment."

"What!" exclaimed Harewood, getting red in the face.

"This," continued the girl, "we do not wish to do, although the three rooms under the roof are quite comfortable. But you see these men are not what Yvette and I care to meet. Even when my uncle was alive, and Yvette and I came back from the convent at Christmas—they—they were at times a little rude with their attentions. Yvette and I were very glad when they left—even without paying anything at all."

"Do you want my advice?" asked Harewood, brusquely.

"If you do not mind, Monsieur Harewood."

"Then let us go back to the house, for I wish your sister also to hear what I have to say."

"But—but—the two Germans are there—now—trying to persuade Yvette."

Harewood's eyes changed in a second; a white pinched look came about his mouth, then his whole face lighted up with a smile so charming, so perfectly winning, that Hildé's troubled gaze cleared and

she involuntarily stepped closer to him.

It was seldom that this expression came into Harewood's face—this absolute command of a sudden rage so frightful that it whitened and sharpened every feature, only to be followed by a smile that would have disarmed the devil himself. Bourke had seen it once when Harewood's little fox terrier was wantonly clubbed to death by a peasant in Saarbrücken; the peasant was probably still in the hospital.

"Come," said Harewood, pleasantly, "perhaps we can arrange this affair very easily. Why, there is Bourke now, going up the steps!" He called to his comrade. "Wait, Bourke! I want to see you a moment! Is that a riding crop you have there?"

Bourke looked at them sharply as they came across the street, but he bowed gaily to Hildé and opened the door.

"Riding crop?" he repeated, "here is one. I've sold the horses. Are you going to ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross, my son?"

He stopped suddenly with a narrow glance at Harewood's placid face. It was too placid—and Bourke knew it.

"What's the trouble?" he asked bluntly.

Harewood said: "Nothing much," and led the way into the parlour.

As they entered without knocking, Yolette rose hastily from a chair at the table and came to them; and at the same moment, two men, lounging on a sofa, looked up angrily. The men were Speyer and Stauffer.

"Monsieur Bourke," said Yolette, resolutely controlling her voice, "it is fortunate you have come—I—I cannot stay in this room another moment."

Before Bourke could understand, Harewood said quietly, "Mademoiselle, it is all arranged. Will you step into the office and write a receipt?"

His eyes told Hildé to go too; she obeyed, with a frightened glance at his face, which was still smiling, but white as a sheet.

Speyer had risen; Stauffer also stood up, close beside Speyer. When the latter began to speak, Harewood turned and looked at him, and he stopped short.

“Bourke,” said Harewood in even tones, “would you mind stepping into the office and bringing me the receipt?”

Bourke’s sombre, puzzled eyes rested on Speyer for a second, then he turned on his heel and left the room.

“What do you mean by this?” blustered Speyer.

“What?” asked Harewood without emotion.

There was no answer. Stauffer instinctively took a step toward the door, then paused as he met Harewood’s eyes. At that moment Bourke re-entered the room, holding a sheet of stamped paper in his hand. He laid it on the table before Speyer but said nothing.

After a silence, Stauffer’s weak face expanded into a smile, and he picked up the paper with a pitiful little swagger. Then he laid a few gold coins on the table, piling one on the other in affected jocularly.

“Will Mr. Harewood do me the honour of counting them?” he said, sauntering toward the door.

Harewood stopped him with a gesture.

Speyer, glowering across the table, watched the counting of the coins. When Harewood finished he stepped back a pace.

“Get out—”

“No!”

“Get out!” he said, gently. Stauffer slipped past the table at once; Speyer hesitated, sneering, fairly weak with rage, then turned and walked out, followed closely by Harewood. At the door Stauffer began to laugh; his forced mirth seemed to sting Speyer to madness. He turned as he reached the sidewalk; Hildé’s name was on his lips, but Harewood lashed him across the mouth with his riding crop.

“Go,” he whispered, with white lips. “If you don’t go, I’ll kill you. Can’t you understand—can’t you understand—I’ll kill you if you don’t go!”

He flung him out into the street, and walked slowly back to the house, closing the door very softly behind him.

He met Bourke in the hall, and answered his enquiries with a shrug.

“Nice pair,” commented Bourke; “Yolette is shedding tears; do you suppose they said anything blackguardly to her?”

"I fancy they did. It's well we came back when we did. Is dinner ready, Cecil?"

They knocked at the dining-room door; Yolette smiled at them as they entered. "It was very silly to cry," she said sedately, seating herself at the table.

Bourke, not knowing what to answer, sat down gravely and looked at the lioness; and Schéhérazade, who had taken a great fancy to Harewood, stole around to his chair and stood there, looking up with luminous eyes, while her lithe tail gently waved in the air.

"Some day," said Bourke, "she'll take a fancy to me and we shall be inseparable."

His half-serious, half-pretended suspicions as to Schéhérazade's intentions always delighted Yolette and Hildé. They loved to hear him call the lioness a living tomb and wish that his bones might have a quieter grave.

"He's insulting you again," cried Hildé, dragging the lioness across to her own chair; "as if my Schéhérazade would eat anything she shouldn't! Hear her purr, the darling! I do believe, Monsieur Bourke, that you are really afraid!"

"I am," said Bourke; "so's Harewood. Fright keeps him speechless."

Hildé raised her dark eyes to Harewood's.

"Is that true, monsieur?"

Harewood brightened and laughed, nodding across the table; but Hildé's face, always a little grave and sensitive, even in her mirth, grew graver and more sensitive. It had changed within a day; something had come into it too subtle for Harewood to detect; something that even escaped Yolette. The contour of her cheek and neck was still almost childlike, the full scarlet mouth was also a child's mouth, yet already lip and cheek were finer and purer, a softer shadow tinged the eyes, an imperceptible tenderness touched the lips.

"I cannot see," said Bourke, honestly, "how your hands can be so white if you and Yolette wash those dinner things."

"We don't," laughed Yolette; "we only dry our little tea cups. Red

Riding Hood does the rest. You haven't seen Red Riding Hood yet? She's the scissor-grinder's child. They live in the passage de l'Ombre, and they are very, very poor."

"Hildé thought of it first," said Yolette. "The little thing came to the door last winter—oh, so cold and hungry. She comes every noon and evening now. Hildé made her a red cloak and hood. Her father drinks."

"I think," said Hildé, "she may be in the kitchen now. Shall I bring her in?"

Bourke nodded, a trifle embarrassed. He never knew what to say to children. Hildé looked shyly at Harewood, saw that he approved, then rose and went to the door. "Red Riding Hood!" she called, "Are you there, little one? Yes? Then won't you come in?"

There came the clatter of small sabots along the tiled hallway; Red Riding Hood appeared.

Bourke stared at this thin little creature, who stared back at him with a pair of great eyes, black as jet. But Harewood, easy with anything that seemed helpless or dependent, held out a strong brown hand, smiling. Children and animals never resisted his smile, and Red Riding Hood was no exception. She came slowly forward and gave him a thin red hand, never taking her eyes from his, and he bent forward and kissed the child.

Hildé's face changed; an exquisite tenderness touched her eyes. She looked at Harewood, trying to speak, but could not.

"What is your name; mine is Harewood," he said.

"Mine is Marie Ledoux; I should rather be called Red Riding Hood," said the child, seriously.

Harewood was quiet and attentive.

"Exactly," he said, "and I want you to come to visit me. Will you?"

"Yes," said the child, "to-morrow."

"Then will you say good-night to these ladies and gentlemen, Red Riding Hood?"

The child looked earnestly at him, then walked to the door.

"Bon soir, mesdames; bon soir, messieurs," she said gravely, and

walked out, her small wooden shoes echoing along the tiles.

“What in the world has tamed our little Red Riding Hood!” exclaimed Yolette; “Hildé, would you have believed it!”

But Hildé turned away toward the sofa without answering and laid her cheek against Schéhèrazade’s head.

“While you’re about it, Jim,” said Bourke, laughing, “why don’t you make friends with Schéhèrazade? Even a lioness couldn’t resist you.”

Hildé clasped the lion’s head closer to her breast.

“No,” she said, without turning; “he need not take everything I love.”

CHAPTER VIII.

A PEACEFUL HOUR.

The days and nights of early September, 1870, were like perfect days and nights in June, when soft winds stir and the blue air scintillates under the gemmed rays of the sun. The mornings were fresh and exquisite, the sunsets gorgeous, the midnight heavens magnificent.

On the afternoon of the thirteenth of September, the day set by General Trochu for a grand review of the National and Mobile Guards, Bourke, returning from the city, found Harewood writing his weekly synopsis of the situation for the Syndicate.

"Hello," he said, looking up from his desk lazily, "did you forward our mail matter, Cecil?"

Bourke nodded and sat down on the bed. Harewood, coat off, shirt sleeves rolled up, relighted his pipe and continued writing.

When he had finished, Bourke, lying on the bed, was sleeping lightly, but he woke as Harewood's chair scraped across the floor.

"Tired, Cecil?" asked Harewood.

"A little. I walked from the Arc to the Place de la Bastille."

"Whew!" exclaimed Harewood, "what for; to see the review? Was it worth the trouble?"

"Yes. There's a bit of excitement in the city," yawned Bourke, sitting up, his eyes still puckered by the light, his hair in disorder.

"That review," he continued, "was significant, Jim. I saw 300,000 men in line from the Arc to the Place de la Bastille, all bawling the Marseillaise, and all of them nothing but National Guards and Mobiles. They made a great deal of noise."

"Was it impressive?" asked Harewood.

"They made a great deal of noise," repeated Bourke.

"O!"

"They are not regulars, of course. I don't know what they can do. It was queer not to see the uniforms everybody expects to see in a review

in Paris—the cuirassiers, you know—and the rest. The people are acting foolishly, anyway, I think. They're stark mad over the new republic; they're changing the names of the streets, too; the rue Bonaparte is now the rue du Peuple, the place Royale is the place de Vosges—O, the whole business is too childish—too grotesque! Think of wasting time and energy in such foolish occupations, with a couple of hundred thousand German soldiers—heaven knows how close to the gates! Why, Jim, they have even scratched the Imperial N from the bridges and the public buildings, and have painted:

‘LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY’

over everything. Victor Hugo and Edgar Quintet are dancing cancons on the ramparts, hurling odes and lyrics at the Prussians! Think how Moltke must grin! But their crowning madness has just been accomplished; in spite of the Governor of Paris and the Minister of War, they have decreed that all officers of Mobiles shall be elected by their own soldiers! What frightful stupidity!”

“What became of the Mobiles and National Guard? Gone to the forts?”

“Some—the Mobiles. The others are scattered. They are to police the city and ramparts. I fancy we'll have a few here soon. To-day the sixty-nine gates of the city and all the railroad tunnels have been closed until the siege ends. They're establishing drawbridges over the moats. I tried to cable that, but the censor cut it out. By the way, eighty odd words of your Tuesday despatches were cut out, too. Don't swear, Jim.”

Harewood began to qualify the censor with such energy that Bourke, unable to control his laughter, went into his own room and shut the door.

“Predestined idiot!” muttered Harewood, scowling at his manuscript; “now I suppose he'll also cut this to suit his own degraded intelligence!” He shoved back his chair and looked out of the window, sulky, impatient, a little wrathful at Bourke's amusement. For he cared a great deal about his work; he laboured faithfully to acquire a literary style. His style, at its best, was simple and honestly direct; often

forceful and sometimes clear. To have a French censor butcher and garble it always made him furious; but he was always able to enjoy the good-natured banter of his comrades when he had cooled down. It was his first service as correspondent in the field, and he learned that there was little romance in it. He learned other things, too; he found that electricity had nothing to do with the speed of telegrams, but that their celerity was regulated entirely by the diplomacy and generosity of the sender. He learned when to bribe and when not to—when to use the wires and when to use the mails—when to see, when to be blind—when to speak—when to remain silent. He found that there were four things which army officers dreaded, bad roads, the war department, typhus, and war correspondents. They could become habituated to the first three plagues, but it needed the diplomacy of Disraeli to reconcile a general to the infliction of newspaper men. However, when this was once accomplished, half the battle might be considered won. The other half of the battle was in reality a duel—a perpetual assault upon a cool, polite, often playful, often sympathizing official who apparently possessed an insatiable thirst for literature and who took the closest personal interest in the perusal of manuscripts. This official was the dreaded censor. Harewood had easily won half the battle—but what man can affirm that anybody except the censor ever won the other half? Of course it was not difficult to evade censorship for a while, but indiscretion meant not only personal inconvenience but also ultimate expulsion.

Harewood sat moodily by the window, biting the amber pipe stem, staring absently across the fortifications opposite, where, beyond, wrapped in a sapphire haze, the valley of the Bièvre lay, green and brilliant under the showered sunshine. To the east a dun-coloured vapor hung over Meudon woods, to the south the sun glittered on distant window panes, dotting the valley with tiny points of fire. Everywhere lay patches of green woods, checkered expanses of yellow grain stubble and ploughed ground, squares of paler green where cabbages grew, or blots of sombre verdure, marking potato fields. White spires rose beyond l'Hay; greenhouses, roofs sparkling,

clustered along the route to Fontenay, and over all the great warders of the valley loomed, purple through the mist, majestic, mysterious—Fort Ivry, Fort Bicêtre, Fort Montrouge and Fort Vanves.

Bourke sauntered in presently, note book open, pipe lighted. “Forgot to tell you something,” he said between his teeth. “I found out that Jules Favre contemplates making overtures to Bismarck. What do you think of that? Rather a tumble, after his diplomatic twaddle—eh, Jim?” He took his pipe out of his mouth with a gesture of disgust.

“How did you hear about it?” asked Harewood, intensely interested.

“Now, my son, that’s my business and you needn’t ask.”

Harewood laughed and nodded.

“My conclusions are,” continued Bourke, waving his pipe, “that if he tries to fix up things he will fail; first, because the Parisians will surely repudiate any agreement; second, because he can’t swallow his own words, and Bismarck won’t let him off without the cession of Lorraine, at least; third, because I’m convinced that this war is not, as Bismarck says it is, a war against Napoleon, but a war against France and the French, and I tell you, Jim, Germany means to crush France for years to come. Why,” he continued, “if all they want is to humiliate and destroy Napoleon and his dynasty, they have done it already. The Emperor is a prisoner in Germany, the Parisians have chased the poor Empress and the Prince Imperial across the Channel. France is a republic now. Then why don’t King Wilhelm and Bismarck ask for an indemnity and go home to their cabbage gardens?”

Harewood listened attentively, but offered no comment.

Bourke continued: “O no, that isn’t what the Germans want; they mean to dominate the continent and occupy the place that France held three months ago. There is but one way to do it—crush France. They’re coming here to try it, too. If they succeed it may mean a permanent German federation—perhaps an empire—a Teutonic empire dominating all eastern Europe. I tell you, Jim, it makes me sick. France, with all her faults, has done more for human progress, human liberty—for everything that makes life worth while—than all the other

European nations put together. To-day, aye, to-morrow, too, Germany might drop out of the world, and the world would never be the worse. But blot out France or England or your own blessed country, and it would mean something very different. I shall now go and write this out; it's probably invaluable. Much obliged for your attention, Jim."

He went away, laughing, only to reappear at the door.

"Jim, that kid is here. May she come in?"

"Yes," said Harewood, listlessly.

A moment later Red Riding Hood entered, removed her small wooden shoes, and pattered up to him in noiseless chaussons, saying seriously, "Bon jour, Monsieur Harewood; peut on entrer, si'l vous plait?"

"Indeed you may," he said, smiling, "have you come to pay me another little visit?"

Red Riding Hood shook her head and stood looking up at him, waiting for the kiss that was, to her, the most important event in her daily life. He laughed and held out his hands; she put both frail arms around his neck and raised her face. This solemn rite accomplished, the child sighed and nestled closer to his shoulder.

"I have finished the dishes," she explained; "I then played with Schéhérazade. Then I learned my lesson. It was arithmetic. I was perfect."

"Are you sure, Red Riding Hood?"

"Yes. I repeated it to Mademoiselle Hildé. She said it was quite perfect. I then played with Mehemet Ali, the parrot, who is my friend. I am fond of the parrot."

"Suppose," said Harewood, "that some time you were very, very hungry; would you eat Mehemet Ali?"

"No, monsieur."

"Why?"

"The parrot is my friend. It would be shameful."

Harewood laughed aloud and Red Riding Hood, looking anxiously at him, laughed too—a timid, joyless little laugh, sadder than tears.

“You are right, that would not do at all, would it? We must never aid ourselves at a friend’s expense—even a parrot’s.”

Here ended the lesson, for Harewood found that loyalty and unselfishness were virtues which Red Riding Hood would never need to learn from him. As for lies, the child apparently had never conceived the idea of telling one. That lesson, too, had ended with a laugh and a kiss. But, alas! appropriating pastry was Red Riding Hood’s besetting sin; and it took all of Harewood’s cleverness to explain to her the difference between mine and thine. She did comprehend at last, and gave him her promise for future abstaining; and with this was accomplished the moral regeneration of Red Riding Hood—which, after all, was no very difficult undertaking.

“I came,” said Red Riding Hood, “to tell you several things. Shall I?”

“By all means,” replied Harewood anxiously.

“Then I will. The first is that I was perfect in arithmetic; I have already told you that. The other is that Mademoiselle Yolette has gone out. She has gone to the market, I think. The third is that Mademoiselle Hildé is quite alone in the parlour.”

Harewood looked at her suddenly, a faint colour under his eyes.

“Why do you tell me that, Red Riding Hood?”

“Because,” said the child, “I think she would like to have you come down.”

“Did she say so?”

“No.”

“Then why do you think so?”

“I don’t know,” said Red Riding Hood, looking up into his face. Harewood put one arm around the child; his eyes were absently fixed on hers. After a few moments he said: “Do you love Hildé, Red Riding Hood?”

“Yes—and you also, monsieur.”

“Me?”

“If you do not mind——”

Harewood smiled and said:

“I want you to love me, too, Red Riding Hood—and Mademoiselle Yolette and Monsieur Bourke—Mademoiselle Hildé best of all. Will you?”

“I don’t know,” said the child, “whether I love you or Mademoiselle Hildé best. I must think for a day,” she continued sedately, “and then I will tell you. Good-by, I am going to shell peas.”

“Good-by, Red Riding Hood,” said Harewood, “and will you please come again?”

“Yes—to-morrow.”

She trotted over to the door, put on her wooden shoes, turned and said, “Adieu, Monsieur Harewood!” and went away down stairs, tap, tap, tap, over the tiles.

Harewood shook out his coat, washed the inkstains from his hands, brushed his hair, settled his necktie, then took a dozen turns up and down the room. Presently he went to Bourke’s door and opened it, but that young man was again asleep, fists doubled up like an infant’s, face buried in the pillow. Harewood watched him for a moment, preoccupied by his own thoughts; after a while he turned away down the stairs, stepping softly on Bourke’s account.

The door of the parlour was open. Schéhèrazade lay on the sofa, eyes closed, tail trailing to the floor. The lioness opened one eye when Harewood entered, immediately closing it, however, when she saw who it was. Harewood had never taken any notice of her, therefore, as a self-respecting lioness, she snubbed him. Hildé was not in the room, but he heard her voice not far away, probably in her own bedroom. She was singing to herself as she often did over her needlework:

“Of all the saints in Brittany
Sainte Hildé,
Sainte Hildé,
is blessed evermore—”

He dropped into a chair, smiling at Schéhèrazade and listening to Hildé’s voice:

“Pachik, pachik, ma fach bihan,
Kes d’he saludin d’he c’hampr
Ha tach d’e’houd ober kompliment!”

“Hildé!” he called suddenly; “Salud d’ac’h, ma dousig Hildé!”

There was a silence; then Hildé’s voice in utter astonishment:

“Monsieur Harewood! Who taught you to speak Breton?”

The next instant she was at the door, flushed and wondering, her needlework in her hands.

“Saludan ma dous a diabell,” he said, laughing. “I learned Breton in Morbihan, mademoiselle.”

“Hennez zo eum den a galité!” she answered, saucily, also laughing. “Whoever would have believed that an American could speak the Breton tongue!”

“I heard you singing about Sainte Hildé and the little page, and all that, so I thought I’d like to hear more of it. Could you work just as well here, mademoiselle—and sing, too?”

“I don’t know,” she said, seating herself, and passing her needle through a bit of flannel. She looked up at him once, then dropped her lids and began to sew. After a silence she looked up again, saying:

“Yolette and I are Bretonnes; did you know it?”

“I think I suspected,” he replied, smiling.

“Why, monsieur?”

“Yolette’s eyes—they are the rare Breton blue. Besides, your songs are always Finistère songs—and you know how few French people can understand the Breton language. You and Yolette often speak it when you are alone together.”

She watched him shyly, a little indignant that he knew so much more than she could have suspected.

“Really,” she said, “it would be only just if I understood English—when you and Monsieur Bourke talk together so rapidly—tr-r-r-r! C-r-r-r!—in your English tongue! I am displeased, monsieur; I shall talk no more Breton with Yolette.”

“Will you sing something in Breton for me if I sing you a beautiful little English song, Hildé?”

Hildé laughed outright.

“Yes—if you sing first.”

“Here goes, then! It’s a song I’m very fond of,” and he began to

drone out “Jim Crow.”

“Horrid!” cried Hildé, putting both hands over her ears; “how can you make such sounds—like June beetles around a candle!”

“Isn’t it pretty?” demanded Harewood, a little disconcerted. He hadn’t much voice, but he was fond of music and proportionally soulful when he sang. “Jim Crow” being his favourite—and his limit, he had sung it with an enthusiasm that set Hildé’s nerves on edge.

“Anyway,” he said, “it isn’t as ding-dong as the French songs,

“Henriette était fille
D’un baron de renom,
D’une illustre famille
Était le beau Damon,
Il était fait au tour,
Elle était jeune et belle,
Et d’un parfait amour
Ils étaient le modele.

“I don’t know anything to compare with that for imbecility,” he added.

Hildé was laughing so gaily that Schéhèrazade woke up, cast a reproachful glance at them both and loped off into the garden. This made Hildé laugh the more, and Harewood, catching the infection, laughed too, not knowing exactly why.

“We are very ridiculous,” said Hildé, gathering up her needlework. Her cheeks were aglow with delicate colour, her eyes brilliant and fairly dancing with mirth. After an interval, the sudden soberness which always follows laughter came upon them. Hildé resumed her sewing, Harewood leaned back in his chair, watching her wistfully.

Dreaming there in the silent room, where bars of sunlight lay across the carpet and drowsy flies buzzed along the window panes, there came to them a sense of peace, of stillness, of desire fulfilled, something they had never before known nor even wished for.

She began speaking to him quite naturally, indolently occupied with her needle, now and then raising her head to look at him, resting her clear eyes on his with confidence. Such moments are rare in life, but they come to all at times, when everything seems but the continuation of familiar conditions, long established, an unchanging

régime, pleasant, even in tenor, without trouble, without desire. She told him of the convent, of the death of her uncle, of her hopes, her fears. She spoke of Brittany, of Carhaix, of the Pardon of the Birds, and of Sainte Anne d'Auray. She painted for him in quaint phrases the chapel of Morlaix, the coast of Saint Gildas, the Icelanders and the blessing of the fleet. He asked her to sing and she sang the "Ar Vinorez" deliciously.

Carmel,
Carmel,
Na vo ket dimet ar vinorez
Ken vo bet pardon ar Carmel—

She told him naïvely of Ker-Is, that city punished and submerged because of the fault of Ahes, daughter of Gradlon, the king:

"Qu'y a-t-il dans la ville d'Is,—si la jeunesse est tellement joyeuse,—et si j'entends le biniou—"

She recited the Gwerz of Count Gweto, and her eyes filled at the moment of peril:

"Seigneur Dieu ma fille, comment fera-t-on!" And the reply:

"Allez danz la chambre blanche prendre de beaux atours!"

All the pathos and mystery of the Bretonne was in her eyes and voice as she paused in her sewing and intoned for him the "Vespers of Saint Gildas—"

"O Vierge glorieuse Marie!" until he seemed to hear the sea bells tolling off the cliffs and the long coast swell washing, rocking, washing, where the surf curls in a flurry of settling silver sands.

"There is something more in Brittany," he said, vaguely uneasy—"something besides the waves and the bell-buoy, and the vespers of the sea. At Treguier they have a song, called 'Little Madeleine' or 'Madeleinic.'"

"Madelenik!" she said, her face lighting up with an imperceptible smile; "it is really a chansonnette for the inn, with its gay refrain;

"Ho! fois! j'y vais;
Ho! fois! je n'y vais pas."

It is very easy, monsieur, to see where you spent your evenings in Treguier."

He laughed and hummed the dashing chorus—

“Ho! fe! graon; ho! fe! na naon!”

until she caught the spirit and joined her clear voice to his, and they sang the chanson of little Madeleine until between laughter and tears Hildé sank back, both white hands closing her ears in protest.

At the same moment Yolette appeared, market basket over her arm, a picture of amazement.

“What on earth is all this about, little Madeleine!” she cried: “never—never have I seen such children—never! never! And, monsieur, may I ask who taught you my native language?”

Harewood confessed his knowledge, while Hildé, becoming very serious, opened the basket and made a mental invoice of the contents.

“Yolette, you forgot the pigeons.”

“No,” said Yolette, “I did not forget, but do you know they are a little too dear? The butcher said it was because the Germans were stealing everything in the north. I told him it was nonsense.”

“I think,” said Harewood, “that things are going to be a little dearer in Paris. Of course everybody says that we have food enough to last a long time, even if the Germans should blockade the whole department, but it will make things more expensive, and I only wish to say that you must not be too indulgent to Monsieur Bourke and myself.”

Hildé looked up at him without answering; all her shyness had returned with the return of Yolette. Her sister smiled and glanced at the basket, saying: “I think the dinner will be nice—even without pigeons.”

She started toward the kitchen, but paused to say; “O, I forgot to tell you, the soldiers are marching into the Prince Murat barracks, and a company of sailors have brought a cannon and are mounting it on top of the ramparts across the street.”

“If they fire it will break every window in the house, won’t it?” exclaimed Hildé, in consternation.

Harewood frowned and started for the door.

“Hark!” said Yolette, “the people are cheering outside. I can hear the drums in the barracks, can you? Hildé, where are you going?”

Hildé had started with Harewood, but now she hesitated, looking at Yolette with troubled eyes.

“If—if they fire the cannon—and it bursts——” she began.

“Of course,” said Yolette, gravely; “then why do you go near it?”

Hildé looked blankly at her sister, then sat down and bent swiftly over her sewing. She had not been thinking of her own safety but of Harewood’s; and when she realised that, her cheeks turned scarlet.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PROPHET.

When Harewood reached the front door he stood amazed. The rue d'Ypres, that broad, sunny street, usually as quiet and deserted as a country road, was thronged with people, from the Porte Rouge to the Prince Murat barracks. In front of the house the people were silent and attentive, watching a swarm of labourers gathered around the bastion. A company of sailors from the fleet stood, leaning on their rifles, in front of a strange, shapeless structure that towered into the air above the heads of the crowd, one long steel arm stretched out stark against the sky. Beyond it, on the rusty rails of the narrow-gauge track, stood a car truck, painted blue, and on this truck lay a gigantic cannon.

The gun-carriage had already been placed on the circular track, sunk into the cement below the ramparts, the terrassiers were shaving the terrace, sodding it along the glacis and piling sacks filled with earth across the angles of the epaulment. The rotten gabions and packed barrels that supported the gun-terrace were being removed and new ones substituted; locksmiths and carpenters worked in the bomb-proofs, and the tinkle of chisel and thud of mallet came up, half-smothered, from below.

Down the street drums were rolling sonorously from the court of the caserne; and now, bugles sounding, rifles glittering in the sun, a company of infantry issued from the sallyport and marched solidly on to the Porte Rouge, their red trousers a long undulating line against the green of the glacis.

Suddenly above the crowd the great derrick began to move, three chains dangling from its single rigid arm, the little rusty engine staggering under spasms of steam jets. Slowly the cannon swung up into the air, turning as the steel arm turned, further, further, lower and lower. Then, in the stillness, a boatswain's whistle sounded, once, twice; the crowd swayed forward, and thousands of voices rose in thundering cheers:

“Vive la France!”

All that night Harewood lay restlessly on his bed, thinking of the future, which, until he first met Hildé, had held no terrors for him. Now it was different. The menace of a siege meant something more than excitement and newspaper despatches, it meant danger, perhaps famine, perhaps annihilation, to a city that had suddenly become important to him—because Hildé lived there. He had never seen a siege. His ideas on the subject were founded on histories. He could not believe that any army would be able to absolutely isolate such a city as Paris—itself nothing but a gigantic citadel, with its double armour of fortresses and ramparts, its suburbs, railways, forests and rivers. He believed that even if a German army sat down before the walls it could never sustain such a position against hunger, against the sorties of the hundred thousands of troops, against those new armies that everybody said were forming in the south, at Bordeaux, at Tours, at Rouen, from the war ports to the Loire. In common with the great mass of the Parisians, he never doubted that, as soon as the Germans appeared, the bombardment would begin; but he doubted the ability of a Prussian artilleryman to send shells into Paris from a gun outside the range of Mont-Valérien. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied with the rue d’Ypres as a haven of safety for Hildé at such a time. It was practically on the city ramparts, it was close to one of the gates, the Porte Rouge, and closer still to the barracks, and he knew that if the German cannon troubled the city at all, the fire would be concentrated on the fortifications, the gates, the magazines and the barracks.

Lying there in the darkness, he could hear, from the ramparts, the marine sentinels’ challenge as they walked the rounds; the stir and the movement of horses, the dull creaking of wheels. He thought of the four great forts that covered the country beyond the Vaugirard secteur, Montrouge, Vanves, Ivry and Bicêtre. If the Germans attempted to seize Meudon, there was the fort of Issy; if they advanced toward Creteil, the fort of Charenton blocked the way. Could they hold Saint Cloud with Mont-Valérien looming like a thundercloud in the north? Could they seize Sèvres, under the cannon of the Point-du-Jour? No,

he could not see how a German battery would be able to send its shells into the bastions of Montrouge, and this conclusion comforted him until he fell asleep to dream of a cloudless sky raining shells over a city where Hildé lay white and dead; and he awoke, trembling in every limb. He turned over and tried to go to sleep again, but he could not, dreading a sleep that might bring such dreams.

He thought of Bourke, slumbering peacefully in the next room; he thought of Red Riding Hood and of Yolette, also asleep; but for a long time he avoided the path of thought which he had so often shirked before—the path that led to the solution of a question. Awake, sometimes asleep, the question repeated itself—it was repeating itself now, more persistently, more monotonously than ever. The question was “Hildé,” and Hildé remained an enigma, not because he could not solve the enigma, but because he would not. As he lay there, he felt that the time was coming when it would be impossible to evade an explanation with himself. He shifted his head restlessly and opened his eyes in the darkness, and before he knew it he had faced the question at last.

What had happened to him? What was going to happen? Why should thoughts of Hildé occupy him constantly? Was it because, in a moment of unselfishness, he had renounced the idle amusement of inspiring affection in a young girl? Why had he renounced it? Every man, consciously or unconsciously, seeks the same amusement; and if conscience intervenes, is it not easy to pretend that the woman was perfectly aware of the game? Or, if the result does turn out grave for the woman, a man can always have recourse to those little exercises of diplomatic hair-splitting with his conscience, to which men’s consciences so easily adapt themselves.

It is merely a matter of chance, this amusement which may or may not be harmless; a selfish man takes the risk, risking nothing himself.

All this was clear to Harewood as he lay there in the dark; but it did not satisfy him as it had once. Moreover, whereas, a few days ago, he was certain that he himself risked nothing; now he was far from sure. He asked himself whether he was in danger of caring seriously for

Hildé, but could not reply. Had he been simply curious to know how far he could go? Had it been vanity, after all, or a lower incentive?

His face grew hot with shame and self-resentment; he was mentally vindicating Hildé—defending her against himself; but he did not know it; he thought it was himself that he was vindicating. This mental protest of innocence left him calmer and less restless, and after a little he fell asleep. Whatever he dreamed must have been pleasant, for the morning sun, stealing into the room, illuminated his face, young, peaceful, touched with a smile as innocent as the woman he was walking with in dreamland.

Bourke woke him, regretfully, saying; “What the deuce are you grinning about in your sleep? Get up, Jim, I’m going to Saint Cloud to see what’s in the wind? You’ll come, too, won’t you?”

“Yes,” said Harewood, “I suppose the trains are running yet. What’s the news?”

While he was bathing and dressing, Bourke ran over the morning papers, reading aloud the telegraphic despatches.

“Hello—what do you think of this? When the Germans entered Laon, some crazy French soldier ran to the citadel and flung a torch into the magazine!”

“Read it,” said Harewood, lathering his face for a shave.

“Here it is: ‘Through the cowardice or treachery of the Governor of Laon, the Duke of Mecklenbourg entered the city on the ninth of September at the head of the enemy’s 6th cavalry division. It was raining heavily. Suddenly a frightful explosion shook the city to its foundations; the citadel had blown up, killing more than a hundred of our soldiers and three hundred and fifty Prussians. This awful catastrophe was the work of an old French soldier, a veteran of the Crimea and of Italy, who, not having the courage to surrender the place to the Prussians, crept into the magazine and set fire to it, blowing himself and everybody there to pieces. The Duke of Mecklenbourg was wounded: our General Theremin was killed. The German troops, recovering themselves, cried that they were betrayed, and flinging themselves upon our unarmed Mobiles, massacred them

in the streets and at the house doors. The slaughter was swift and merciless. Yet, who, remembering the horrible courage of that heroic madman, can pronounce one word of blame or of regret for his deed? Honour to the dead!’ ”

Harewood, razor poised, face lathered, stared at Bourke.

“It’s simply ghastly,” he said; “it brings the whole business out more plainly, doesn’t it? Laon is only a few days’ march from Paris. I can’t realise that people are doing things like that while you and I sit still and scribble rot to the journals.”

“I don’t know that we’ve had such an easy time of it,” said Bourke; “Mars-la-Tour was no football game, Jim. And as for you—you’ve given the Prussians chances enough to shoot your idiotic head off, haven’t you?”

“Nonsense,” said Harewood, returning to his shaving; “I mean that there’s a vast difference between us and those poor devils of soldiers out there. That citadel business chills me to the marrow. Go ahead with your newspapers, Cecil.”

Bourke continued reading aloud, skimming through the mass of proclamations, edicts, appeals from hospitals and charities, until he was tired.

“There’s nothing new,” he said, throwing down the journal; “it’s merely the same crisis growing more acute hour by hour. As far as I can make out, the Germans are somewhere between here and Laon, the French fleet has done nothing, the Mobiles are a nuisance, the National Guards are raising hell in Belleville, an army is forming along the Loire to assist Paris, and Garibaldi is coming to France. That’s a fair synopsis of the whole business. As for the United States interfering, it’s not likely: Italy’s gratitude is not to be counted on: France must face the music alone.”

“I wish,” observed Harewood, “that the Paris journals would exhibit less hysteria and more common sense. They’ve had Bismarck killed every week since last August, they’ve captured Moltke, they’ve inoculated the Red Prince with typhus, they’ve announced the mutiny of every regiment in the Bavarian and Saxon armies. Look at the way

the government is blowing up tunnels and bridges. What lunacy! They're only hampering their own movements, and it takes about a day to lay pontoons." He put on his coat, standing up for Bourke to brush him.

"That's a big cannon they've mounted down there," he observed, looking out of the window. "Come on, Cecil, breakfast must be waiting."

As they descended the stairs, Hildé and Yolette stood at the front door looking at the cannon across the street.

"Good morning," said Yolette brightly, "Messieurs, have you seen the Prophet?"

"Which particular prophet do you mean? I'm a little in that way myself," said Bourke gaily, "and I prophesy that we are going to have a most delicious bowl of café-au-lait in a moment or two."

"Anybody can prophesy that," said Hildé; "Yolette means the cannon. The soldiers have named it 'The Prophet'; everybody is talking about it; the morning papers say it can throw shells as large as a man, and that it will be terrible for the Prussians."

"O," smiled Harewood, "so they call it 'The Prophet'?"

"All the same," said Yolette, "I hope it will not need to prophesy."

They stood a moment looking at the great silent gun, at the squad of sailors who were exercising around it, then Yolette laughed lightly and summoned them to breakfast, leading the way with her arm around her sister's slender waist.

"There is an awful creature," said Hildé, "who calls himself the Mouse, and who came into the hallway early this morning and asked for Monsieur Harewood."

Shouts of laughter interrupted her; Bourke begged Harewood to introduce his friend the Mouse, and Yolette insisted on inviting him to dinner. Even Hildé laughed until Harewood, a little red, explained who the Mouse was.

"And you helped him to hide from the police!" exclaimed Yolette, horrified.

"That's just like Jim!" said Bourke, who had enjoyed the story

keenly.

Hildé said nothing; her changing face was turned to Harewood.

“What did he want with me?” asked Harewood, carelessly. “Money?”

“No,” replied Hildé, with a strange little shudder; “he said, ‘Tell him to go to the “Undertakers” if he ever needs help.’”

“The Undertakers!” gasped Yolette.

“It’s not what you think: it’s a sort of club in Belleville, a nest where the *élite* of all cutthroats congregate,” said Harewood, much amused. “I suppose the creature is grateful to me for hiding him. I don’t think I shall accept his invitation.”

“Gratitude is rare in that species,” observed Bourke, cautiously; “I fancy he’d cut your throat for a franc, Jim.”

“Probably he would,” laughed the other.

Hildé listened in silence. When Bourke slung his binoculars over his shoulder and said he was going to Saint Cloud with Harewood, Yolette insisted on putting up for them a little luncheon. Hildé aided her, silent, preoccupied, deftly tying the small parcels and wrapping up two half bottles of red wine. At the front door Bourke stood, telling Yolette not to keep dinner waiting, as they might stay away all night; and, as Harewood started along the hallway to join his comrade, Hildé began carelessly:

“Of course, Monsieur Harewood, you are not going to the—the ‘Undertakers’?”

“Why, no,” he said, surprised, “we are going to Saint Cloud.”

“But—I mean—you are never going—are you?”

There was a silence; he looked at her without stirring, one hand on the door. Again that swift emotion sent the blood thrilling, tingling, leaping through every vein, yet, even then, he reasoned—even then, when in her face he saw reflected his own emotion—even then, when a fierce desire seized him to stoop and take her in his arms—this girl so close to him—Hildé, who would not resist. He stood there dumbly, one hand twisted in the door handle, daring neither to speak nor move—for her sake. The enchantment of her bent head, the curve of her

scarlet mouth, the white hands idle by her side, held him fascinated.

Bourke called impatiently, and came through the hallway toward them. At the sound of the voice Hildé raised her head as though aroused from a dream. With dazed eyes she moved toward the door, holding the little packet—Harewood's luncheon.

"Time to start," said Bourke, with a cheerful smile; "are you ready?"

"Yes," said Harewood, shortly.

He took the luncheon from Hildé's listless hands, thanking her and saying good-by, then followed Bourke out into the rue d'Ypres.

When they had gone Yolette went back into the garden, where, slate in hand, Red Riding Hood sat, accomplishing multiplication. Hildé lingered by the door watching the sailors, rifles en bandoulière, drilling with "The Prophet." From the bastion the short commands of the officer came clearly to the ear; "La hausse a quinz cents metres! Première pièce, feu! La hausse a deux milles metres! Première pièce, feu!"

Then, pretending that the gun had been fired, the two cannoniers in the centre swabbed the piece as the brigadier and artificier unlocked the breech, the two loaders hoisted in a dummy shell and the aide pointeur affixed the lanyard. Mounted on the gun carriage, high against the sky, the pointeur rested both hands on the breech, while behind him two cannoniers imperceptibly swung the enormous gun from right to left. Then he straightened up, both hands raised; the movement ceased, the captain verified the elevation, the aide pointeur seized the lanyard.

"First piece, fire!"

And the pantomime recommenced, a succession of figures trotting backward and forward, suddenly rigid, then an abrupt gesture, a command, and the dark blue figures trotting to and fro again.

Hildé looked at the barracks beyond the rue Pandore, where, through a brief interval of iron railing, she could see the line infantry marching and wheeling to the sound of bugles. Down at the Porte Rouge a solid column of wagons poured over the pont-levis—vehicles

of every size and shape, piled with furniture, bedding, grain, cabbages or bales of hay and potato sacks. The country people and the inhabitants of the suburbs were coming into the city in constantly increasing numbers, bringing with them furniture and live stock. Farm wagons, piled high with bedding, on which sat children or old women, holding the family clock, crowded against furniture vans from Paris, loaded with the bric-à-brac of prosperous suburban merchants; oxen huddled behind smart carriages driven by servants in livery, cows, sheep, even turkeys and geese pursued a dusty course through the gates; and over all rose the cries of the teamsters, the lowing of cattle, the ominous murmur of disheartened things, fleeing from that impending tempest that was rolling up somewhere beyond the horizon.

In the eyes of the men there was more of despair than of terror; the old people were dumb, peering through the dust with hopeless eyes, tearless and resigned. Even the children, laughing up into their silent mother's eyes, grew sober and sat quietly on the heaps of bedding, staring down at the huddled cattle, trampling by on either side.

To Hildé, however, the distant wagon train, half-hidden in dust, was scarcely visible except where it wound through the gate. Even there she could not distinguish features or age or sex, for the Porte Rouge was too far away, and the foliage of the chestnut trees hid a great deal. How much she divined is not certain, but she turned away into the house, a new weight on her heart, a sudden heavy foreboding.

In the bird store the canaries were singing lustily in the sunshine; Rocco, the monkey, cracked nuts and ate them with fearful grimaces at Mehemet Ali, the parrot, who looked at him enviously, upside down. Hildé dropped some fresh melon seeds into the parrot's china cup, renewed the water in all the cages, stirred up the squirrel's bedding, and sat down, her dimpled chin on her wrist.

She thought of Harewood, of the first time they had entered the bird store together. She thought of that moment when, before she knew it, he had bent and kissed her, and, wonder of wonders! she had kissed him. Why? The eternal question, always returning—why? Why? It

wearied her to think, and what was the use? Until he had kissed her she had always supposed that such a kiss was sin. The Sisters at the convent said so. Now she did not know—she knew nothing except that they had kissed each other. She had not resisted. She had never thought of resisting. In his presence she was satisfied and yet frightened, contented, yet restless. She never tired of watching him. She was curious, too, about him, wondering what his thoughts might be. Twice, since that first day, he had looked at her in the same way, with the same unexplained question in his eyes—a question that left her breathless, confused, dazed. Sadness, too, came later, and wistfulness,—a fatigue, a weakness that made her eyes grow tired and her limbs heavy.

She went slowly into her bedroom, only to stand before the faïence Sainte Hildé, thinking, thinking. She had never asked Sainte Hildé of Carhaix for aid because she did not know what to say, and, when she tried to think, the gold and azure mantle of the Sainte distracted her attention. How often had she counted the links in the chain around Sainte Hildé's china neck; how often had she striven to understand the placid, set smile on her polished face—yet always thinking of something quite different—of Harewood—and the kiss—and the question, unanswered, in his eyes.

And, as she stood musing in the twilight of her chamber, suddenly the room swam, the floor seemed to fall beneath her, a frightful explosion shivered every window-pane in the house.

Hildé reeled, clutching at a chair; Yolette crept in, pale, shaking in every limb.

“It is nothing,” she gasped; “they have fired ‘The Prophet.’ The Prussians are in Meudon woods!”

CHAPTER X.

THE PROPHECY.

The rue d'Ypres was a surging turmoil. Swarms of eager, anxious people thronged the street and the ramparts, where an irregular cloud of white smoke hung, half concealing the Prophet. A company of line soldiers were driving the crowd back to the sidewalk, a mounted gendarme shouted orders and wheeled his horse right and left, white gloved hand raised, the grenade on his baldrick glittering like a live coal. From everywhere came a murmur, growing louder, deeper, more persistent, "The Prussians! The Prussians! The Prussians!" until the monotonous chant swept from the Porte Rouge to the Prince Murat barracks like the thrill of a tense cord, deep strung, trembling, vibrating in the arched sky.

"The Uhlans were signalled near l'Hay!" cried a boy, raising himself on the point of his wooden shoes to catch a glimpse of the Prophet.

"Can one see the Prussians out there?" asked a woman, looking up anxiously at Hildé, who leaned from the window.

"I see nothing, madame," replied Hildé, faintly.

"They're there!" insisted a man in a blue blouse; "the Prussians are in Meudon woods, madame."

"Who saw them?" asked a dozen voices at once.

"How do I know. Everybody says they're there."

"They're over by that spire—one could see them with a glass," said an old man, who immediately became the centre of attention.

"What spire?" demanded the man in the blue blouse.

"Can you see them? Are there many?" asked another.

"The Uhlans! The Uhlans!" shouted the crowd.

Hildé, leaning from the shattered window, looked down at the surging throngs below and then out across the valley of the Bièvre, sparkling with dimmed brilliancy under its veil of haze. She saw nothing except patches of woods, white spires and checkered fields,

flecked with misty sunshine.

Yolette spoke calmly beside her; "We must fill all the window frames with panes of oiled paper. If they fire again, there will be no use having glass put in."

In the street below, an officer with gold lace on his crimson cap rode slowly through the centre of the crowd, repeating: "Go back, messieurs; there is nothing to see. The Prussians have not been signalled; the marines are only practising to get the range."

"No Prussians?" exclaimed the man in the blue blouse. A disgusted laugh ran through the crowd.

"Fichtre! Je m'en vais, alors," said a young butcher, tying his apron tighter: "we'll have plenty of time to see Monsieur Bismarck later."

The crowd slowly dissolved, melting away little by little, leaving a group of hopelessly curious gamins at the Porte Rouge, the barracks, and as near to the Prophet as the cannoniers would permit.

So, after all, the Prussians were not in sight. The crowd appeared to be good-humoured but a little disappointed, for they had come to see something, and now were obliged to retire unsatisfied. Curiosity prevailed in spite of dread—that insatiable curiosity of the Parisians, so easily gratified, so soon changed to ennui.

The shot from the bastions had aroused the whole city; even Bourke and Harewood, lounging on the terrace above the palace of Saint Cloud, heard the distant report, and saw the white smoke curling up along the battlements behind Issy.

"That comes from our quarter," said Harewood, "do you see the smoke, Cecil?"

"It's nothing," replied Bourke; "they're practising somewhere on our secteur, probably to find the range. It may be 'The Prophet' that has spoken."

They sat on a bench, lazily discussing cold chicken and light Bordeaux, looking off over the valley where the panorama of the Seine valley spread out. At their feet lay Paris, white, fair as a jewel set in green velvet, circled by the limpid necklace of the river. The late sunlight burned on the gilded dome of the Invalides, the twin towers

of Nôtre Dame glimmered beyond. Nearer, the majestic dome of the Panthéon and the strange towers of Saint Sulpice detached themselves from the level mass of green—the gardens of the Luxembourg; and, farther beyond, the observatory glistened, its mosque-like domes snowy white. To the southeast, looking across the peninsula where Billancourt lay smothered in verdure, the six forts of the south stretched away in a single rank to the river Marne; in the north the vast mass of Mont-Valérien cut the sky-line—always mysterious, always menacing, wrapped in gloomy majesty. Close to Saint Cloud the Montretout redoubt lay, still unfinished, but apparently formidable enough.

Harewood could see the terrassiers swarming over the glacis, troops marching and counter-marching, gun squads drilling on the parapets. At their feet, so close that Bourke could have tossed a pebble onto the roof, the beautiful palace of Saint Cloud nestled amid its ancient forest, stiff ranks of hedges, and quaint marble-terraced pools. A squadron of cuirassiers had dismounted at the foot of the terrace steps; hundreds of officers, municipal magnates, huissiers, gendarmes and holiday strollers passed through the palace grounds, staring up at the exquisite gray façade with unaccustomed emotions of curiosity and apprehension.

A group of mounted officers, returning from an inspection of the Haras carrefour, passed slowly beneath the terrace, spurs and helmets jingling, breastplates glittering like mirrors. One of them, a slim young fellow, splendidly mounted, glanced up at the two Americans as he passed, turned his head to look again, laughed and waved a gloved hand.

“Who’s that?” asked Bourke.

“General Bellemare, commanding at Saint Denis,” said Harewood. “He’s going to let me know when anything is up in that direction.”

It was sunset before they rose to go, with a last glance at the distant splendid city where the Arc-de-Triomphe had turned to an arch of pearl, the obelisk to a flaming torch—battlements, spires, bridges, impalpable as structures of opalescent mist, faded as the enchantment

waned, fainter, dimmer, until in the rose-banked haze a star broke out; another glimmered in the zenith. Then, as the shadows fell on forest and palace and sombre silent pools, far through the velvet twilight, between the avenues of trees, the moon, blood red, rose above the edges of the plain.

“Come on,” said Bourke, strapping his binocular and starting down the terrace steps.

Harewood followed him, entering the hedged avenue just as the cuirassiers rode out of the court. In the twilight one of the passing cavaliers stopped, calling to Harewood in English, tinged with an accent:

“It is you, my friend? Ma foi, you are not amiable—no, scarcely amiable. I am glad to see you again.”

Harewood shook hands with him as the horse passed, saying: “Good evening, General Bellemare; I am coming to see you at Saint Denis soon.”

“I shall expect you,” said General Bellemare, turning in his saddle. “Don’t forget—rue d’Athis—au revoir, mon chère,” and passed on with the cavalry into the dusk, saluting them both with easy grace.

The two Americans pursued their way toward the river, saying little to each other until they were standing on the deck of a bateau-mouche, speeding through the twilight under the high viaduct of the Point du Jour.

Red and green lights on the fleet of river gunboats sparkled under the shadowy arches of the viaduct; on the eastern bastions an electric light sputtered, blue and blinding, casting luminous shadows over quay and dock and long rows of polished siege guns, lying on car trucks below the ramparts. Other boats passed them, clustered lights on bow and stern, rows of illuminated windows and ports staining the dark waters with golden beams as they passed. The little waves danced along the wake, criss-crossed with green and crimson streaks, distorting the lantern reflections until the black water surged under a polished surface, shot to its depths with jagged, trembling shafts of coloured light.

“That’s the gunboat Farcy,” said Bourke, as a shadowy shape loomed up in midstream. “She’s got a big gun aboard, but to my thinking the recoil must raise the mischief with her plates.”

Already the dark, endless façade of the Louvre appeared on the left, bridge after bridge spanned the river, bright with festoons of gas lamps, until a black bulk surged up before them, crowned with clustered pinnacles, lighted only by the stars. It was the Cité. Their voyage had come to its end. As they climbed the steps of the quay below the Palais de Justice, away in the south a ball of fire sped up into the sky and burst, spraying the night with vermilion stars.

“What’s that signal?” muttered Bourke.

The distant report of a cannon confirmed the answer that the newsboys were shouting along the boulevard: “Extra! The Orléans railway blown up between Abion and Athis! The Prussians have reached the forest of Senart! Extra!”

Harewood bought a paper and stood reading it under a gas jet, while on every side an increasing tumult arose from the crowded sidewalks as rocket after rocket whirled up into the night and the dull thunder muttered from the forts of the west. In the glare of the lighted shop windows, black masses of people gathered, gesticulating, blocking the street, lingering in knots under the gas lamps, where some boulevard orator alternately read from a newspaper and harangued his neighbours. Hoarse voices, with the sinister intonation of alarm bells, dominated the deeper hum of the multitude—insistent voices, clamouring disaster. “Extra! Extra!”—every discordant cry rang out harsh and tense, vibrating with the malice of prophecy.

“It’s true,” said Harewood soberly; “the Prussians have cut the Orléans railroad near Athis.”

He handed the journal to Bourke, adding, “there’ll be the devil to pay in the streets to-night. I’ve a mind to stay here and dine at the Café Rouge. What do you say?”

“I told Yolette not to expect us,” replied Bourke, “so it’s all right. Come on!”

They threaded their way through the crowd, crossed the street and

traversed the Place Saint Michel, where a jam of omnibuses and cabs, hopelessly mixed, blocked the passage of a battery of artillery. In the black mass, silhouettes of riders, towering in their high saddles, crossed and recrossed the gaslit bridge; here, a horse's head tossed, sharply outlined; there, the slim shape of a cannon detached itself from the shadowy chaos.

As they pressed on up the hill of the Saint Michel and entered the brightly lighted terrace of the Café Rouge, cuirassiers were passing through the boulevard Saint Germain, sabres, casques and polished armour shining, crimsoned with mirrored reflections from the flaming torches borne by single cavaliers. A trumpeter rode by, a trooper carrying a guidon, staff in stirrup, followed, then, all alone, came a general, sombre face shadowed, gilded sash, chapeau and epaulettes glittering with woven gold. Under his cocked hat his dreamy eyes looked out into the glare undazzled; he saw neither torch nor shadow, nor the steel blades of swords—he, the mystic, the oracle of vagueness, the apostle of the past—this Breton Governor of Paris, General Trochu.

So he passed by with his armoured troop, a remnant of ancient pageantry, a Breton of emblazoned chronicles, silent, vague-eyed, dreaming dreams of chivalry and paradise, and the blessed sainte whose filmy veil was a shield of God for the innocent.

When the last squadron had trampled past and was blotted out in the darkness, Bourke, followed by Harewood, entered the Café Rouge and found seats at a table between a soldier of the National Guard and one of Franchetti's scouts.

The latter was taunting the National Guardsman with the indiscipline of his battalion; the Guardsman answered sulkily and sawed away at his steak, washing huge mouthfuls down with goblets of red wine.

"You and your Major, eh?" sneered the scout. "Tell me, my friend, since when has a battalion of the National Guard boasted a Major? I leave it to these two gentlemen"—here he turned and nodded at Bourke and Harewood—"I leave it to these gentlemen, if it is possible for a National Guard battalion to have a Major, unless it's a company

of fantoches!”

“Fantoche yourself!” shouted the Guardsman, stung to fury by the taunt; “let me tell you that Major Flourens is Major because he’s accepted the command of three Belleville battalions. If you don’t like it, go up to the ‘Undertakers’ to-night and say so to Buckhurst—and see what happens.”

“Who is Buckhurst?” inquired the scout sarcastically.

The Guardsman swallowed a mouthful of bread, emptied his goblet, smacked his lips, and said: “None of your business.”

Bourke looked at Harewood.

“Buckhurst?” he repeated under his breath.

“It wouldn’t surprise me,” muttered Harewood, “if that ruffian is in Paris; the ‘Undertakers’ is just the place for him.”

They ate in silence for a while, preoccupied with this bit of news, news which they knew was well worth cabling to America. Forger, murderer and incendiary, Jack Buckhurst had at last been caught during the draft riots in New York, and, after being clubbed into insensibility, had been locked in the Tombs prison to be dealt with later. The next day the warden reported him dying; the day after he was gone, but not to hell. Where he had gone the authorities tried for a while to find out, until at last the fame of his exploits faded into legendry, and nothing was left of his memory except an occasional line in a newspaper and a faded photograph in the rogues’ gallery.

The scout began again to tease the National Guardsman, asking sneering questions about Belleville and the battalions quartered there, until the Guardsman jumped up in a rage, cursing impartially the whole Latin quarter.

“If you think Belleville is so funny, come up and see: come up and tell us how funny we are!” he shouted; “Henri Rochefort will answer you—Major Flourens will reply to you—Monsieur Buckhurst may have a word to say! What is the Latin quarter, anyway, but a gutter full of cocottes and students and imbecile professors! Don’t tell me! And just wait a bit. The dance is beginning, my friend, and the red flag is a better flag than Badinguet’s tri-coloured horse blanket!”

The café was in an uproar by this time; the scout dashed a glass of red wine into the Guardsman's face, somebody in the room threw a chair at somebody else, howls and curses mingled with the crash of crockery, until somebody shrieked: "I'm stabbed!" and there was a rush for the door.

Bourke found himself out on the sidewalk, warding off the cuffs and kicks of several enthusiastic citizens who kept shouting: "He's a Prussian spy! Kill him!" until the hazard of battle brought Harewood to his aid. Together they managed to back out of the crush in good order until darkness enabled them to prudently efface themselves in the rue de Médecine. And it was well they did, for the cry of "Spy" in Paris at that period meant rough usage first and inquiry later—sometimes too late.

"Damnation!" said Harewood, furiously, holding up a tattered sleeve, "I've a mind to use my revolver next time, and I'll do it, too! Idiots! I'll show them who's a spy—yes, I will, Cecil!"

"You'd better not," said Bourke, grimly regarding his own dishevelled attire. "There's no telling what your Parisians may do in this crisis. Jim, you heard what that rat-faced soldier said about Buckhurst? Of course we'll cable it—but—what would you think of arresting the fellow and getting the government to hold him for extradition?"

"Government! What government? Not this crazy aggregation in Paris? What's the use? They won't do it; they won't dare touch him if he's hand in glove with the Belleville gang. Didn't you hear the soldier couple his name with Rochefort's and Flourens'? Probably he's one of the shining lights of their cutthroat club, the Undertakers!"

Bourke looked up suddenly.

"Jim, that's what we'll do; we'll go to Belleville to-night and attend a séance of the Undertakers!"

Harewood nodded uncertainly.

"You remember I have a friend at court there, the Mouse," he said; "but, as you suggested, it's possible that he may attempt to cut our throats as an expression of good will."

Bourke hesitated. He looked sharply at Harewood, undecided, a little curious to know how his comrade would act.

“Do you care to go?” he asked, after a pause. “You needn’t—on my account.”

“Yes, if you are going,” replied Harewood, pleasantly.

“Come ahead, then,” said Bourke, wondering whether Harewood had accepted the risk through recklessness, a reporter’s instinct of rivalry, or an unwillingness to let him take the risk alone.

CHAPTER XI.

THE UNDERTAKERS.

The Reign of Terror inoculated Paris with a virus, the first symptom of which was an eruption of “clubs.” A hundred years later the city was again violently infected; the Third Empire poisoned Paris, and a fresh outbreak of “clubs” followed, aggravated by the declaration of war in July, 1870. Now that the German armies were closing in on the city, the irresponsible mania for organising clubs increased to such an extent that, in certain quarters of Paris, every street had its club. And, of all the clubs organised to discuss politics or to combat political parties, the grimmest, the most sinister, the most thoroughly revolutionary, was the so-called “Undertakers club” of Belleville.

In the beginning this club had been extremely radical but perfectly sane. It flickered into life with the birth of the Third Empire, blazed like a comet during the fusillades of the boulevards and streets, and finally went out like a greasy candle, leaving a doubtful stench in the city. The flame, however, was relighted when Napoleon III declared war against his “good brother,” King Wilhelm of Prussia; and when that mild-natured and sentimental old monarch left his becabbed estates to chastise his “bad brother,” Napoleon, the Undertakers stirred in their slumbers.

The resurrection of the Undertakers was accomplished through three circumstances, the Franco-Prussian war, the will of God and Jack Buckhurst.

Where Buckhurst came from, how he came, why he came, no one knew; but in a week he had all Belleville aflame, clamouring for whatever he told it to clamour for. He walked into the Undertakers one evening, demanded an election, got it; demanded the privilege of the tribune, got it; demanded a revision of the constitution, a ballot for new officers, a new watchword, a new policy, and got everything he demanded. Then, with terrible vindictiveness, he turned on the semi-

sane minority, crushed it and drove it from the quarter; and, when denounced and accused by Carl Marx from his exile, he defied the International, and was overwhelmingly elected president of the Undertakers.

If the Undertakers had once been radical—even revolutionary—now it was of the “Reds,” reddest. All the worst elements of Belleville entered into its composition, its walls rang with furious denunciations of all existing social order, its motto was “disorder, destruction, death!”

If Buckhurst had not been the devil’s own prophet, if he had not foreseen what was to be, if he had not known as surely as the sun rises that the Commune was coming, coming inexorably after the brief war cloud had blown clear of a humiliated nation, the Undertakers would never have lifted a finger to equip a battalion for the defense of Paris. But Buckhurst saw further; he knew that every new marching battalion from Belleville meant, for him and his, a veteran reserve in time of need. His need would come when the Commune came. So when two organised battalions of the National Guard elected Flourens their commandant, Buckhurst rose in the tribune and called for volunteers to form a third battalion. He knew what he was doing, he crushed opposition and won his point, and the Undertakers fixed a night for the mustering in of their battalion and a reception to “Major” Flourens. All this, of course, was contrary to law, military and civil; there was no such title as major in the National Guard, but the government dared not antagonise Belleville at such a moment.

When Bourke and Harewood entered the hall, nobody apparently paid them the slightest attention. They slipped quietly up stairs to the wooden gallery, found a seat on the steps between two aisles, and looked down at the tumult below. A thick fog of tobacco smoke hung over everything, through which gas jets burned with pale, attenuated, spearlike flames. High on the three seats of the tribune, behind the pulpit-shaped desks, sat three men; on the right, Flourens, young, flushed, handsome, blue eyes dilated and nostrils fairly quivering with impatience, on the left sat Mortier, all body and bandy legs, with the

eyes of a lunatic deep set under a high, bald, domelike forehead.

In the middle, Buckhurst sat.

Harewood and Bourke leaned forward, eyes fixed on this incomprehensible international criminal. He sat there, pale eyes set in a paler face, a man of forty, lithe of movement, well proportioned, dainty of hand and foot. There was a hardness about his smoothly shaven face, yet each feature was well nigh perfect—except his eyes. These were so pale in colour that, in the gas flare, they looked almost pearly.

The hall was packed with the Undertakers and their friends, sitting cheek by jowl around hundreds of little iron tables, sloppy with beer dregs and the blue-black lees of cheap wine. Everybody was smoking, cheering, screeching, hammering beer mugs on the round iron tables; women waved wine glasses in the smoke-choked glare; soldiers of the National Guard banged on the floor with bayonets and sword-sheaths. Red flags were draped around the hall alternating with hideous decorations, mostly emblems of death and the undertaker's profession. In the midst of the uproar, the foul, smoke-reeking atmosphere, and stench of stale beer, half-a-dozen well-fed reporters sat writing at a long table which stood directly in front of the base of the tribune. Their sleek, ruddy faces, their well-groomed persons, silk hats, ivory-handled walking sticks, fat cigars tucked under waxed mustaches, presented a picture at once incongruous and reassuring. Oblivious to the crowd, the stench, the furious fulminations from militant anarchists, denouncing everything, including the Maker of everything, these reporters scribbled away at their pads, sharpened pencils or flicked the ashes from good cigars, under the very noses—in the very faces—of the most irresponsible crowd of ruffians that ever gathered to encourage each other's criminal instincts.

Mortier began to speak, rising on his crooked legs, his long throat swathed in a red handkerchief. Under the grotesque dome of his bald forehead, his villainous face contracted till the scrubby beard bristled. When he opened the black cavern of his mouth a single tooth broke the monotony of his grinning gums.

He spoke for a long time, his piercing voice splitting the choked atmosphere till the crowd howled again and the dreadful tumult broke back from the echoing rafters into a very hell of sound.

Flourens followed, speaking first earnestly, then with frightful impetuosity. He leaped to the platform before his desk and stretched out his arm. Every movement set the gaslight glittering and shimmering over the gilded arabesques on his uniform. The crowd roared, mad with exultation.

Then Buckhurst rose.

At the first quiet word a hush fell over the hall; his voice was placid, passionless, cool and grateful as summer showers.

“Citizens,” he said, “you have organised your battalion, you have added your voices to the voices of the other two battalions; a legion has been formed; Major Flourens is your leader. The government says that he is not. We differ from the government—we expect to differ more seriously still—when the time comes. At present we can afford to wait. But a time is very near when orders that come from the Palais Bourbon will be countermanded by orders issued from the Hôtel de Ville. The Undertakers need a larger hall—the Hôtel de Ville is not too large.”

Frantic cheering checked him for a moment. Then he resumed:

“For a time it is best that we go to the ramparts, that we fight the Prussians under the tri-colour. This is policy—for the moment. But—policies change; so do flags; so does what is now called patriotism.

“Citizen Mortier has reminded you that universal brotherhood is not compatible with patriotism, that the red flag of revolt is the universal banner of human brotherhood, that there is nobler game for your rifle bullets than the hearts of battle-driven peasants, who, although Prussians, are your brothers and your comrades in arms against the wealth of all the world. It is well to bear this in mind—and wait.

“And now, as you have elected Major Flourens chief of the new legion, and as you have elected me commandant of your battalion, I ask you for the privilege of naming to you two of my fellow-

countrymen for election as captains in the third battalion.”

“Name them! Name them!” shouted the crowd.

Bourke leaned over the balcony, clutching Harewood’s arm.

“By heaven!” he whispered, “do you see who he’s going to name?”

Harewood, mute with astonishment, stared down at the platform, where two men had mounted from the crowded floor and now stood facing Buckhurst.

The two men were Speyer and Stauffer.

Amid a whirlwind of applause, their names were presented and accepted. Buckhurst administered the oath. Flourens dramatically returned their salutes; Mortier, his ape-like face stained a dull red with excitement, sat behind his desk, on which lay a pile of red cocardes. His little insane eyes snapped as Speyer and Stauffer marched up to be invested with the badge of anarchy; the crowd howled; drums and bugles crashed out; the meeting was at an end. Suddenly, in the midst of the tumult, Harewood felt that somebody on the swarming floor below was looking straight at him. He turned his head uneasily; Buckhurst’s colourless eyes met his own. For a full minute they gazed silently at each other across that smoke-reeking chaos; the bugle’s ear-splitting racket, the crashing of brazen drums, the echoing howl died away in Harewood’s ears; he only heard a clear, penetrating voice repeating, “Silence, silence, if you please, gentlemen,” and Buckhurst, with his eyes still fixed on him, touched Speyer on the elbow. Stauffer, too, was looking up now; Speyer had turned livid when he saw Harewood.

“Come,” muttered Bourke, “we might as well get out of this,” and he moved toward the stairway, Harewood following.

As they reached the last step and started to push through the crowded doors, a hand fell lightly on Harewood’s shoulder; Buckhurst stood beside him.

The involuntary start that Harewood gave communicated itself to Bourke; he also turned to confront Speyer and Stauffer.

“Gentlemen,” said Buckhurst, speaking in English, “your faces are familiar to me. Captain Speyer tells me that you are reporters. Do you

know me?”

“Yes,” said Harewood, sullenly. Buckhurst’s pale eyes stole around to Bourke, then returned directly to Harewood.

“Of course,” he said, placidly, “if you cable anything unpleasant about me I’ll have your throat cut.”

Harewood started on again toward the door, but Speyer jerked him back, saying savagely: “Listen! Do you hear?” and Buckhurst added quietly:

“You’d better listen.”

If Bourke had not gripped Harewood’s arm in time, Speyer’s face would have suffered. With clenched fists Harewood pushed toward him; Buckhurst flung him back, showing his teeth slightly, his face distorted with that ghastly smile that none who had ever seen it could forget.

“If you cable for my extradition,” he said, “I’ll cut your throat as a spy!”

“Spy?” stammered Harewood, furiously.

“Yes, an Imperial spy who aided the Empress to escape from the Tuileries. You fool, don’t you think I know? You and your comrade and two women named Chalais—you aided the Empress!”

Harewood was dumb; Bourke stared at Speyer, who sneered in his face; “You want a witness? I am the witness,” said Speyer.

Buckhurst turned fiercely on Bourke:

“Look out!” he whispered; “don’t try any of your damned newspaper tricks on me. The government last night decreed the expulsion of every dissolute woman from Paris during the siege, and if you give me any trouble I’ll set the police on your charming little Chalais girls!”

Harewood struggled to strike him; Buckhurst faced him, one hand in his coat pocket.

“I’ve got a pistol in my pocket,” he said. “It covers you. If it wasn’t that I don’t want a row that might lead to an investigation, I’d shoot you now. Stand back! Get out of here, and keep your mouth shut, or I’ll let the whole hall trample your face into the floor!”

Harewood, white to the lips, jostled by the crowd pouring through the doors, strove to keep his position in front of Buckhurst. He looked into the pale, merciless eyes, he saw the outlines of fist and levelled pistol in the black side pocket of Buckhurst's coat. He saw, too, suspicious faces peering at him from the passing crowd—dark, sullen eyes, burning with the smouldering fire of frenzy. Speyer sneered at him. Stauffer's weak blond face relaxed into an insulting smile.

"Come," muttered Bourke, "there is nothing to do," and he laid his hand on Harewood's arm.

"No," said Harewood aloud, "there is nothing to do—now."

Buckhurst heard. His thin lips receded again, showing an edge of snow-white teeth.

"Neither now nor later," he said, softly. "Leave this hall!"

Speyer cut in: "If you give us any trouble, the Governor of Paris shall know how the Empress escaped! And you can take yourself out of the rue d'Ypres, too—bag and baggage—and women!"

Bourke had dragged Harewood back to the door, repeating in a whisper: "For God's sake, Jim, let them alone! Let them alone!" Buckhurst followed slowly, Speyer at his elbow, Stauffer in the rear. Behind them the lights were being turned out in the empty hall; in the dark street outside the foul sidewalks, wet with an autumn shower, reflected the flickering flame of a single lamp-post.

Bourke, urging Harewood, backed out into the street; the night was appalling in its fathomless blackness; the leaves on an unseen tree stirred somewhere above them.

"They've followed us," whispered Bourke, straining his eyes back to the black, gaping door of the hall. "Listen, Jim!"

The silence was absolute. Down the street the single gas jet burned uncertainly, now flaring up into a yellow patch of light, now sinking to a blue spark.

Suddenly Harewood felt the haunting presence of something that he neither saw nor heard; it was close to him, there in the shadow, moving nearer. Then the darkness seemed to part before his eyes, a shaft of flame singed his brow and the narrow street resounded with

the racket of a pistol shot. Instantly he struck out, and struck again, solidly, knowing that it was Buckhurst who had received the blow full in the face. Somebody slid the shutter from a lantern; he caught a glimpse of Bourke knocking Stauffer into the gutter, of Buckhurst, white face soiled with blood, groping on the sidewalk for his revolver, of Speyer swinging his arm for a blow. The blow was for Harewood himself; it caught him fairly on the neck and sent him flat. Dazed, he struggled to rise; a knee pressed him back, a knife glimmered in the lantern light, falling swiftly towards him, only to be caught by another knife and sent whirling. And now he was on his feet again, and again the blinding flash of a pistol dazzled him, half revealing a swarm of dark, hurrying figures closing in around them. It revealed something else, too—the hard face of the Mouse, starting from the shadows at his elbow.

“This way, monsieur,” muttered the Mouse; “hold to my arm!”

A lantern fell violently to the sidewalk, rolled around, and went out, leaving a stench of petroleum in the air. There was a sudden rush, a collision, angry, panting voices, the dull sound of blows, a shrill cry: “the police!” Harewood, running through the darkness, one hand on the Mouse’s arm, turned sharply with his guide into a broader street, lighted by a dozen lamps. At the same instant Bourke rounded the opposite corner and met them face to face. For a minute they stood there breathless, listening to the distant shouting and trampling that gradually grew duller, as though the affray had almost subsided.

“Mince!” said the Mouse, thrusting his tongue into the corner of his cheek and holding up a broad-bladed knife; “I was just in time, eh, monsieur?” He shuffled his feet reflectively, glanced obliquely at Bourke, shrugged his shoulders and laughed, nodding half patronizingly when Harewood began to thank him.

“Bah—that is nothing, my friend! There are miracles in Belleville when the Mouse patters through the dark. Besides, the four winds blow for nothing, but it costs money to live.”

“Come to the rue d’Ypres to-morrow,” said Harewood, soberly, “and the four winds will blow you something besides air.”

“At your service,” said the Mouse, with impudent condescension, “and, messieurs, I have the honour.”

He bowed with exaggerated politeness, turned on his ragged heel, and slouched off into the night.

CHAPTER XII.

IN THE MOONLIGHT.

When Harewood and Bourke entered the rue d'Ypres, a thin rain was falling, driven by sudden little volleys of wind that grew colder and more violent as the rain thickened.

They stood for a moment looking out into the black void beyond the ramparts. There was nothing to see, not a star, not a sentry—nothing but quivering sheets of rain slanting across dim signal lamps set low on the bastions.

Bourke unlocked the door noiselessly: Harewood followed him up stairs and into his own bedroom; and, as he struck a match and lighted the lamp, he felt a sudden ease, a sense of home-coming—something he had not known in months. Bourke answered his unspoken thoughts. "Yes—it is very pleasant to get back, Jim. I think I'll turn in directly."

Harewood sat down on the bed; his glance wandered around the lamp-lit room, resting finally on the windows.

"Somebody has filled the window frames with oiled paper," he said listlessly; "do you suppose the Prophet shattered the glass?"

"Probably," said Bourke.

The rain rattled on the oiled paper; gust after gust set it crackling and bulging inward. Bourke started aimlessly toward the door, halted, returned and leaned on the footboard of the bed.

"What are you going to do?" he asked wearily.

"About Buckhurst?"

"Yes."

"I don't know."

After a minute of silence Bourke resumed: "I'd cable in a moment if it wasn't for the threat he made about Yolette and Hildé."

Harewood's face grew red, but he did not look up.

"General Trochu is a strange man," continued Bourke. "If those blackguards should denounce Yolette and Hildé, and bring a lot of

ruffians to swear to anything, who can tell what might happen?"

"You mean that the Governor might expel them—under the law covering the temporary expulsion of dissolute women?" demanded Harewood with an effort.

"Yes," replied Bourke, "that's what I mean."

Again a silence ensued, broken, at length, by Bourke.

"As for Buckhurst's threat to cut our throats—of course that bothers neither of us—at least it wouldn't prevent our cabling. But I shall not cable now, and risk ruining the lives of these two girls."

"No," said Harewood, "we cannot cable." Then he looked up, his face so transformed with rage that Bourke involuntarily recoiled.

"Cecil," he whispered, "if they ever trouble Hildé I'll kill them both—I'll kill them both, when and where I can!"

Bourke did not reply. Gradually the fierce hate faded from Harewood's face. He rested his chin on his hand, eyes vacant, lips parted.

"You see, they've got us, Cecil," he said, more quietly; "don't you remember meeting Speyer in the crowd, when we were watching the Tuileries. Of course he saw us when Hildé and Yolette gave up the cab to the Empress. I suppose he can annoy us if he tries, and I'm sure he's going to try."

"It's curious," reflected Bourke, "how anxious he and Stauffer seem to be to get us out of this house. And their returning the other day to re-engage rooms is queer, too. What do you suppose they want?"

Harewood rose suddenly and began to walk up and down, hands clasped behind his back. Presently he halted before his comrade:

"Do you know what I think? I believe Speyer is a German spy!"

"Eh? Spy?" repeated Bourke, blankly.

"Yes, spy! Why did he enlist in a Belleville battalion? Do war correspondents do that? Why is he fawning and flattering the Belleville revolutionists? To get news for his miserable German-American sheet? Not much; war news is more important to Americans than a report of anarchist squabbles in the slums of Paris. I'll tell you

why he's cringing to Buckhurst and Flourens: he's a paid emissary of Bismarck, hired to stir up internal strife in Paris while the Germans pound the forts to bits outside. And I'll bet you, Cecil, that he never was anything but a spy; what has he done for his paper in New York? Nothing. Its columns are filled with stolen despatches and special work from all the other papers. Speyer is a spy: he has corrupted Stauffer, too. As for Buckhurst—I believe he's only a criminal who gives his life to anarchy just now because he believes there's something in it for himself. That is my theory."

Bourke stood by the bed, eagerly attentive, acquiescing with nods and gestures as Harewood proceeded:

"He tried to stab me there in the street when I was down; he had his knee on my chest; if it hadn't been for the Mouse, I don't know—I don't know, Cecil—but I think he meant to cut my throat."

He looked up into Bourke's face, soberly, beginning for the first time to realise his recent danger.

"The Mouse is a grateful beast, after all," he continued. "I never thought anything about bread cast upon the waters, you know."

"Cast more," said Bourke, seriously; "it's a good scheme, Jim."

Opening the door, he added: "We'll cable nothing about Buckhurst for the present. Good night; I'm fit for sleep, I think."

"Good night," replied Harewood, absently.

After Bourke had gone away he sat for a while on his bed, listening to the drumming of rain-drops on the paper window-panes. He thought he could sleep, but when he lay among the chilly sheets his lids remained open in the dark. It was Buckhurst's colourless eyes that haunted him—that, and the memory of the pistol flash, the momentary impression of Buckhurst's ashen face, streaked with blood, as he groped on the sidewalk for the pistol. The blood? That had been his doing. Twice he had struck Buckhurst heavily between those pale eyes. And, as he lay there, he knew that this dreaded criminal would never forget, never rest until he had satisfied a criminal's ruling passion—revenge.

Harewood, resting motionless among his pillows, heard the wind

rising in the night, heard the sudden creak and swing of storm-shaken shutters, the swelling monotone of the rain. It seemed to beat on his heart; he felt the harmony of the million drops, the swift shafts of wind-swept rain blowing over vast valleys, over hills and plains and the crinkled surface of unseen rivers.

He wondered whether the Prussians were very near—how soon their black shells would come moaning and whistling over the city. That very morning he had read the government bulletins warning the inhabitants of Paris to prepare for the bombardment by placing valuables in the cellar, installing barrels of water on roof and landings to fight fire, and particularly to remove all paving stones from court and sidewalk in order to lessen the effects of exploding shells. He himself had seen workmen stuffing the windows and balconies of the Louvre with bedding and mattresses; he had seen the Arc de Triomphe swathed and padded and sheathed for protection against shot and shell. How soon would the Germans arrive? Which way would they come—from the north or from the east?

Outside the storm was subsiding; a cooler current of air swept across his face; the beat of rain on frame and sill ceased, leaving dropping echoes from rain-pipes and eaves. As the wind freshened the dripping roof-gutters grew silent; the southing of the wind through wet leaves filled the room. And now he could see the shadows of moving branches outlined on the paper panes where long shafts of silvery moonlight fell athwart the window ledge, turning the oiled paper to sheets of palest gilt.

He could not sleep; he crept from the warm bed to the window and opened it a little way.

Vast masses of silvery clouds swept away into the north, trailing in their wake flecks and filmy tatters. In the midnight velvet of the sky rare stars twinkled like wet diamonds dimmed by the splendid white lamp of the moon.

Black ramparts, sharp-cut against the sky, stretched out their angles east and west; the crimson and sapphire lanterns glittered like gems, staining the wet sidewalks with their colours. Over the bastion

the Prophet rose, detached from the massed ramparts, a colossal shape, up-tilted, printed clean black against the horizon.

Even the wind was subsiding now, leaving a clear, fresh odour of distant winter in the air. The moon, too, sparkled with a wintry radiance; the stars went out in its white lustre.

On wall and pavement the etched foliage no longer moved. Harewood leaned from the window ledge, scarcely breathing; for the beauty of the night was upon him and upon his soul was a spell.

He did not know it; he knelt heavily in the moonlight, chin on clasped hands, eyes dreaming. For him the breath of war was far away; alarms, rumours, the dull discontent of expectancy, all had vanished in this placid shadow world, passionless, unreal as a pale sweet vision.

And so, pensive, dreaming, he rose and moved about, unconscious that he was dressing, unconscious why he passed through the door and down the dusky stairs, deeper, deeper into the silent house. At last he stood before a closed door at which he had not knocked. It opened silently and he went in.

Moonlight silvered everything, the white bed, the curtains clustered overhead, the polished faïence Sainte, smiling her set smile through the shadows; but Hildé's hair, clouding brow and neck, veiled her pale face in a shower of silk and gilt.

They did not speak; she stood silent and white before the Sainte; he knelt beside her, holding her hand against his eyes.

All by itself the door swung softly to, and closed.

A clock ticked through the silence; after a long time the weights slid, creaking, and an hour struck. There was an imperceptible movement of the hand he held pressed to his eyes, a soft stir of a faintly fragrant garment, delicate as lace. When he stood up she was waiting; he held her waist imprisoned now, and her silky head; she put both arms around his neck.

When he had passed again through the door, the perfume of her lips on his, she sank before the corner, where, in the meshed moonlight, Sainte Hildé of Carhaix smiled. And there she lay, faint with the sweetest happiness life holds for maid or man.

As for the man she loved, he went blindly up the dusky stairs, groping for his comrade's door. And he entered and sat by his sleeping friend.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SOUL OF YOLETTE.

Bourke awoke with a start, his ears ringing in a din so sudden, so frightful, that for a moment he lay, half stupefied, among his pillows. Under his feet, shock on shock, the earthquake outcrash rocked the house, the windows shook and clattered as the cannon's lightning, blast after blast, split the keen air of dawn.

He saw Harewood at the window, beckoning him to come, and he went, shivering and stumbling in the morning chill.

"The forts," motioned Harewood with his lips.

Far across the shrouded country, in the pale dawn, five dim forts towered, crowned with clouds; and through the clouds, heaving, rolling, floating, bright lightning darted. Sudden yellow flares of light, spirts of flame, swift crimson-jetted flashes played under the canopy of smoke. The great fort of Issy steamed from every embrasure; Vanves roared like a volcano; from Montrouge, Ivry, Bicêtre, peal on peal, the reverberations rolled, until the humming air, surcharged and overstrained with sound, dinned in the ears with muffled, deadened echoes, that set the sickened senses swimming.

And now it seemed as if the wind had changed; the thunder blew clear of the city as clouds blow before a gale. There was a sudden silence, filled almost instantly by a roar from the street in front of the house—the shrill, frenzied howl of a mob.

"The Prussians!"

Harewood ran back into his own room and looked out into the street. It was choked with people, men, women, children, swarming over the ramparts, shouting, screaming, gesticulating, pointing. Officers stood out against the sky on the bastion, the rising sun warming their crimson caps and striking dazzling sparks from brass-tipped field glasses. Drums were beating everywhere, down by the Porte Rouge, in the parade of the Prince Murat barracks, on every bastion, in every guard house. The line battalions filed at double

quick from their caserne; the cannoniers of the Prophet clustered over the epaulment and glacis, scanning the distant hills towards Viroflay, Velizy and the plateau of Châtillon.

Up in the window Bourke knelt, his marine glasses fixed on a hillside below Chaville, where a single horseman stood, immovable.

The horseman was a Prussian Uhlan.

Presently Harewood's glass brought more Uhlans into focus.

"Cecil," he muttered; "they're right this time! The Prussians are here!"

It was true; the first Uhlans had appeared near Versailles like buzzards above a wounded thing. When the rest arrived they would sit around patiently, waiting for the end of the city lying at their feet.

"There's hell to pay at the Point de Jour, too, if anybody should ask you," observed Bourke, shivering in his nightshirt; "the gunboats are firing—look!—do you see!"

"I see," replied Harewood, soberly. He turned with a sudden gesture. "The siege has begun at last," he said.

Bourke nodded.

After a silence Harewood burst out; "I wish to heaven we were out of this!"

"What's that?" asked the other sharply.

But Harewood turned away wearily, saying:

"You can't understand; never mind, I wish I were—I wish I were—"

"What?" demanded Bourke.

"Dead," snapped Harewood, sulkily, and went out of the room.

"What's the matter with him now," mused the other, closing the window and entering his own bedroom.

When Bourke had dressed and descended the stairs to the dining-room, he found Yolette sitting alone at the table. She looked up as he entered; there were traces of tears in her eyes.

"It is foolish," she said, smiling; "the cannon have frightened us—Hildé will not leave her room. I carried chocolate to her, but she will not even open her door. Has the siege begun?"

"I think it has," said Bourke, lightly; "perhaps it will be more noise

than anything else. Where is Monsieur Harewood?"

"He has gone to the city; he would eat nothing. Are you also going to the city?"

"Yes," said Bourke.

They finished breakfast in silence. Yolette's blue eyes were half raised from time to time, but Bourke's eyes were on his plate. Before he rose he looked up absently; something in the swift droop of Yolette's clear eyes arrested his own. A light colour touched his cheeks and temples; he made an unconscious movement to rise and go—the first instinct of a prosaic man who surprises the soul in a woman's eyes.

She made no movement; the white sash curtains behind her stirred in the morning wind.

Under such circumstances it takes a truly prosaic man ten seconds to make up his mind that he is mistaken. Eight seconds were sufficient for Bourke. He slid into his chair, looked at Yolette, swallowed his coffee with serious satisfaction, and helped himself to a finger bowl.

"I suppose," he said, "that Monsieur Harewood has gone to the telegraph office?"

"I don't know," said Yolette, without raising her eyes.

"Does anything trouble you?" he asked. He had no tact.

Yolette looked up, confused, pink with resentment.

"Why, of course not, Monsieur Bourke."

Vaguely uneasy, he stood up as she rose. He was aware that some subtle condition of mind threatened to change existing conditions. There was a sense of expectancy already developing in his own mind, a mental attitude of preparation for something or other that began to disturb him. He looked curiously at Yolette: he noted the white neck, the silken blue-black hair, the eyes fringed deeply with the same colour.

"I am going," said Yolette, "to see Schéhérazade. If she bites me, I shall be very unhappy."

"Bite you," repeated Bourke.

"Yes. The poor darling is almost out of her senses with the

cannonade. She is so frightened she runs around and around the garden and slinks close to the ground and snarls dreadfully.”

As Yolette spoke she walked toward the garden door and Bourke followed. He would not allow her to precede him into the garden, and when they stood together at the door he unconsciously placed his hand on her arm and stepped in front.

“Let me go and call her,” said Yolette, starting across the grass, but he drew her back with a sudden decision that surprised her. It surprised him, too, to find that his natural solicitude for her amounted to sheer fright.

“Monsieur,” she said. “I am not afraid of my own lion.”

There was something besides mutiny in her blue eyes as she started forward again, only to be firmly detained by Bourke’s sun-browned hand.

“I cannot let you do that,” he said; “call her from here.”

“Monsieur Bourke!”

“Don’t go,” he said, beseechingly.

Is it possible that Yolette enjoyed his consternation?

There was a little thrill in her breast and a quiver in her clear voice as she repeated: “Monsieur Bourke, you will certainly not detain me!”

“Yes, I will,” he replied; “I am not going to see you clawed by a frightened lioness, and you must stay here.”

The flash of revolt died in her eyes; there was contentment in her heart and acquiescence, too—and something more that made the smile on her lips so exquisite that Bourke’s hand fell from her arm, and again the impulse seized him to go away somewhere with moderate haste.

“Schéhèrazade! Schéhèrazade!” she called, holding out her arms in the sunlight.

There was no response.

“Schéhèrazade! Schéhèrazade!”

The tangled thicket of rose and briar bushes moved slightly.

“She’s in there,” said Bourke. He walked out among the trees, calling to the lioness. Presently he saw her, crouching close to the

parched earth, under an acacia bush. But that was not all; on the ground beside her knelt Hildé, both arms around the lion's neck.

When Hildé saw Bourke she hid her face in Schéhèrazade's tawny shoulder.

"Why, Hildé!" he said; "what on earth are you hiding out here for?"

"Hildé!" cried Yvette, coming up, "be careful, my darling! Schéhèrazade growled at me this morning."

Hildé stood up and answered, looking down at the lion; "I am not afraid." She drew the lioness to her feet beside her without glancing at Yvette or Bourke, saying, "I shall take her to my room. If you go in she won't be afraid."

Slowly she drew the lioness toward the house, never looking up at her sister or at Bourke until they reached the door. There she met Bourke's puzzled gaze, turned, smiled at her sister, and passed into the house leading the cowering lioness.

The day passed quickly for Bourke. He prowled around the ramparts by the Point du Jour until luncheon, scribbling notes and bits of half-caught gossip from the swarms of officers who were watching the Prussians with a fascination approaching hypnotism. There was not much to see—a column of smoke here and there, nothing more, except a rare Uhlan, a tiny speck on some distant height. The forts of the north and east were silent, the forts of the south were steadily cannonading the distant woods, blue and hazy under the veiled sunshine. Now and then a great gun bellowed from the Viaduct, clouding the bastions with billowy mist, beneath which the Seine frothed and sparkled in the wake of some river gunboat, ploughing its way under white arches of masonry.

On every height, on every tower and dome and terrace, people clustered to look off at the hills where the Prussians lay. The Buttes Chaumont, the hill of Montmartre, the Trocadero, the Viaduct, were black with people. Ladies in carriages surrounded the Arc-de-Triomphe, gay colours dotted the crowd on top of the Arc. It was so amusing—really a delightful sensation to watch the shells' tall curve,

to see the cloudy explosion, shot with lightning, to watch the shredded vapours float away, white as fleecy wool. It was a new sensation and a thrilling one to know that those shells were aimed at men hiding among the blue woods and hills. And so the carriages flashed past through the trees, bright with colour, glittering with painted wheels, silver chains ringing changing rhythms to the tinkle of steel-shod hoofs; and the gay sunshades and bonnets and scarfs brightened the autumn greys and greens of the Bois de Boulogne until the brilliant city seemed to be en fête, and the soft thunder of the guns was but a feu-de-joie announcing the triumphs of peace and of the brotherhood of man.

Bourke lunched on the ramparts, surveying the scene with cool, optimistic eyes.

“The Prussians will never get in,” he mused, as he munched his bread; “there will be an assault or two and then a sortie, and nobody can see the end of the war yet.”

In the early afternoon he sent his despatches by way of Bordeaux, for the northern and western wires were not working, and about three o’clock he strolled homeward, wondering where Harewood had spent the day. There was nobody in evidence, excepting Red Riding Hood, when he entered the house.

“I think,” she said, “that Mademoiselle Hildé has gone to market with Mademoiselle Yolette.”

“And Monsieur Harewood?”

“He is lying down in his room.”

Bourke looked pleasantly at the child; he wished to say something kind and cheerful, but he did not know how. He realised this and it embarrassed him. It was always so with children—his awkwardness stifled his affection.

“You are washing—er—dishes,” he inquired.

“I am,” replied Red Riding Hood serenely.

The fact was as obvious as Bourke’s confusion.

Red Riding Hood’s serious eyes opened a little.

“Here,” said Bourke, desperately, “are some bonbons,” and he

solemnly presented the child with a package tied up in red ribbon.

Red Riding Hood thanked him gravely, untied the parcel, retied the scarlet bit of ribbon in her tangled black locks, and came up to him holding out the sweetmeats.

“Take one,” she said.

Bourke obediently took a chocolate drop and placed it in his mouth. Red Riding Hood did likewise.

“Now,” she said, “I will return to my dishes. Good-by.”

“Good-by,” he said, understanding that the audience was at an end.

Up stairs he found Harewood lying on the bed.

“Hello, Jim; out of sorts?” he asked amiably.

“No,” said Harewood, without looking up.

Bourke sat down on the bed.

“Sent your despatches?”

“Yes.”

“I sent mine, too. Well, the Prussians are here at last. What a devil of a row the forts of the south make when the wind is right! Where were you this afternoon?”

“Outside the city.”

“Go far?”

“Bas-Meudon.”

“See anything?”

“No.”

After a pause Bourke said, “Don’t you care to talk, Jim?”

“Yes,” said Harewood, sitting up suddenly, “let’s talk, for God’s sake—let’s do something——”

“What’s the matter with you?” asked Bourke, sharply.

Harewood’s face changed; he smiled at his comrade and touched him affectionately on the arm.

“Nothing—case of blue devils—they’re gone. You’re a good chap, Cecil.”

“Am I?” replied Bourke, gratified. “I haven’t had a chance to see you—to talk things over to-day—you went away rather abruptly.”

After a moment’s thought he added: “What’s the matter anyway,

Jim? Have you had a misunderstanding with Hildé?"

"No," replied Harewood, forcing a smile.

"O, I wasn't sure. Hildé seems to have the blues, too. What have you been doing all day?"

"When I came back from Bas-Meudon," said Harewood, crossing one leg over the other and clasping both hands above the knee, "I borrowed a crowbar from a soldier and pried up all the flag-stones in the courtyard. You know the Governor issued orders for all sorts of precautions. At noon to-day a soldier came to see whether we had obeyed Trochu's orders. Guess who it was?"

"Not Speyer!" exclaimed Bourke,

"Yes, it was Speyer."

They looked at each other significantly. Bourke began to pace the floor.

"I foresee what's coming," he said, bitterly. "Buckhurst and Speyer are going to nag us and irritate us until we do something for which they can denounce us. Buckhurst fears us because we know his record. Speyer wants to get into this house because it's the ideal headquarters for a spy. They are both working for the same end."

"I think," said Harewood, tightening his clasp about his knee, "that Speyer is the centre of the whole spy system in Paris. Shall I tell you why? Listen, Cecil. When he came to find out whether we had unpaved the court—and incidentally to discover whatever he could to our detriment—I, luckily, had just finished prying up the flag-stones and piling them against the wall. He was in uniform—the uniform of a Belleville staff captain. He spoke to me and looked me in the eye as though he had never before seen me. And all the time I was eyeing the mark my riding-crop left across his face. He came into the house—I dared not strike him; his uniform, you know—and that would have been fatal—fatal to us all. It was not until he went that he said anything important; but, as he left by the same steps down which I had kicked him a few nights ago, he stopped and said: 'Take my advice and get out of this house before you're thrown out.' "

Bourke's face crimsoned; he stood stock still in the middle of the

floor.

"I replied," continued Harewood, "that in the event of a frost in hell I would leave, and not before. I also pointed out that, uniform or no uniform, I'd twist his head off his shoulders if he ever came back."

Harewood had risen while speaking, and now he also began to pace the floor.

"You see, Cecil," he continued, "that I've committed us all. But I mean it. We can't stay here with these Belleville ruffians free to enter the house when the whim strikes them—free to billet their fellow-cutthroats here—perhaps Speyer, perhaps Buckhurst himself. And I tell you if any man, soldier or civilian, offers a word—a look—at Hildé—I'll fling him through the window!"

Harewood, nervous and flushed, sat down on the bed again.

"I fear it's coming," he said, "I fear we shall all be obliged to leave. They have the whip hand: if they denounce Hildé and Yolette for aiding the Empress—if they denounce them on a more dreadful charge—who is to help them? Not you—not I. Trochu will listen to his soldier-police—not to us. Think of the horrible shock to those young girls—think of their helplessness! Suppose Speyer should swear to the lies he threatens them with? He is a staff captain; he once lodged here; he has a lying witness in Stauffer. Would it help matters if I should shoot Speyer down in the street, in the house—on the witness-stand itself? This thing is like a nightmare to me, Cecil."

"Do you mean to say," burst out Bourke, "that they would not listen to you—that they would not believe you—you who can swear that Hildé is the sweetest, purest woman on earth—the woman—Jim—the woman you love?"

Harewood's lips whitened; he tried to answer; his cheeks were smitten with a deadly pallour.

"The woman—the woman I love?" he repeated.

"Do you not love her?" demanded Bourke, violently.

Still Harewood's white face was turned to his in silence.

"Answer me," said Bourke, stepping nearer.

As he spoke, a vision of Yolette flashed before him. He saw her

blue eyes fixed on his own, he saw her hair, the troubled curve of her lips, the quiet, pure brow. And suddenly he understood that it was Yolette—it was for Yolette that he spoke—and it was for himself, too—for he loved her. The sudden illumination, his own heart laid bare before him, the surprise, the emotion, the flashlight revelation of a secret unsuspected, the undreamt of secret of his own heart—staggered him.

Harewood, gazing blankly at him, saw nothing but a parting of his comrade's lips, a dilation of his eyes, a brusque movement of chest and head.

After a moment Bourke said: "I thought you loved Hildé. I only asked because I hoped you did." His voice was wonderfully gentle. He spoke slowly, as though, between his own words, he was listening to another voice—the voice that whispers, whispers always, in the ears of those who love.

He went on, slowly: "You and she are so much together it might not be the safest and best thing for her if you took it lightly—not that I think you dishonourable, Jim—you won't believe that! But sometimes I have thought—I think a great deal about you, Jim—I sometimes fancy that Hildé cares for you a great deal. It might be less cruel for both—both you and Hildé—if we went away—unless—unless—"

He stopped abruptly, his face touched with a tender light, the voice again sounding softly in his ears.

"What?" motioned Harewood, with dry lips.

Bourke smiled at him and touched his forehead with his hand, dreamily.

"What was I saying?" he asked.

"Nothing," said Harewood, vacantly.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN OPEN DOOR.

The sun, imbedded in terraced banks of clouds, glimmered like a cinder over Meudon woods, the battery smoke, drifting across the southern forts, turned to pink and pearl. Soft thunder muttered among the westward redoubts; silvery electric stars pricked the haze that veiled Valérien; the river slipped past, misty, meadowed shores untroubled by a keel.

The house on the ramparts was very still; Bourke sat in his room by the window, reading: Harewood stood at his window looking out over the valley. Below him the Prophet tilted skyward, loomed, ominous, swathed in its canvas winding sheet. A sentinel stood motionless on the parapet, head turned toward the hazy hills, where a thin column of smoke mounted straight up into the still sky. Once a little whirlwind of bugle music from the Porte Rouge filled the street; once the wind veered and the heavy detonation of the cannonade set the sultry air a-quiver for a while.

The expectancy of evening brooded over all, over the massive ramparts, over the fresh grassy thickets on the glacis, in an imperceptible wind that freshened and cooled the face, yet scarcely stirred a leaf.

Presently there came a clatter of small sabots on the stairs outside, the discreet patter of stockinged feet, a knock, a happy whisper. It was Red Riding Hood, come for her evening visit. Harewood kissed her listlessly.

"You bring twilight with you, little one," he said, turning back her thick black curls. "The scarlet ribbon—it is very becoming—do you know it?"

"Monsieur Bourke gave it," said the child, nestling closer to him. "Come, let us sit down, will you?"

Harewood absently drew a chair to the window; Red Riding Hood leaned against his shoulder. They looked out over the valley in

silence.

"I might have been perfect," said Red Riding Hood, presently, "but Mademoiselle Hildé could not give me my lesson to-day."

Harewood answered without turning, "Why?"

"I do not know," said the child, with a little sigh. Harewood bit his lips; his heart turned sick with the futile bitterness that follows—too late—the knowledge of consequences—consequences that spread like ripples from a pebble in a troubled pool.

"Mademoiselle Hildé will hear your lesson to-morrow," he said, looking from the window.

"To-morrow," repeated the child.

He said nothing more. Perhaps he was thinking of those endless to-morrows, passing, passing, each one troubled as the spreading rings in a pool disturb the placid peace that once reigned there. And he had cast the stone.

"Look at me," said the child.

He turned his head; her dark eyes met his own.

"Is it sadness?" she asked.

"Yes, little one."

She held his hand a moment, then let it drop. He scarcely noticed it; a moment afterward he heard the click, click, of her little sabots down the stairs outside. An hour later, a bitter hour, he followed, descending the worn stairs silently, fearing the very silence that he dared not break.

Yolette moved about the dining-room singing to herself in an undertone. He passed into the hallway and out to the bird store, where Hildé knelt among the wicker cages.

When she saw him she rose to her knees, hiding her burning face in her hands. He bent close to her and touched the flushed cheeks between the hands. One by one he untwisted the slender fingers, closely interlocked, and at last he raised her head to his. But she would not look at him, her sealed lids pressed the lashes tightly to her cheek.

"Why have you hidden away all day?" he said.

Presently she answered: "Can you ask?"

He raised her from her knees; her eyes were still closed, but her white hands stole around his neck. When at last he released her and the quiet tears had dried in her eyes, without falling, she went to the open door and stood there, looking out into the west. Earth came back to her slowly through the heaven of their kiss—sounds grew through the music of his voice; she heard the cannonade's dull triple throb, she saw green tree tops stirring in the sun.

He came and stood beside her. Love's lassitude hung heavy on her limbs; he took her unresisting hand—that little hand, so small, so smooth, fragrant and fraught with mystery, a cool white blossom with five slim petals tipped with pink.

The beauty of life was upon her, the loveliness of the world was in her eyes—the world so kind to her—so kind to all—to all!

In the red west a flaming belt of haze girdled the horizon; in the north plumed clouds suspended from the zenith hung motionless; the glass of the stream mirrored a single tree.

When their silence grew too heavy, too sweet for such young hearts, they broke it; and it broke musically, with the melody of half-caught questions—a sigh, a little laugh re-echoed pure as the tinkle of two crystal glasses, touched discreetly. The softest drumming of the guns stirred the pulsating air like the distant drumming of a partridge; the gemmed azure, veiled with haze, swam and shimmered with its million brilliant atmospheric atoms—tiny points of fierce white dusting the blue like diamond dust.

When the sun was very low and the level meadows ran moulten gilt in every harrow, the sparrows, gathered for the night on tree and roof, filled the street with restless chirping that stirred the caged birds in the shop. Linnet answered thrush, finches whistled wistful answers to the free twittering of the sparrows; a little lark rustled and ruffled; a blackbird uttered a still, thin plaint.

And Hildé, who, when her own heart was free, had never understood captivity, now, when she listened, understood, and her own imprisoned heart answered the plaint of wild caged things.

To her half-spoken thought he answered; together they gathered all the feathered wild things into one great wicker cage. The parrot's pale eye was veiled in scorn; the monkey flouted freedom with a grimace, shivering and mouthing as the hundred wings beat at the wicker bars.

Harewood took the cage; Hildé walked beside him, in ecstasy at the thought of freedom given by those who know that something else is sweeter. There was a shrub in flower on the glacis—some late-blooming bush, starred with waxen blossoms, breathing perfume. Under this they placed the cage.

When Hildé opened the cage a feathered whirlwind circled about her head: there came a rush of wings, a thrilling whirr! and she clasped her hands and stepped forward. Out over the valley the bird flock rushed, bore to the left, circled, rose, swung back on a returning curve, but always rising higher, higher, until far up in the deepening evening sky they floated, and chose their course, due south.

She watched them driving southward; she could tell the finches by their undulating flight, the thrushes, the clean-winged starlings. She sighed contentedly; she had opened the door of pity when love opened the door to her heart.

"Look!" whispered Harewood; "there is one little bird that will not leave us."

"It is dead—God forgive me," faltered Hildé. A rush of tears blinded her; she knelt beside it on the grass—a frail mound of fluff and feathers, silent and still.

"Freedom and death—life is so sweet—so sweet," she whispered. "And somewhere in the south where the others have gone, there is summer, eternal summer—life—life."

"Winter is close," he answered sombrely. With an unconscious movement he drew her to him; he bent and searched her changed face.

The wind, too, had changed; there was frost somewhere in the world, and the solemn harmony of the cannon swelled with the swelling breeze, and the breeze stirred a broken feather on the dead bird's stiffening wing.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ANATOMY OF HAPPINESS.

That night they closed the empty bird store; Harewood lifted the wooden shutters into place and locked them; Hildé carried the monkey into the dining-room and installed it in a warm corner. Mehemet Ali, the parrot, viewed these proceedings with contempt. It mattered little to him where he passed his pessimistic days; weariness and a vicious melancholy had marked him for their own; even when he ate, he ate as if he were making an ironical concession to the weakness of some one else. Curiosity he had subdued, sinister solitude he courted—and bit when it was denied him. There had been a time in earlier days when he whistled the “Marseillaise”—when he croaked “Vive l’Empereur!” Now for a year he had been mute, brooding in silence among the noisy feathered inhabitants of the bird store, dreaming, perhaps scheming—for he had the sly, slow eye of the Oriental.

He bit Harewood when that young man was bearing him to the dining-room, and, when dropped, diplomatically sidled under a sofa. From this retreat he made daily excursions, mounting all the furniture by aid of beak and claw, sullenly menacing those who approached.

Schéhèrazade had not recovered from her fright. The characteristics of the big house-cat had almost disappeared; she cowered when approached, she slunk when she moved; there was a blankness in her eyes; a stealth, almost a menace, in the slow turning of her head. Already in these early days of the siege milk was becoming too expensive to buy for a lioness; meat also had increased so swiftly in price that Yolette was frightened, and haunted the market wistfully, scarcely daring to buy. Vegetables, bread and wine, however, were plenty; so were proclamations from the Governor of Paris assuring everybody that the city had ample provisions for months to come. Most people thought that the increase in the price of meat was only temporary—a mere flurry caused by the consummation of an event

that was not yet entirely credited—the actual advent of the Prussian army before Paris.

The arrival of the Germans was like a theatrical entrance: the audience was all Paris, the orchestra, a thousand cannon. They tuned up by batteries, west, south, and finally north, as the vast circle of steel closed closer, closer, and finally welded with the snap of a trap. Then, when the city and outer ring of forts were in turn themselves encircled by a living iron ring, when the full-throated thunder from the battery of the Double Crown was echoed from Saint Denis to Mont-Valérien, from Saint Cloud to Charenton, and again from the southeast northward to Saint Denis, Paris began to understand.

The first futile curiosity, the foolish terror and fear of instant bombardment, died out as the weeks passed and the crack of the Prussian rifled cannon had not yet awakened the hill echoes of Viroflay. The silly proclamations urging the instant tearing up of pavements, the fortifying of cellars, the assuring of a water supply, were forgotten. People began to realise that it takes months to establish siege batteries—that for every gun capable of throwing a shell into Paris, the Germans would have to send to Germany. Fear vanished; how long it would take to convey heavy cannon from Berlin across France to the Seine? And would not the convoys be cut off by the Franc-tireurs, by the provincial armies now organising, by an uprising of outraged people? Surely the very land, the elements themselves, would rise and destroy these barbarians and their wicked cannon. Trochu, the sombre mystic, the Breton Governor of republican Paris, moved on his darkened way, a flash of tinselled pomp, a shred of pageantry, the last paladin riding back into the gloom of the middle ages, seeking light, fleeing light, wrapped to the eyes in the splendid mantle of the Trinity.

So he rode, esquired by Faith, dreaming of saints and quests of chivalry, pondering miracles. As a figure for a Gobelin tapestry, General Trochu would have been useful; in no other capacity, save perhaps in a cloister, would he have been of use in the nineteenth century.

When, on the seventeenth of September, the Prussian advance guard was signalled and saluted by the forts of the west and south, General Vinoy's brave corps passed the gates and advanced to Cretail. The affair was not serious—nothing was serious then. And yet that was the very time when a crushing success might have electrified the whole nation into such resistance that the end of the war would not have arrived with the capitulation of the capital. Was it not possible to rapidly mass the two corps of Vinoy and Ducrot to crush the few thousand men of the advance guard? The moral effect of such a stroke would have been stupendous.

But in this first engagement under the walls of Paris, the deplorable system was inaugurated, and invariably followed in all subsequent operations around Paris: fighting without a fixed objective, forcing new troops not sufficiently habituated to fighting, and, on the contrary, when a serious object was in view, operating with insufficient numbers and inadequate artillery.

On the eighteenth of September, when Vinoy's corps fell back, the Prussian investment began; the various railroads were cut, and at three o'clock in the afternoon the last train from Paris for Rouen left the Saint Lazare station. From every direction the German masses poured into the country; the Prince of Saxony advanced from the north, saluting Saint Denis with a thousand trumpets, the Prince of Prussia rode up from the south through Fontenay aux Roses and woke Aunay woods with the hurrahs of his horsemen.

Two vast crescents formed the circle; the ring was soldered at Versailles in the east; the other gap closed at Saint Germain.

Then, on the nineteenth of September, Ducrot was attacked in the south, flanked, driven pellmell under the Châtillon redoubt, where the great forts of Vanves and Montrouge shielded him. At four o'clock the few cannoniers spiked the last guns in the unfinished Châtillon redoubt and retired; Clamart, Villejuif and Meudon swarmed with Prussian cavalry. Night came, and Paris knew that its southern key had been stolen when the Prussian flag crept up the shattered staff on the ramparts of Châtillon.

So was lost the southern key to Paris, the great unfinished redoubt of Châtillon. Let those high officers of engineers remember—let others in high places of the land remember—and be remembered.

Scarcely had the investment of Paris been completed when the humiliating interview at Ferrières between Jules Favre and Bismarck became known to the public. Had Jules Favre carefully considered the matter, had he offered terms, for example, as follows:

First—An indemnity.

Second—The dismantling of one or two of the eastern forts.

Third—The cession of Cochin China.

Fourth—The cession of a few ironclads.

Doubtless Germany—coerced by Europe—would have accepted.

But it was not to be. The poor representative of the republic left the Prussian headquarters with Bismarck's harsh voice ringing in his ears, and the next day all Paris knew that it was to be a struggle to the death.

Stung again into action, Vinoy, supported by the forts, hurled a division of the 13th corps on Villejuif and carried it. On September 30 Chevilly and Choisy-le-Roi were attacked. Again the fatal lack of sufficient artillery nullified the advantage gained at Villejuif; the sphere of action had scarcely been enlarged at all.

From the ramparts of Paris these first engagements under the walls were scarcely visible to the people—scarcely audible, save for the thunder from the supporting forts. A high rampart of yellow mist stretched from the Montrouge fort to Arcueil; beyond it, denser volumes of smoke poured up into the sky from l'Hay. At moments the wind brought the crackle of the fusillade through lulls in the cannon din—scarcely louder than the crackle of a bonfire. This was all that the Parisians could see or hear from the southern bastions. Great crowds of women and children watched the infantry passing through the Porte Rouge; the cavalry sang as they rode between dense masses of excited people; the cannoniers swung their thongs and chanted gaily:

Gai! Gai! serrons nos rangs,
Espérance
De la France
Gai! Gai! serrons nos rangs,
En avant, Gaulois et Francs!

to the air of “Gai! Gai! Marions nous!” and the Franc-tireurs took up the song savagely:

Quoi! ces monuments chéris,
Histoire
De notre gloire,
S’écrouleraient en débris,
Quoi! les Prussiens à Paris!

and the people roared back the chorus:

Gai! Gai! serrons nos rangs!

Hildé, standing at the door, heard them singing at sunrise, caught the distant glint of bayonets, saw the sun, white and fierce, crinkling the polished surface of helmet and breastplate.

At night, too, lingering on the steps, she heard the movement and murmur of marching masses; she saw the rockets drifting through the sky, the jewelled string of signal lamps swinging like a necklace from the Porte Rouge battlements. All day long the rue d’Ypres rang with a clang of bugles and the vibrating crash of drums; all day long the cannoniers of the Prophet drilled and manœuvred and played at firing, but the night came and found the Prophet’s lips still sealed and the long bronze fetish motionless, reaching toward heaven in its awful attitude of prayer.

Since those early practice shots that had shattered the window glass, the Prophet had not spoken; yet, all day long, its gigantic mass, thrust out over the ramparts, swung east and west at the monotonous commands, sweeping the points of the compass with the smooth movement of a weather vane turning in a June breeze.

Harewood, locking the dusty wooden shutters for the last time, turned to watch the Prophet as it swept to the west, stopped, sank at the breech as a horse sinks on his haunches. For the hundredth time he thought they were going to fire, but the gun captain took up his mechanical call: “Elevation at 1,500, at 2,000, at 2,500,” and the

pointeur mounted the bastion and called the class of instruction to the breach.

In the evening glow the ramparts burned red, the dust in the street gleamed like powdered rubies; long, mousey shadows stretched across the grass, soft and velvety as the bloom on a purple plum.

When Harewood had finally locked the shutters, he climbed up and unhooked the sign of the shop. Hildé watched him without speaking; he lifted the signboard to his shoulder and carried it into the darkened shop. To Hildé it was the last scene in the prologue of a drama—the drama of a new life, just beginning. She went into the shop and looked at the sign, that was standing upside down against the wall.

“It is one of my landmarks,” she said; “they are all going now, one by one. Yesterday my Sainte Hildé of Carhaix fell and broke on the tiled floor, and I shall miss the birds, too.” She added hastily: “I am glad that they flew away; you must not think I regret anything.”

Harewood, standing close beside her, said: “You regret nothing, Hildé?”

After a long while she answered, “Nothing—and you?”

“What have I to regret?” he said, in an altered voice, unconscious of the axiom and its irony—unconscious that he stood there, the mouthpiece of his sex, voicing the dogmas of an imbecile civilisation. She bent her head; her white face rested on his shoulder. All the million questions that stir and flutter in a love-wrung heart awakened, trembled on her lips,—all that she would know, all that she should know, all that she feared. Yet, of the million questions, she could not utter one, least of all the eternal question, more surely asked and answered in silence. With her love came terror, too, lasting the space of a heartbeat, dying out with a quick sigh, a flutter of silken lashes, a parting of scarlet lips divinely wistful.

As for the man beside her, he stood thrilled yet thoughtful, following his thoughts through the dim labyrinths of his heart that beat deeply, heavily, against her yielding breast. What had happened he scarcely comprehended; he only knew that love is sweet. The

beginning was already so long ago, so dim, so far away. When had it been? Had they not always loved? And, if the beginning of love was already half forgotten, the end loomed vaguer still, the distant future promised nothing yet, a veil of mist, rose-tinged, exquisite, although behind the veil something was already stirring, a shape—nothing—because he refused to see. Yet it was there; Hildé felt its presence, unconsciously shrinking, in her lover's arms, and again the questions stung her lips. "Is it love—love for me? Is it truly love? Is it forever? Is it truth and faith and constancy, forever and forever?" Her breathless lips parted, but no question passed them; and they were sealed again in silence.

Hildé and Harewood moved once more to the door. Night stretched its star-lined tent from the zenith, the moon, enmeshed in a fathomless film, hung in a corner, a tarnished rim of tinsel, pale as a silvery withered leaf. As they stood there, Bourke came through the hall with Yolette, bidding them hurry, for dinner was over. Then they went away, close together, and their voices were lost on the dim glacié where the scented shrubbery spread its perfume through the shadows.

Hildé glided silently to her chamber; Harewood waited for her, standing by the table where Bourke's and Yolette's plates had already been removed. Red Riding Hood came to the kitchen door with a shy "good evening," and, when Hildé returned and seated herself, the child brought dinner and served it with the adoration that serves a shrine. Twice Hildé kissed her, for she needed the love of all, now that she had given a love, infinite and innocent, a love that embraced the world and life and death.

"Red Riding Hood's father has gone with the thirteenth battalion," she said, looking across at Harewood. "I begin to think our little one will always be with us." The child listened with downcast eyes. Harewood smiled at her and drew her to him.

"When did he go?" he asked.

"To-day," replied Red Riding Hood. "He is a brave soldier."

As the child spoke her dark eyes glowed; for at last he had been justified in his daughter's eyes—this squalid, drunken father, glorious

in the shining garments of resurrection—a home-made uniform with epaulettes. War, the great purifier, had come with blessings to Red Riding Hood; and the child of chance, whom chance allotted to her father, sewed gilded braid and brave buttons on her father's clothes that he might be fine among the fine; that he might no longer be ashamed among men; that she no longer need be silent when men spoke of honour and virtue and brave deeds and the soldiers of France.

"He will fight until he dies," said the child seriously.

"Pray God he may not die," said Hildé gently.

"He will die," replied Red Riding Hood, with that quiet conviction that makes children sometimes feared.

Late that night, Harewood, sleeping on his tumbled bed, was awakened by Bourke.

"Jim, there's a man at the door below; Red Riding Hood's father is dead."

"Dead?" repeated Harewood.

"He was drunk—he fell from the drawbridge at the Porte Rouge."

Harewood threw on his bath-robe and went gravely to the dim room where Red Riding Hood lay asleep. "Little one," he whispered. She felt for his hand in the darkness, clasped it in both of hers and pressed her wet face to the pillow.

"It was a brave death—a soldier's death," he whispered. She wept; it was the one pleasure her father had ever given her,—his death. She thought of the man himself, and wondered why she wept. Harewood, too, wondered, and she answered his unasked question.

"I weep because I have so little to weep for. Go, now, and leave me with my happiness."

CHAPTER XVI.

BETROTHED.

In Paris the days succeeded each other with few incidents and moderate excitement. Suspense had given place to certainty; the city was completely hemmed in by an unseen enemy, unseen save for the smoke of burning villages on the horizon, yet that enemy had as yet done nothing; Nôtre Dame and the Tuileries were still standing, cabs, cars, omnibuses ran as usual, and the boulevards and cafés were thronged.

True, there had been a few alarms in the interior of the city; a petroleum storehouse caught fire on Montmartre through accident, a chemical factory blew up in the rue de Vaugirard and killed some people. Everybody was certain that these fires were of incendiary origin, but probably nobody knew the truth—unless Speyer and Stauffer knew it. There was practically no news from the provinces; now and then a daring messenger managed to elude the Prussian picquets and creep into the city, but, except for that, Paris was absolutely isolated from the rest of France as far as receiving news was concerned. But the Parisians could send news by pigeons and balloons; they sent something else, too—a balloon loaded with 200 pounds of Monsieur Gambetta, destined to fill the Midi with his fanfare and gasconading, destined to flop in the Prussian drag net and blind himself and his fellow victims with the turmoil of his own flopping, destined incidentally to aid in the disgrace and destruction of a brave incapable, more sinned against than sinning, the innocent fat-brained scapegoat of a frenzied nation—Bazaine. If there ever existed such a thing as a patriotic demagogue, partly genius, partly mountebank, Gambetta must remain the unique example, and yet the court-martial of Bazaine has left the stain that tarnishes the name of Gambetta and makes it stink a little, too.

The courage and splendid fortitude that brightened the gloom of the year of punishment, the terrible chastisement of a guilty nation,

was displayed by the army and the people. The leaders, the politicians, the men in high places, the government must look elsewhere for eulogy. Thiers, agitated by senile convulsions, Gambetta, bawling nonsense, Rochefort, brilliant and useless as a will-o'-the-wisp—and quite as easy to catch; Favre, self effacing, patriotic, unequal to his task; Trochu, sombre, fervidly good, living amid hallucinations, a monument of martyred indecision—will some historian or writer of fiction—they are synonyms—be pleased to gild the letters of these great names? And while the romancer, or historian—whichever you will—is about it, let him regild the name of Rénan, as he sits feeding himself at Tortoni's in the starving city, splitting platitudes with De Goncourt. See him as he eats! His chin is fat, his belly fatter, his fat white fingers are spread out on either knee, the nails offensively untrimmed. He preaches universal brotherhood; he is on good terms with humanity. Incidentally he talks much, and familiarly, about our Saviour—and, eats, eats, eats.

In the beginning of his career, Gambetta created for himself a name. It took only a few weeks to create it. He followed Rochefort's methods with equal success. He was very popular in France. He was a talented lawyer. Again and again in the corps législatif he showed himself to be not only an orator, but a statesman, of a certain kind. In the beginning of the revolution he was useful; he was the hyphen that connected the parti avancé and the bourgeoisie. He was opposed to Trochu. He sailed away in his balloon to Tours, where he felt that his sphere of action ended only with the frontier. He was mistaken. His colleagues proved useless. He set up a dictatorship that ended by sterilizing and making ridiculous his former energy.

“Did this young tribune of the people remember that the greatest glory God can accord to man is the glory incomparable of saving his country? Had he a soul sublime enough for such a mission? And the purity of his intentions, the simplicity of his life, the elevation of his character—were they so notorious that he should be deemed worthy of such an honour?”

Let France answer her own.

The third sortie ended in the fire-swept streets of Bagneux, and, for the third time since the siege began, the army of Paris retired to the city, having accomplished nothing except a few thousand deaths, highly commended by “Ollivier Militaire.” Bourke, hurrying back to the city, had attempted to telegraph this news by way of Bordeaux. Then, when he had spent the remainder of the day in similar and equally vain attempts, he gave it up and went back to the house on the ramparts, where he found Harewood, pockets stuffed with unsent despatches, pacing the hallway and smoking furiously.

“It’s just as I told you,” he said, when he saw Bourke; “we’re cooped up for good. If you had listened to me and gone on to Versailles——”

“O, shut up,” said Bourke, pleasantly, “you are no worse off than I am.”

Harewood, a little ashamed of his selfish petulance, sat down on the stairs and looked over his despatches.

“We can’t run the lines,” he said; “we can’t send these by pigeons, even if we had the pigeons; we might send them in the next balloon.”

“I’ve tried,” said Bourke; “it’s no go.” He flung his own despatches into a corner and lit a cigarette.

“As war-news purveyors,” he observed, “you and I are useless, my son, until a sortie is made and the German lines pierced. Then we must be there; we must go out with the next sortie, and if our troops get through we must go, too.”

“How about getting back?” asked Harewood.

“Chance it.”

Harewood was silent.

“You’re naturally considering Hildé and Yolette,” began Bourke.

“Naturally,” replied the other, with a tinge of irony.

“So am I. Now, Jim, we are either war correspondents or we are not. We can do nothing here, that’s certain. If we take risks and try to get through the lines, we stand every chance of early and uncomfortable decease. But it’s what we’re paid for. If we follow the next sortie, we may get through with whole skins. That’s more to my taste and fairer

to our journals. If we stay here, it is true we can chronicle the siege and watch for a hole in the German lines, but I think we ought to resign from our journals in that case and risk selling our stuff outside if we can't get it through beforehand. That's the only honourable course I see—either get out of the city, or stay, resign and turn free lance. What do you think?"

"I won't leave—for the present," said Harewood, reddening.

"Good," replied Bourke, promptly. "Neither will I while these young girls are here alone. Of course, I knew you'd say that. Our papers will have to wait until we can get a chance to send in our resignations and reasons. That can't be helped; it was a practical mistake for us not to go out of the city when we had the opportunity. It's tough on our journals, but I've decided not to accept last month's salary, and that will square things. I'll not draw another cent, either. Have you money, Jim?"

"I've a little money," said Harewood. He took out a note-book and pencil and calculated. Presently he looked up.

"We shall need our salaries before the month is out," he observed.

"Then," said Bourke, "one of us must do the work for both; one of us must go out with the next sortie and get through, if possible."

"And—the other?" asked Harewood, slowly.

"The other ought to stay here—as long as there is danger. Jim, do you want to stay?" He forced a smile as he spoke. Harewood said nothing. Bourke's embarrassment was increasing; he reddened and stood up.

"Do you care for Hildé?" he asked, with an effort. Harewood did not answer. Bourke unbuckled the spurs from his riding boots and walked backward and forward, swinging the leathers till the rowels jingled like tiny chimes. After a moment he came up to Harewood, who was sitting moodily on the stairs.

"I should like to stay, Jim—if you don't mind—very much."

Harewood did not move.

"It is—for—for Yolette," added Bourke, crimson to the temples; "but if I thought you loved Hildé, I would go. If you wish it I will go

to-morrow.”

Harewood's face was set and pale, his heart sank under an overwhelming rush of shame; shame for himself, shame because he could not answer the confidence of his comrade, bitter shame that he should be willing to accept a generous man's sacrifice, a man who loved for the first time in his life, and who loved honourably. Bourke continued almost timidly: "I never imagined that Yolette was anything to me; I never thought of that sort of thing. It came before I knew it, Jim. You see, I never before cared for a woman." Harewood's strained glance met his questioningly, and Bourke answered: "I have not spoken to her; I don't believe she would listen to me; I scarcely dare think of it; you see, Jim, I'm not attractive."

He broke off abruptly; there was a swish of a skirt on the landing above; the sound of a door, gently closing.

"They don't understand English," motioned Harewood; "go on."

"Yes, they do—Hildé does," muttered Bourke.

"Hildé understands English?" repeated Harewood in dull surprise. He had not even suspected it; suddenly he realised that he had learned nothing of Hildé—absolutely nothing, except that she loved him.

Bourke slipped his riding crop into his boot, picked up his despatches and moved toward the stairway.

"It was Red Riding Hood; I think I saw her skirt," he said. "Jim, shall I go with the next sortie?"

Harewood turned and mounted the stairway with his comrade.

"Come into my room in an hour; I'll tell you then," he said, and left Bourke at the head of the stairs.

When Harewood entered his room he went straight to the mirror. A mirrored face looked back at his own—a face, young, firm, a little pale, with tightened muscles under the cheekbones—and lips compressed. Like painted pictures, scenes began to pass, swiftly and more swiftly, gliding before his eyes; and behind each scene he saw the shape of his own face, he saw his reflected eyes, immovable in accusation. And once, stung to torture by his eyes' fixed condemnation, he raised a menacing hand and pointed at the pointing

figure in the mirror. "Coward!" But the mirrored shape was voiceless.

Then he went to the bed and sat down; and, an hour later, when Bourke knocked, he opened the door and took his comrade's hands affectionately in his, saying that he would go with the troops, saying that he was glad and proud that Bourke had chosen Yolette for the woman he would marry, wishing him luck and happiness. He spoke lightly of the sortie, expressing his satisfaction at a chance for action and a certainty that all would go well. He spoke of an easy return to Paris, once the German lines were ruptured and a free passage established; he prophesied his own early return, smiling carelessly when Bourke stammered his thanks and wishes and fears. They sat together consulting maps, sketching routes and probable lines of investment, until the late sunlight sent its level crimson shafts far down the carpetless hallway, and the shadows reddened in every corner. . . . Before Bourke left he spoke again of danger, but Harewood smiled and folded up his maps gaily.

"You had better look to yourself," he said. "Did you notice the crowds around the bakeries and butcher shops to-day?"

"Yes," replied Bourke. "Yolette says that prices are going up, and many people are buying supplies for months ahead. I think I'll lay in a store of tinned stuff, vegetables and meats, you know. If there should be a famine things might go badly with us."

"And if Speyer troubles you, what will you do?"

"I don't know," said Bourke; "if it would be safer for Yolette and Hildé, I suppose we would be obliged to move. But it won't come to that, Jim; they can't turn us out, and as for their blackguardly threats about Yolette and Hildé, it's too late now to carry them out. The Prussians are here, and nobody can leave the city, willingly or unwillingly."

Harewood lingered restlessly at the door, as though he wished to say something more; Bourke understood, and nodded gravely.

"I needn't say, Jim, that I'll do all I can."

"All I can" meant, for Bourke, devotion while life lasted. Harewood knew this.

“Nothing could happen in the few days I’ll be away, and if I can’t get back as soon as I expect—”

“I will do what I can,” repeated Bourke.

After a silence they shook hands; Harewood returned to his room, closed the door, locked it, and flung himself face downward on the bed. But he could not even close his eyes, and when Red Riding Hood knocked he sprang up and unlocked his door with the relief of a half-stifled man. They exchanged their kiss solemnly; he sat down again on the bedside and took the child in his arms. For an hour he told her stories, wonderful tales of the east and west, legends of north and south, chronicles of saints and martyrs and those well loved of God. And the burden of every tale was honour.

Twilight spun its grey web over all, sounds grew softer, the child slept in his arms. He laid her among his pillows lightly, then went his way down the dim stairs, flight after flight, until he came to the closed door. Again it opened for him, as it had opened once before, noiselessly, and he entered. On the niche in the wall Sainte Hildé of Carhaix stood, leaning at an angle; for, when she had fallen, feet and pedestal had been shattered on the tiles. Under her hung a rosary. He looked around slowly; behind the curtain by the dim window something moved.

“Hildé,” he said aloud. He scarcely knew the voice for his own. But she knew it; what else should she hear—hear all day, all night, but his voice—always his voice. She came to him through the twilight and laid both hands in his.

“You are going away?” she said.

She had not heard him say so, there in the hall; she knew it as women know such things.

“Yes,” he said, “I am going away.”

“To-morrow?”

“Yes.”

She waited for him to speak again. She waited in a terror that dried lip and eye. Her knees trembled; a chill crept to her breast. She waited for a word—a single word that meant salvation; she shrank before

silence, for silence was her sentence—a sentence without hope, without appeal.

After a long while her hands fell from his; she moved backward a step; her head brushed the hanging rosary and set the brass cross swinging like a pendulum, timing the sands of life. The sands of her life were running quickly now—too quickly.

“You heard?” he asked; “it was you—on the stairs there?”

“Yes.”

“That Bourke loves Yolette?”

“Yes.”

She reached out in the darkness, needing support. The white wall seemed to waver and recede under her hand.

“And Yolette,” whispered Harewood, with tight lips.

There was a crash, a tinkle of porcelain on the tiles. Sainte Hildé of Carhaix had fallen again at his feet. There was something else breaking, too—close beside him—a woman’s heart in the twilight.

“And Yolette,” he repeated.

She said: “Do you love Yolette?”

His hot head swam; he groped for a chair and leaned on it, heavily. Then he sat down, his clenched hands over his eyes, knowing nothing, hearing nothing, not the quiet sob in the darkness, not the faltering footsteps, not the rustle of her knees on the tiles beside him. Two hands drew his hands from his eyes, a silken head rested on his knees.

“Whatever is for your happiness,” she gasped, “but—be honourable; it is my sister.” And again she whispered: “Your happiness—that is all my love for you has meant.”

He looked up, slowly, trying to understand the question that at last had been answered for him. It was so simple, so clear now; had he ever doubted it; doubted that he loved? And where was fear now—where was self-distrust—despair? They had vanished utterly, if they had ever existed. As yet the awakening to understanding had not touched him with the subtler passion that should endure while life endured; he was so sure, so quietly happy. Then, when his hand fell lightly on her head, and when her face was raised to his, and when she saw at last in

his eyes that his body and soul were hers—ah, then she knew the mystery and meaning of eternity, which is shorter than the shortest atom of a second, and longer than the sleep of death.

There was a spot of moonlight in the room; her face was paler. His lips touched the exquisite contour of cheek and brow; he scarcely dared to touch her mouth, the mouth that had been his for the asking, for his pleasure, for an idle smile. The divine curve of the parted lips, the shadowed lashes on the cheek, troubled him.

Her eyes unclosed; she looked at him listlessly, crushed to his breast. Stunned by her own great happiness, she listened to the words, so long awaited, so long despaired, the words that told her his love was to be forever and forever, this love she had lived for. She scarcely comprehended, she seemed awake yet swooning. Her head had fallen back a little, lips parted, eyes never moving from his own.

“Forever and forever, together, always together, to love, to hold, to cherish, to honour——”

Ah, Hildé—“to honour”—that is what he is saying; can you not hear?

Her eyes enthralled him; her closing lids hid their heavenly sweetness. He kissed her mouth.

“Life of my life, heart of my heart, breath of my breath, forever and forever, to love, to hold, to cherish, to honour.”

Her eyes unclosed.

“All that was yours at our first kiss,” she said.

They were standing by the window, where the moonlight barred her body and transfigured a face so pure, so exquisite, that the hot tears of repentance blinded him, and he could not see until she dried them, grieving at his grief, whispering consolation, forgiving with a caress, a pale smile, that mirrored the adoration in his eyes. When two souls meet the purer absorbs the other, and stains of life are washed away. Into her spirit had come the strength and knowledge that is needed to bear the burden of a lesser spirit; she it was who was to lead, henceforth, and he knew it. Young, yet world-worn, he sought her

guidance, he craved her spiritual purity. She wept a little, standing very still, when he told her that he must go with the troops—that either he or his comrade must act as bread-winner for them both. He made it clear to her that it would not be honourable to accept money and make no effort. He told her that he wished to do this for his comrade, because the sacrifice was necessary. As he spoke he longed to believe that his unselfishness might make him more worthy of her, and she divined his thought, and smiled through her tears, saying he was all her life and hope and happiness, saying he was brave and noble and good. He said that his comrade was all that. He made her promise not to tell Yolette until he returned, because if Yolette and Bourke knew that they were betrothed Bourke would insist on sacrificing himself.

“He would not let me go; he is so generous. Hildé, my darling, I must do this thing for his sake—for Yolette’s sake.”

“Yes, I shall weep no more.”

He smiled with that perfect happiness that self-sacrifice brings.

“Does Yolette love him?”

“I don’t know.”

“And—did you think I loved Yolette, sweetheart?”

“Yes; did you?”

“No,” he said.

“And—now?”

Their eyes met.

“And now,” she sighed, trembling with happiness.

His arms encircled her slender body; he whispered “My Hildé —” then stopped.

For there came a tapping at the open window.

He turned his head slowly; the window opened, a face looked in. It was the Mouse, haggard, bloody, blinking at them with his blind eye.

CHAPTER XVII.

A RECRUIT FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

When Hildé saw the Mouse she uttered a cry of fright. Harewood stared at the tattered creature with disgust. "Get out," he said.

"Let me come in, monsieur," whined the Mouse; "they are following me."

"Following you!"

Harewood stepped to the window.

"Who? The police?"

"The troops," muttered the Mouse, under his breath. "Hark! You can hear them—in the rue Malaise."

Harewood listened.

"I hear them. Come in."

He opened the side door of the garden, motioned the Mouse into the empty bird store, and followed, calling back to Hildé to bring a lamp. When Hildé entered a moment later, the lamp lit up a ragged figure, lying flung across the floor. There was blood on his cropped head, on his fist and wrist.

Harewood took the lamp and knelt beside the inert mass. The yellow light fell on one unclosed eye, ivory white, sunken, sightless.

"He's been pricked by a bayonet; he's been running hard. Ask Bourke to come," whispered Harewood.

He set the lamp on the floor, and lifted the Mouse's arm.

"Ugh! He's been shot, too," he added.

"Poor thing—poor thing,"—faltered Hildé, standing with small hands tightly clasped. "Shall I bring water?"

"Yes, and call Bourke."

A moment later Bourke entered carrying a pitcher of water; Hildé and Yolette followed with some cloths for bandages, a bowl, and another lamp.

The Mouse was sitting up, supported by Harewood, his ragged back resting against the shop counter, his legs thrust out on the floor.

He swallowed all the cognac Bourke gave him without comment, winked solemnly with his sound eye, gasped and looked up. He recognised Hildé and Yolette at once, and a flicker of amused malice came into his face, which changed, however, so suddenly that Harewood thought he was about to faint again.

“The lion,” gasped the Mouse; “I don’t want to see it.”

It was difficult to quiet him. The horror of his previous introduction to Schéhérazade had left an impression never to be obliterated. However, he was in no condition for further flight, and at last Hildé’s pity and Harewood’s amusement reassured him.

“They punched me full of holes,” he explained. “The soldiers of Vinoy and the Garde Mobile,—for what? God knows,” he added, piously. “Have I been shot, monsieur?”

“Grazed; it is nothing,” replied Harewood. He looked anxiously at Hildé; she understood and drew Yolette toward the door.

“Are you hungry?” she asked, shaking her head gravely at the Mouse.

“Mademoiselle,” replied the Mouse, with an approach to enthusiasm, “I am always hungry.”

Bourke and Harewood washed the battered ruffian’s wounds; they were slight, perhaps painful; but in the lower organisms sensibility to pain is at a minimum. It is exhaustion that tells most heavily upon creatures of the Mouse’s species; the finer tortures, mental and physical, need nerves for appreciation, and the Mouse had none. Bourke brought him a chair; Harewood set the two lamps on the counter; the Mouse was supplied with a cigar.

“Now,” said Harewood, “go on.”

The Mouse leaned back luxuriously; a placid sense of well being and security filled his body and soothed him to the ends of his toes.

“Messieurs,” he said, “it was Major Flourens; I was at the Undertakers; we all were there, peaceably, like gentlemen at our wine—denouncing the government. Then comes your American, Buckhurst, who whispers to one—to another—ma foi! what?” He shrugged his shoulders and shifted the cigar in his thin lips. “Then,”

he resumed, "your Americans, Speyer and Stauffer, begin to shout, 'To the Hôtel de Ville! Vive la Commune!' and our Major Flourens calls for the drummers of the carbiniers to beat the générale through Belleville. Messieurs, in a moment we were marching—all marching and singing the 'Marseillaise.' You understand that our heads were warmed a little? Flut! Je ne m'emballe p'us."

"Go on," said Bourke, sharply.

The Mouse examined his bandaged arm, blew a disgusted cloud of smoke from his lips, shrugged and continued:

"Your American, Buckhurst, said it would be easy; everybody said so; nothing to do but march into the Hôtel de Ville, make a new government, and become rich. I went; messieurs—it was quite natural, was it not? Mince! They arrived, too, the fantassins of Vinoy and the Garde Mobile. I ran; it was natural."

"Very," said Harewood, gravely.

"N'est ce pas? Donc—I ran. So ran the carbiniers of Flourens. Fichtre! They—the others—ran after us—the line and the Garde Mobile, and—I am here."

Harewood laughed outright; Bourke looked seriously at the Mouse.

So there had been a revolt in Belleville. Flourens and his "legion," now known as the "carbiniers"—had, at the instigation of Buckhurst, Speyer and Stauffer, descended from Belleville to seize the Hôtel de Ville and proclaim the Commune. Why had Buckhurst done this? For plunder. Why had Speyer urged it? Bismarck's spies were paid to foment disorder: was this the first sample? Did the pockets of the Undertakers bulge with Prussian gold?

"Who beat the générale in Belleville?" demanded Bourke, suddenly.

"The drummers of the carbiniers," replied the Mouse, with a wink.

"By whose orders?"

"Pardi—the orders of Major Flourens, monsieur."

"Did the carbiniers march?"

"Yes, and two thousand of the Belleville aristocracy," said the

Mouse, impudently.

“O, like yourself?”

“Oui, monsieur.”

Bourke walked over to him, and, before the Mouse could protest, he had whipped a handful of coins out of his pocket. Among them was a gold piece bearing on one side the Prussian double eagle, on the other the portrait of Wilhelm Koenig.

“Where did you get that?” demanded Bourke.

The Mouse seemed genuinely surprised.

“Captain Speyer gave it to me,” he replied, placidly; “all gold is good now. It cost two like that to start me marching for the Hôtel de Ville; it will cost twenty in future,” he added.

Bourke looked at him intently, then, patiently, he began to point out what the presence of German gold meant among the people—he spoke simply and slowly, explaining to an undeveloped intelligence.

“It is distributed by German spies,” he said. “Bismarck pays them to weaken Paris by turning Frenchman against Frenchman.”

“What’s that to me,” replied the Mouse, sullenly. All the hatred of the rich flamed up in his single eye; he set his lips and sneered at Bourke:

“Frenchman against Frenchman. What is that to me? It is what I want, I, the Mouse!”

Harewood shot a disgusted glance at him, but Bourke, subtler in his appreciation of men, spoke again patiently.

“Very well, Frenchman against Frenchman, rich against poor, if you will; but not now.”

“It is none too soon,” growled the Mouse, with an evil light in his single eye.

“Then,” said Bourke, “if you are in such haste for money, go out to the Prussian lines. They will pay you well for a package of to-day’s newspapers.”

“Dieu de Dieu!” shouted the Mouse, red with rage; “do you take me for a spy?”

“No,” said Bourke, with a sigh of relief.

Harewood rose and gravely took the Mouse's uninjured hand.

"You're a decent casse-geule," he said; "listen to Monsieur Bourke."

An hour later the vague intelligence of the Mouse, deformed and crippled from his birth, was enlightened enough for him to see that he had been the very thing that even his distorted nature shrank from—a paid traitor to his own land.

Then fury seized him, and he cursed until Harewood threatened him savagely. He understood but one thing—he had been duped by some one—he had been played, imposed upon, perhaps mocked. And this a criminal never forgives. There was no righteousness in his fury—unless the blind instinct that forces a man to spare his own land can be called such. He abstained from treason as he abstained from cannibalism. If he had owned a square inch of French soil he would doubtless have fought for it tooth and nail; but there was no broader impulse to make him fight for the land that others owned—the land owned by emperors and princes—and the rich. Yet even he would not sell it, though he did not even know why.

What stung him was that somebody had tricked him into doing something. This roused the sullen rage that never dies in men of his type, a rage that needs to be glutted with vengeance—a sombre hate that must be hugged and cherished and brooded on—until the red day of reckoning.

That day was to dawn—he scented it as buzzards scent a thing far off—the day when the spectre of the Red Republic should rise and stalk through Paris, while palaces sank in ashes and the gutters marked high tide for the crimson flood.

But there were others first to reckon with; those others, whoever they were—wherever they were—who had duped and mocked, and bought and sold, and tricked and flouted him. And yet he was patient by nature—when vengeance needed patience. He was sly, and, when it served his ends, cowardly, like a wolf in a pit. Bourke's brutal solution of the problem needed Harewood's finer hand to prove it, and he did, moulding the Mouse at his will—tempting him with the bait of

satisfied revenge, enslaving him with the oppressive conviction of a knowledge superior and more materially powerful than his own. The Mouse understood that he had been used for the pleasure and profit of other men; that he had been tricked into treason. He also understood that Harewood knew how to help him to revenge, and that made him docile. He comprehended that a knife stuck into Speyer's back was poor vengeance compared to the ultimate confusion of the whole spy system, the annihilation of Flourens, Buckhurst and Mortier, and the wholesale execution of the Undertakers. Therefore, he was willing to be guided, and Harewood, without scruple, brought the government a recruit.

There was another feature that Harewood had neglected to count on; the curious unconscious attachment of the Mouse to himself. Was it gratitude for aid when the police ran him through the passage de l'Ombre? Was it an instinct that moves live things to continue to protect whatever they save from destruction? Each had saved the other in sorest need, and now the Mouse's inclination moved him to move, when and where Harewood moved.

There was a tub in the bird store, and here the Mouse was ordered to bathe in the hot water that Bourke brought. Later, his wounds redressed, the Mouse sat down to be fed. He wore an old suit of Bourke's clothes; his clean shirt made him shy and suspicious, but a heavy dinner dissipated suspicions, and, later, a mattress and blankets in the corner of the bird store aided the Mouse to sleep a sleep of repletion, pleasantly tinctured with dreams of carnage.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WOMAN WHO WAITS.

That very night, unknown to Harewood, a sortie was attempted from the gates of the south—a sortie, as usual inadequately supported by artillery. About midnight the cannon on the southern forts aroused him. Bourke came into his room, and together they looked out into the night, where, above the Issy fort, the sky reflected dull crimson flashes as gun after gun boomed through the darkness.

After awhile Bourke went back to bed. Harewood, too, slept soundly, lulled by the swelling harmony of the cannonade. The grumble of the guns ceased with the night. In the morning they knew the troops had failed at Châtillon; they knew also that the raid on the Hôtel de Ville had proved a ridiculous fiasco, so ridiculous that the government allowed Flourens to retire to his Belleville fastness undisturbed and drink mournfully to the Commune with his carbiniers. It is probable that the government believed it had its hands full without inaugurating civil strife in Belleville under the muzzles of the Prussian guns. This inertia or cowardice of the government was the beginning of that disastrous temporising, later criminally indulged in by Thiers, and which cost Paris the Commune.

So Major Flourens flourished his heels in security, and Buckhurst, emboldened by the government's apathy, refused admittance at the Undertakers to reporters or government officers, while Speyer and Stauffer whispered discontent and treason among the carbiniers.

The week passed slowly for the Mouse; he was waiting for revenge. It passed more swiftly for Bourke; he was in love. As for Hildé and Harewood, the days appeared and vanished like April rainbows. He was with her in the evenings; in the mornings he haunted the war-office, ears open for any bit of gossip that might indicate the date of the next sortie.

The war-office remained in a state of indescribable confusion; everything lay at loose ends. There appeared to be no system, no

order. The place was thronged by irresponsible young officers who knew everything and nothing, and who talked, talked, talked. Surely it needed no extraordinary spy system on the German side to keep Monsieur Bismarck au courant with the daily life in Paris, with the physical and moral conditions of the French army. Every movement contemplated was discussed with unheard-of carelessness, every secret project aired, every plan shouted aloud to anybody who cared to listen. The vital necessity of secrecy in arranging for a sortie was absolutely ignored. Is it, then, any wonder that, hours before a sortie, the Germans knew of it and were already massing in the threatened zone?

Harewood, always welcomed among men wherever he went, found no difficulty in learning whatever he wished to learn.

This knowledge he used; he bought hundreds of tins of meat and vegetables, all the flour he could get, all the biscuits and preserves. He had heard things from high sources that appalled him, and he looked fearfully at the lines of people already beginning to gather in front of the provision depots.

Fuel and candles he bought, too, but he could purchase no oil, although petroleum was cheap. The oil was used to inflate balloons; the petroleum could not be burned in lamps.

Hildé and Yolette were very busy storing provisions in the cellar and bottling red wine, aided by Red Riding Hood and the Mouse.

The Mouse, cleaned and chastened and warmly clothed, worked as he was bidden to work—not because he wished to—but because Harewood told him to do so or get out. To find himself working was an endless source of painful amazement to the Mouse.

“Malheur—si ça fait pas pitie!” he would exclaim, regarding his apron and sabots with unfeigned astonishment. But he carried and fetched and scrubbed and rubbed, living half in a daze, half in a nightmare. He was not resentful, however; he knew his skin was safer there than in Belleville. But the degradation of manual toil crushed him to a state of gloom only lighted by three full meals a day and Harewood’s judiciously doled out cigars. He cared nothing for Yolette

or Hildé, he ignored Mehemet Ali, he tolerated Red Riding Hood, he loathed Schéhérazade with a loathing that turned his blood to water. Bourke he revered because that young man had mastered him; Harewood he followed, when Harewood did not drive him off about his business.

All day long the forts of the south pounded away at the wooded heights beyond; all day long the boulevards in the interior of the city echoed with the rattle of drums. There were fewer cabs and omnibuses now; the government was constantly seizing horses for artillery and train service. Horse meat, too, began to appear in the markets, but the government at first restricted its sale to certain designated shops.

Toward the middle of the week, the government published an order in the official, rationing the inhabitants of Paris, and assuming control of every butcher shop in the city. Bourke returned that night bringing with him a printed card, showing the number of people in their house, their names and the amount of meat allowed each—100 grammes daily.

“It looks serious,” he said, handing the card to Yolette. “We are also obliged to secure three days rations at a time.”

The name of the Mouse did not appear on the card; they invented a name for him that served its purpose. But the alarming part was that the government flatly refused to nourish Schéhérazade at its expense, and even suggested sending her to the Zoo in the Jardin des Plantes.

“Never!” cried Hildé, putting both arms around Schéhérazade’s neck; but the lioness no longer responded, and Hildé looked at her sorrowfully, mourning the change in her gentle favourite.

It was Thursday, October 27. Harewood had gone as usual to the war-office; Bourke and Yolette sat in the dining-room, examining the week’s accounts; Hildé moved about her own little chamber, humming her Breton songs. Through the window she could see the Mouse, painfully splitting firewood under the uncompromising superintendence of Red Riding Hood.

“You split too large,” said the child; “don’t you know how?”

“No,” said the Mouse, sulkily.

“Then—here—give me the hatchet! There! That’s how wood should be split.”

“Don’t let me deprive you of the pleasure,” sneered the Mouse, as she handed him the hatchet again; but the child disdained to answer.

“Mince!” observed the Mouse, “do they want wood for a month?”

Red Riding Hood turned up her nose.

“Bon,” said the Mouse, “I’ll die of fatigue, but there is nobody to weep.” He shrugged his shoulders, picked up another log, and chopped on. Hildé smiled to herself, watching the comedy from her curtained window. The happy light in her eyes, the song on her lips—the song that her heart was singing, too—transfigured and glorified her face. In it the childish sweetness had changed to something more delicate and subtle; the purity of contour was almost spiritual, the curve of the scarlet lips grew finer and more exquisite. Strength had shallowed the dimples that nestled in soft corners; the beauty of her eyes was indescribable, her every gesture a caress.

There were moments when, as she sat thinking in her chamber, the swift tears filled her eyes and her heart failed. At such moments terror of death—his death—brought her to her knees at the bedside. But the rosary was near, and so was Sainte Hildé of Carhaix, mended with glue, azure-mantled, serene, still smiling in spite of a missing nose.

Hildé sewed at times—not in the dining-room, where Yolette, demure and silent, listened to Bourke’s opinion of everything under the sun. He discussed ethics and morals and human happiness; he touched on transubstantiation, on agriculture, on logic. But he never spoke of love. Possibly his opinions were valuable; probably not, for he had little imagination.

“Do you think,” said Yolette, “that it is going to rain?”

“No,” he replied.

A silence ensued. There seemed to be no further excuse for lingering; he rose unwillingly and picked up his accounts.

“Must you go?” asked Yolette, innocently.

It was the first time she had ever asked him to stay. He sat down hastily and realised it. She went to a table, sorted some silks, chose a

needle or two, and presently looked at him over her shoulder as though surprised to see him there yet. He felt this; it confused and pained him.

“Perhaps I had better go,” he said. She apparently did not hear him, and, after a moment, he decided not to repeat the remark. Presently she returned to her chair, seated herself, threaded some needles and began to smooth out the embroidery on her knee. He could not withdraw his eyes; her delicate fingers fascinated him.

“One, two, three, four, and one, two, and one, two, three,” said Yolette, counting her stitches. He felt himself excluded from the conversation; he looked out of the window and chafed. Had he seen the glance that Yolette stole at him—the instant dropping of the blue eyes when he moved—perhaps he might have felt less injured. He did not: he listened in silence as she began again. “One, two, three, four, and one, two, and one, two, three.” He watched her slender fingers guiding the flying needle; those slim fingers were in her confidence; she seemed to be gossiping with every rosy tip, every polished nail. Her head was the slightest bit averted; the whiteness of her neck dazzled him.

After awhile, Yolette dropped the embroidery into her lap and sighed. Her arms rested on the arms of her chair. One hand dropped quite close to his shoulder. He regarded it with rising interest. It was white and delicately veined with blue; it looked very smooth and young and helpless. After a moment he took it naïvely. It was then that a series of thrills shot through his limbs, depriving him of sight, hearing and a portion of his other senses. He was vaguely aware that the hand he held was responsible for this; he held it tighter. Yolette, perhaps, was asleep. “Are you?” he inquired aloud. “What?” asked Yolette, amazed.

Bourke only stared at her until again she turned her head to the window. They sat there in absolute silence. A lethargy, a delicious numbness, settled over Bourke. He would have been contented to sit there for centuries.

Presently Yolette tried to withdraw her hand, failed, tried again,

failed, and resigned herself—not unwillingly. She was very young.

“We will live in New York,” said Bourke, speaking in a trance. After a silence he added, “in a brownstone house. We will have many, many children.”

“Who?” said Yolette, faintly.

“Who? why you—you and I——”

Yolette turned quickly: her cheeks were aflame. “What do you mean?” she demanded, breathlessly.

“Are you—you not going to marry me?” faltered Bourke. His expression was absurd. They had both risen; she stood, leaning a little forward, one hand resting on a chair. The silence was absolute. After a little she swayed, almost imperceptibly, toward him; he toward her. He dared not touch her again—yet now he found his arms around her waist, her head close to his. It frightened him into speech—a stammering, pleading speech, that had a burden not at all complicated, “I love you! I love you, Yolette!”

When he kissed her she rendered him his kiss innocently. His courage revived, and he told her things that only she had a right to hear. That, perhaps, is the reason why Mehemet Ali withdrew from the sofa back to the gloom under the sofa. Perhaps, too, that was the reason why Hildé, entering the room from the rear, paused, turned, and glided back to her white bedroom, where, with Sainte Hildé of Carhaix, she began a duet of silence. She had been waiting there an hour, possibly two hours, before the door creaked, swayed and swung open, and Yolette was in her arms.

“My darling! My darling!” laughed Hildé, tearfully, “I am very, very happy—don’t cry—why should we?”

All day long they sat there, arms and fingers interlaced, and night darkened the room before they kissed and parted, Yolette to her own room, Hildé to the front door, where now she always lingered until Harewood came back from the city.

She stood there, dreaming, her eyes fixed on the corner by the Prince Murat barracks. He always came around that corner.

One by one the signal lamps broke out along the bastions; the

stars, at first so brilliant, faded in the cloudless sky. She could see no haze, no vapour, but the air appeared to thicken around each star till it tarnished, grew dull, and at last vanished in mid-heaven. A sudden shaft of cold struck through the street; and now, around each lamp and lantern and flaring gas-jet a gossamer eclipse began to form that grew iridescent and more palpable every moment. Once a patrol passed, lanterns swinging—a shrouded, cloaked file of silent men, trudging through the darkness with never a drum-tap to echo the clump, clump of their clumsy boots.

Yolette came to the door and waited there a few moments with her sister. “Come,” she whispered at last: “do you not know that dinner is waiting?” Neither moved to go. Presently Yolette spoke again: “What is it, little sister?” Hildé was silent. “I knew it,” said Yolette, under her breath.

Hildé turned slowly: “You knew it?” she motioned.

“Yes.”

Somewhere in the night a cab rattled over a stone pavement; a dog barked down by the Porte Rouge. “See the rockets,” said Yolette; “it is Mont-Valérien that sends them up. They are talking to Saint Denis with their rockets; Monsieur Bourke says so. And now Saint Denis will send the message to the Fortress of the East. Hildé, little sister, you are crying.”

“I am afraid.”

Was it the sudden cold that chilled her? She shivered and turned back into the house. Bourke moved about lighting candles in the dining-room—there was no more lamp oil—and Yolette went to the table and seated herself, her eyes innocently answering the adoration in her lover’s eyes. They waited in rapturous silence until Hildé entered. Then Bourke sat down and the meal began.

About nine o’clock Red Riding Hood came to clear the table. Hildé aided her, bearing out her own untouched plate, pausing to cry a little in the dark entry, until she heard Bourke laughing in the dining-room, and that comforted her. But when she returned serene and smiling, the smile died on her lips, for Bourke was saying: “I wonder

what could keep Jim! I don't like it. He ought to have been here before dark."

A little spasm of fear passed through her heart; she turned and entered the hallway; before she had reached the front door, it opened, and a gust of icy wind swept across her face. At first she thought it was he who had entered; there was nobody there. The rising wind tore a shutter loose on the floor above; the tree in front of the house swayed, bowed, bent and creaked, showering the sidewalk with whirling leaves. Then, in a moment, it was over; the wind died out, all sounds and movements seemed to cease as at an unheard command. The hush terrified her; she looked up through the thick air, looked up through a grey descending veil, a palpable haze that covered her with a million sifting snowflakes. Straight down from the fathomless vault of midnight they fell athwart dim gas-jets—ghostly, noiseless, ominous flakes. They melted at first, wetting the sidewalks till the reflected gas-jets trembled like torches mirrored in a river. After a while, greyish patches and dim blots of snow appeared here and there, spreading faster than they melted; the tree was spotted like a forest beech, the grass on the glacis whitened as she looked. The chill in the air had vanished, yet far away she scented the cold—the clear, clean breath of winter.

Out over dark hills and valleys, over rivers, woods and spires, the unseen snow was falling; she felt it as though each flake were falling on her heart. Her eyes strove to pierce the gloom where all the world was waiting breathless in the snow—waiting as she waited—for what? Again that sick fear struck through her breast; there came a distant echo of footsteps scarcely softened in the snow, nearer, nearer—a shadow passed across a signal lamp, across the next—and the next. "Hildé!"

He held her crushed to his breast for a moment; her eyes were closed, her wet hair glistened with snow crystals under the gas-jet overhead. A minute passed—two, three; he lifted her head, seeking her lips. "Is it to-night?" she sobbed.

"Yes."

After a moment he gently unclasped her arms, stepped to the hallway and called: "Bourke!"

"Not to-night!—not yet!—" she moaned, reaching out blindly. He caught up both her hands and kissed them again and again.

And now Bourke was coming through the hallway, bearing a lamp, and behind him was Yolette. Harewood whispered: "It's for to-night, Cecil—Bellemare's division is leaving Saint Denis. Get your despatches quick. The cavalry are riding by the Saint Ouen gate; the Fortress of the East supports them. Hurry, Cecil, I've only a second."

Bourke turned and hurried up the stairs; Yolette looked from Harewood to Hildé. "Can't it be helped?" she asked at last.

"No, I must go. After I have gone—then tell Bourke—not before—he would not let me go." He kissed Hildé quietly, saying that there was nothing to fear—saying that he would soon return to be with her always. Bourke reappeared with a little packet; Yolette was crying.

"Jim," said Bourke, "I will go—if you say the word."

Harewood smiled and pressed his hand lightly. "Good-by," he said; "there'll be no trouble." Yolette hid her head in her hands; Hildé turned a white face to Harewood. He hesitated, glanced at Bourke with inscrutable eyes, then for the last time took Hildé to his breast—a second—and was gone.

"Jim!" stammered Bourke, "you—you can't go—I didn't understand!—I—Jim—wait!—come back, you fool!"

"Hildé!" whispered Yolette, with ashen lips.

But Hildé no longer saw; no longer heard.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE SORTIE.

At midnight Harewood passed the fortifications, riding with a troop of hussars to a point where the Crevecœur road crosses the military highway between the fortress of Aubervilliers and the village of Le Bourget. Here the hussars wheeled westward toward Saint Denis, calling back to him a friendly “bon voyage,” and he rode on alone.

His horse was already tired; it was the only mount he had been able to find in Paris, a great raw-boned cavalry charger, condemned at the depot and destined for the omnibus or the butcher.

Harewood spared the creature when he could, but the highway was already deep in slush and ice and the horse slipped at every ascent.

Post after post was passed; the pickets at Drancy stopped him, then let him go when they found his papers satisfactory. Again he was stopped where the shattered railroad crosses the Cœurneuve highway, and there the obstinate outpost was mollified by an officer who knew Harewood and who sent him on his way with a mirthless laugh that rang false and sad through the falling snow.

There was nothing to be seen—now and then a yellow lantern lighting up the blackness, blotted out suddenly in a flurry of snow—a dim highway deep with mud, over which thin films of ice had formed, only to crackle under his horse’s feet. Off there in the darkness to the westward the three forts of Saint Denis lay in obscurity—the fort de la Briche, the Fortress of the East and the battery of the Double-Crown. Behind him the fort of Aubervilliers crouched above the highway in utter darkness, indifferent, unheeding the dim signals displayed from the bastions of the enceinte. Once a roaming quartet of Franc-tireurs appeared at his stirrups and seized his horse. They all were drunk and sullenly suspicious, cursing, shoving, demanding papers and passwords, and handling their rifles with a carelessness that threatened the existence of everybody concerned. They lighted lanterns at length and examined Harewood, commenting on his tweed Norfolk jacket, on

the many pockets on breast and hip, and finally on the corded riding-breeches and spurred boots. Evidently they coveted the boots.

"Take them, gentlemen," said Harewood, sarcastically, "and I'll return with General Bellemare to show him how my boots fit you."

This produced its effect; the Franc-tireurs protested that they cared neither for General Bellemare nor for the boots. They consigned General, boots and Harewood himself to a livid and prophetic future, and let him go, shouting after him that Flourens' carbiniers would strip him. General or no General.

This was pleasant news for Harewood; he had had no idea that Flourens' three battalions were out. With a sudden misgiving he drew bridle and looked intently ahead. There was nothing to see but swirling sheets of snow. He listened, peering into the gloom. Suppose Speyer should meet him here alone?—or Buckhurst?

He gathered the bridle nervously; the horse moved forward. "Halt! Qui Vive!" a voice broke out in the darkness.

"France!" cried Harewood, with a sudden sinking of his heart. Cloaked and shrouded mounted figures appeared on every side, a pale lantern glimmered in his face, swung again to the ground and went out.

"C'est bien," said somebody, close at his elbow, "laissez passez, Monsieur Harewood." Colonel Lavoignet's escort parted right and left; one or two officers greeted the American pleasantly from the darkness.

"What troops are these," asked Harewood, striving to recognise his unseen friends.

"The 34th de marche," said somebody.

"The second and third brigades are passing the forts," added another.

Again a lantern gleamed out and Harewood saw General Bellemare passing close in front, escorted by dragoons, cloaked to the ears. The keen-eyed young General smiled at Harewood, who lifted his cap in silence. "Are you going with us to Le Bourget?" asked the General, drawing bridle and holding out a gloved hand.

“Oui, mon General—with your permission,” replied Harewood; “I have General Trochu’s consent,” he added.

“Then what do you want with mine?” queried General Bellemare, with a good-humoured gesture; “you journalists are a nuisance, Monsieur Harewood—a nuisance!”

“I am to carry through despatches, General; may I be of service to you?”

General Bellemare shook his head and wheeled his horse. “Wait until we take Le Bourget,” he said, and trotted forward, followed by his plunging snow-covered escort.

The snowflakes that were now falling seemed fine as sifted flour; they powdered the route with a silvery dust that lay thick in every rut and ditch, they blew across the fields in sheets and drifting pillars, they whirled up before gusts of wind, flurry after flurry, dim phantom shapes that filled the darkness with movements half seen, half divined.

Harewood found himself riding beside a mounted captain of the 34th Infantry, *de marche*; on either side plodded the troops, rifles *en bandoulière*, overcoats covering faces that turned shrunken and pallid under the sudden rays of some swiftly lifted lantern.

The long echo of crunching footsteps, the trample and sigh of horses, the sense of stifling obscurity, depressed Harewood. He watched a lantern’s sickly rays lighting up the knapsacks and muddy trousers of a line of men in front; he spoke to the mounted captain riding in silence, his heavy head buried in his wet cloak collar, but the officer did not seem to hear him.

The snow turned to finest grains of ice, the frozen dust pattered and rattled on wet caps, on soaked overcoats and stiffened epaulettes. Again a sudden shaft of cold passed through the air, bringing with it a mist that hung to the fringe of the marching column, and grew faintly luminous as the snow ceased to fall. The fog became denser, a sour odour of sweat and wet smoke-saturated clothing filled the air. The soaking saddles, the drenched manes of the horses, the rifle-barrels, gave out a stuffy, penetrating smell that choked and stifled. There was scarcely a breath of air stirring; steam rose from the men’s breath; the

horses' flanks were smoking.

Harewood rode on in silence, listening to the creak of saddles, the slop! slop! of steel-shod hoofs, the crushing crackle of thousands of tired feet.

Once the infantry captain, riding beside him in the dark, spoke: "Monsieur, if you are going through the lines, I have a wife and child at Bonneuil—" "Give me the letter," said Harewood soberly. The captain fumbled in the breast of his soaked tunic, drew out a wet letter, and passed it to Harewood.

"Thank you, comrade," he said. As he spoke a star broke out overhead.

Half an hour later the velvet depths of midnight were spangled with stars—great bluish wintry stars sparkling like frost crystals in the moonlight. The long black column detached itself from the shadowy plain, massed squads of horsemen broke the level of the infantry, and, on a little hill in front, the strange silhouettes of cannon passing, moved in shadow-shapes across the sky. It was four o'clock in the morning; Harewood opened his watch and read the dial by the splendid starlight. "We are near Le Bourget?" he asked the infantry captain.

"We are there," said the captain, ominously.

Harewood, standing straight up in his stirrups, saw a little river just ahead, spanned by a column of wading infantry. Horses, too, were fording the shallow stream a few rods below, and, above, the cannoniers of the two field pieces moved cautiously along the pebbled shore searching for a safe crossing. On the opposite bank of the stream, in irregular outline, shadowy houses clustered, a single dim spire rose in their midst; not a ray of light came from the dark village, not a sound.

Riding ahead, Harewood felt the pebbled shore beneath his horse's feet; beside him, the infantry were passing the ford, while the black water gurgled and swirled to their knees. Suddenly all along the opposite bank of the stream a line of tiny lights danced and sparkled like fireflies; there came a rippling, tearing crash, the keen,

whimpering whisper of bullets—showers of bullets, that hurtled and smacked on stone and rock and tore through the bushes on either side. Out in the water a horse reared, sank on its haunches, then began to splash furiously; a soldier in midstream started to run in a circle, shrieking; another dropped forward and came floating past, head under water, little tin cup shining in the starlight.

A shrill cheer broke out from the infantry; the shallow waters of the ford boiled under their rush; mounted officers thrashed through the water shouting, "Forward! Forward!" and the avant trains, borne onward by lashed horses, swung the field pieces down to the shore and through the icy water to the bank opposite, where the will-o'-the-wisp lights flickered and danced and the bullets whistled like hail through sheafed wheat.

The first rolling crash from the French infantry rifles seemed to extinguish the flicker of the rifles from the opposite shore. Already the battery horses were galloping back with the limbers; the two cannon stood apart, half hidden by shrubbery. Then through the night came the rush of a column, a fierce cheer:

"The bayonet! the bayonet!" and Harewood, setting spurs to his horse, rode out of the muddy field to the highway, where the French onset passed like a whirlwind straight into the black throat of the village street.

It was over in a moment; he caught a glimpse of figures outlined through sheets of level flame; he saw an Uhlan, clinging to the neck of a plunging horse, rear up in a blaze of light like a soul in torment. Drums began to beat from the extreme right; on the left the troops were cheering fiercely. A battalion of sailors came up on a double-quick, the flames from a thatched roof on fire gleaming on rifle-barrel and cutlass, on the red knots of their sailor caps, on broadaxes swinging and glittering as the blows fell on oaken doors from which spurted smoke and needle-like yellow flames. There were strange sounds, too, in the houses—shrieks, blows, the dull explosion of rifles behind barred shutters, the clangor of a bell that began swinging and ringing in some unseen steeple. A rush of strange cavalry passed like the wind

—they were Uhlans of the Prussian Guard, stampeding frantically toward the open country. They drove past, a cyclone of slanting lances, of tossing pennons and frenzied horses, enveloped in flame and smoke from the French rifles, while the savage cheering redoubled and swift jetted flashes from revolver and chassepot pricked the fringing gloom with a thousand crimson rays.

The two cannon of twelve shook the earth with their discharges in the east; from the west two other cannon, pieces of four, broke in with shotted blasts, accompanied by the sinister drumming of a mitrailleuse from the Blanc-Mesnil highway. The little river Mollette reflected the glare of a burning thatch; a drowned horse, with bloated belly and hideous stiff legs, swayed with the current, stranded on a shoal.

Harewood, covered with mud, stood on the steps of the village church; his own dead horse lay in the gutter under a shattered lamp-post, its patient, sad eyes glazing in the sickly light of the torches. General Bellemare, cloaked and muddy, stood near Harewood on the church steps, surrounded by dismounted officers. Harewood heard him say:

“The 14th Mobile Battalion and the Franc-tireurs will occupy the village; a detachment of three infantry battalions and two guns will form the grand’garde, to be relieved every twenty-four hours. Two battalions of the 135th will hold Cœurneuve; Admiral Saisset must cover the right flank with the sailors and fortify Drancy. Where’s Colonel Martin? O, well, Colonel, are you under the guns of Aubervilliers? No? Is it too far? Where are those Belleville carbiniers?”

“The Belleville carbiniers ran,” said an officer, with a short, dry laugh.

There was a silence, then another laugh.

“If I had my way, I’d shoot this Flourens,” said General Bellemare, quietly. His glance fell on Harewood and he shrugged his shoulders.

“Monsieur Harewood, I fear you will have to wait before trying to pass the lines. It appears we are to receive no aid from Paris; we must rely on Saint Denis, according to General Trochu.”

“But,” said Harewood, astounded, “Le Bourget is the key to Saint Denis; isn’t it worth holding? It has been won gallantly.”

“Of course it’s worth holding,” broke out General Hanrion, violently. General Bellemare made a gesture of assent:

“It is the key to the Double-Crown battery,” he said; “surely they must realise this in Paris. If I dared to leave Le Bourget—if I dared go myself and persuade the Governor—”

He looked hard at Hanrion, who nodded back at him.

“Saint Denis can’t aid us now,” cried Colonel Lavoignet; “let them send us a dozen batteries from Paris. Do they expect us to annihilate the whole of the Prussian Guard-Royal? Let the Uhlans go back and tell their King that a handful of Mobiles and fantassins sent them packing.”

Everybody moved uneasily. The apathy of General Trochu disheartened them. Here was a victory—the first victory under the walls of Paris. And now, when it was won, the Governor thought it scarcely worth the powder. Yet Le Bourget was the point of the wedge with which the German lines might be split; it pierced the very centre of the north zone of investment, threatened the German eastern communications, and finally assured Saint Denis and opened a wider area of operations for the army of Paris.

General Bellemare drew out the telegraphic despatch from Paris and read it again with knitted brows:

“Le Bourget has no important bearing upon our line of defense, and is not necessary to our general plan of operation.

“Trochu,
“Governor of Paris.”

What was the sombre Trochu dreaming of? What dark chimera did he follow, dreaming awake as he paced the dim chambers of the war-office?

“Messieurs,” said General Bellemare, sharply, “call my escort. I leave for Paris to-morrow.” General Hanrion stepped forward, face

lighted with hope.

“By God!” he cried, “the Governor shall listen now or——”

“Or it will be too late,” said General Bellemare, quietly. He stood a moment watching the tattered Mobile battalions pressing wearily toward the Mollette. The boyish soldiers turned their sad faces toward him; some smiled, some raised ragged arms in salute. A little bugler sounded a fanfare, but he was too exhausted to finish and hung his head in shame, while a sergeant scolded him to conceal the tears in his own eyes. On every face the fine lines of hunger drew lips tight and sharpened nose and cheekbone; in every eye the last flicker of hope had died; yet they marched, turning their patient, pallid faces to their General, who watched them in silence—these men who had conquered and who were now left to die—because General Trochu had “other plans.” At last, when they had passed, General Bellemare turned and walked slowly into the church, up to the altar, holding his sword clasped, cross on his medalled breast.

When he knelt Harewood stepped to the church door and closed it. There was a sudden stillness in Le Bourget.

CHAPTER XX.

LE BOURGET.

At daylight it began to snow again; an hour later torrents of rain swept the deserted streets of the village. The roar of the wind awoke Harewood. A sickly twilight stole through the church, where, rolled in his blanket, he had slept under the altar among a dozen drenched officers.

A cavalry bugler, swathed to the chin in his dripping cloak, stood inside the chancel, strapping his shako chain with numb fingers. He had hung his bugle over the arm of the crucifix, and now, as his pinched, sick face turned to the sunken face on the cross, he paused, hand outstretched. After a second's silence he crossed himself, unhooked the bugle, and, setting it stiffly to his shrunken lips, blew the reveille. A hundred shadowy forms stumbled up in the gloom, the vibrating shock of steel filled the church. An artillery officer, sabre clashing on the stone floor, left the church on a run, pulling on his astrachan jacket as he passed out into the storm.

Harewood stood up, aching in every bone. He shook his blanket, opened his despatch pouch, counted the papers, snapped back the lock and yawned.

An officer beside him began to shiver and shake, a thin, lantern-jawed fellow, yellow with jaundice and covered from cap to boot with half dry mud.

Somebody said: "Go to the hospital." The officer turned a ravaged face to Harewood and smiled.

Outside the church the infantry bugles were sounding; their thin, strident call set Harewood's teeth on edge. He rolled and strapped his blanket, slung the despatch pouch from shoulder to hip and stumbled out to the church door, where a dozen horses stood, heads hanging dejectedly in the pouring rain. A mounted hussar, with a lance in his stirrup boot, looked sullenly at Harewood, who called to him: "Whose escort is that?"

“General Bellemare’s,” replied the trooper.

“Is he going to Paris?”

“Yes, monsieur, in half an hour.”

Harewood glanced down the dismal street. The low stone houses, shabby and deserted, loomed dark and misty through the storm; everywhere closed shutters, closed doors, dismantled street lamps, stark trees, rusty railings on balcony and porch; everywhere the downpour, fiercer when the wind swept the rain-spears, rank on rank, against the house-fronts. And now, down the street, through the roaring wind and slanting sheets of rain, marched a regiment—a spectral regiment, gaunt drummers ahead, lining the flooded pavement from gutter to gutter, sloppy drums vibrating like the death-rattle of an army. It was the 128th of the line—the relief for the grand guard. After it, one by one, rumbled four cannon and a mitrailleuse, escorted by Mobiles—the 12th battalion of the Seine.

The hussar backed his horses onto the sidewalk while the infantry were passing. Harewood leaned from the church steps and touched him on the shoulder.

“Will you deliver a letter in Paris for me?” he asked.

The hussar nodded sulkily and said: “Are you going to stay here with the troops?”

“Yes,” replied Harewood, sitting down under the porch and beginning to write on a pad with a stump of red pencil.

“Then you’ll not need an answer to your letter,” observed the hussar.

Harewood raised his eyes.

“Because,” continued the trooper, with an oath, “that damned Trochu won’t send you any cannon, and you’ll all die like rats—that’s why!”

Harewood thought a moment, then went on writing to Bourke:

“The sortie was no sortie after all; it was a raid on Le Bourget by Bellemare. Trochu isn’t inclined to back him up, and here we are, wedged into the German lines, able to pierce them if supported from Paris, but in a bad mess if Paris abandons us. Bellemare starts for Paris

in half an hour to urge personally the direction of a supporting column. If the Germans come at us while he's gone I don't know how it will end.

"In case of accident you will find duplicates of all despatches in my washstand drawer. I would go back to Paris if it were not such a shame to risk losing this chance to get through the lines. If worst comes to worst, I think I can get back safely. But in case you don't hear from me—"

He started to add something about Hildé, but crossed it out. Instead he wrote, "God bless you all," then scratched that out, for he had a horror of battlefield sentiment and doleful messages "from the front."

He raised his head and watched the storm. Swifter and swifter came the rain, dashing itself to smoking mist on the glistening slate roofs. A shutter hanging from one twisted hinge swung like an inn sign across the façade of a cottage opposite.

He wrote again a message to Hildé, cheerful and optimistic—a gay pleasantry untinged with doubt or foreboding—and signed his name, "James Harewood."

When he had sealed and directed the letter, he handed it to the hussar, saying cheerfully:

"Thank you, comrade, for your trouble."

The trooper thrust the letter into the breast of his tunic, pocketed the silver piece that Harewood held out to him, and nodded his thanks.

A few moments later General Bellemare came out of the house next the church and climbed into his saddle, calling sharply to his escort, and off they tore into the teeth of the storm, the hussar's lance flying a crimson guidon that snapped like a wet whiplash in the tempest.

Harewood prowled around the church, picking up scraps of information from officers and men, until he found that he knew quite as much about the situation as anybody did, which was really nothing.

He leaned against the gothic column that supported the west-choir, eating a bit of bread and drinking from time to time the mixture of wine and rain-water that stood in a great stone font—where once the good people of Le Bourget had found holy-water. The church

swarmed with soldiers at breakfast, some eating ravenously, some walking about listlessly, nibbling bits of crust, some sitting cross-legged on the stone-slabbed floor, faces vacant, a morsel of bread untasted in their hands. They came to dip their little tin cups into the basin where the wine and water stood; one, forgetful, touched the crimson liquid with his fingers and crossed himself. Nobody laughed.

About 7 o'clock, without the slightest warning, a violent explosion shook the street in front of the church. Before Harewood could reach the door three shells fell, one after another, and exploded in the street, sending cobblestones and pavement into the air.

"Keep back!" shouted an officer. "Close the doors!" Harewood ran out into the street. Far away toward Pont-Iblon the smoke of the Prussian guns hung heavily in the air.

"Are you coming back?" bawled a soldier. "We're going to close the church doors."

Harewood came back, calling out to an officer, "It's the batteries behind Pont-Iblon!"

Some soldiers piled pews and chairs into heaps under the stained-glass windows. On each of these heaps an officer climbed, field glasses levelled. The men lay down on the floor. Many of them slept.

The cannonade now raged furiously; for an hour the wretched village was covered with bursting shells. Suddenly the tumult ceased, and Harewood, clinging to a shattered window, heard from the plain to the northward the long roll of volley firing. A moment later he was in the street, running beside a column of Mobiles. Everywhere the French bugles were ringing, the cobblestones echoed with the clatter of artillery dashing past, summoned from Drancy by rocket signal.

Harewood, perched astride a stucco wall, looked across the plain and saw dark masses of the Prussian Guard advancing in silence through the rain. The French shells went sailing out over the plain, dropping between the Prussian skirmishers and the line of battle; the Prussian cannon were silent.

It seemed to him that, after a while, the dark lines ceased to advance, but were swinging obliquely toward Blanc-Mesnil. Presently

he saw that the Germans were actually retiring and he wondered, while the troops along the wall muttered their misgivings as the Prussian lines faded away in retreat, accompanied by shotted salutes from the Fortress of the East and the unseen batteries of Aubervilliers.

All day he roamed about the village, trying to form some idea of its defensive possibilities, and at night he returned to the church. The rain had ceased again, but, through the fog, a fine drizzle still descended, freezing as it fell, until the streets glistened with greasy slush. There were fires lighted along the main street; across the red glare silhouettes passed and repassed.

Harewood looked up at the gothic portal of the church, all crimsoned in the firelight. Above it the rose-window glittered with splendid hues, dyed deep in the flames' glow, and still, above the rose-window, the cross of stone, dark and wet, absorbed the ruddy light till it gleamed like a live cinder. Somewhere in the village a battalion was marching to quarters; he heard the trample of the men, the short, hoarse commands of the officers, the clatter of a mitrailleuse dragged along by hand.

"The carbiniers are insubordinate," said an officer beside him. "I wish the General was here."

"The carbiniers?" repeated Harewood; "I thought they had run away."

"Part of them ran," said an artillery officer, sulkily; "two companies got lost near Blanc-Mesnil and had to come back when the cannonade began."

"They're in the next street," said another officer; "they are quarrelling because there has been no distribution. Damn them," he added, "the distribution they deserve is a volley from a gatling."

Harewood listened a moment to the chorus of denunciation that arose from the group around the fire. From it he gathered that Flourens and his carbiniers had fled at the first attack on Le Bourget, and, on the whole, he was rather glad, for he had no desire to encounter any of the battalion that the Undertakers had sent out. He went to the corner of the street and looked down the short transverse alley where the

camp-fires of the two carbinier companies blazed fiercely. Curiosity led him on and in a moment he had done the very thing that he intended to avoid—he was standing in the midst of a group of carbiniers, listening to their angry bickerings.

The two companies were fantastic enough in their strange uniforms. Hunger had made them sullen. They cursed their officers, their generals and Le Bourget. At daylight they intended to leave for Paris—they had had enough of this sortie foolishness. They were freezing, they were tired, they were hungry, and, above all, the stereotyped phrase was on every carbinier's lips: "Treason! Our Generals have betrayed us!"

Disgust succeeded Harewood's curiosity; he glanced around the fire and started to retrace his steps. As he passed out of the fire circle he looked back at the mutinous carbiniers, and, as he looked, he distinctly saw Buckhurst and Mortier come out of a house with their arms full of plunder. Startled, he stepped back into the shadow of a gate and watched them. And now he recognised Speyer and Stauffer, both in the full uniforms of carbinier officers, holding pillow-cases, while Buckhurst dumped his plunder into the improvised sacks and Mortier tied them tight.

The plundering had become general; bands of the carbiniers began smashing windows and breaking down doors all along the street; others came out loaded with the wretched household articles of the poorer peasantry, clocks, dishes, pewter vessels, clothing, bed linen, and even furniture. The latter they flung onto the bonfires; Harewood saw a baby's cradle tossed into the fire.

"The miserable savages," he muttered. "Why don't they turn the cannon on them!"

The tumult of the orgie was attracting attention now; an officer galloped up on a jaded horse, gesticulating furiously, but the carbiniers menaced him with their rifles, and he withdrew in time to save his skin.

Consoling himself with the hope that, on General Bellemare's return from Paris, a court-martial would probably settle Buckhurst and

his carbiniers, Harewood went back to the church, where the camp-fires roared and sent showers of sparks into the fog, and the rose-window glimmered and glistened, red as blood.

Inside the church the officers were at dinner. He accepted an invitation and sat down on the altar steps with his bit of bread and morsel of dry beef.

The wavering flare from the camp-fire filtered through the stained glass; the sombre depths of the church were tinged with violet and crimson—dusky clustered columns glittered purple; the crucifix was bathed in shadow save where a single trembling beam of light, red as blood, lay like an open wound across the pierced side of our dying Lord.

He looked up into the vaulted roof, stone ribbed, black with the shadows of centuries; he heard the roar of the camp-fires, the crackle of damp logs, the scrape and stamp and stir of sleepy horses, the deep breathing of sleeping men. He rose noiselessly and crept out into the street. The fog hung thick on the heavy flying buttresses, on flèche and gargoyle and on the fluted robes of saints and martyrs, peering down from their niches into the fire glow, where, swathed in their cloaks, lay the martyrs to be, not saints, but men, sick, freezing, starving things, called the 128th of the line.

They lay there like lumps on the church steps, in doorways—they nestled in the gutter, they huddled against doorposts, these clods of breathing clay—sodden and ragged and filthy, sinful, lustful and human, sleeping their brief sleep till the white dawn roused and summoned them home forever.

Faint cries from the sentries, fainter responses, the crackle and snap of logs afire, and the tall shadows wavering, these were all that he saw and heard. The carved stone gargoyles dripped water from every fantastic snout; the reflected flames played over pillar and column, saint and martyr, cross and crown.

All day he had driven thoughts of Hildé from him, but now, at midnight, when the lamp of life burns lowest and the eyes close, and death seems very near—he thought of her; and lying down in the

street beside the fire, he questioned his soul. At night, too, the soul, stirring in the body—perhaps at the nearness of God—awakens conscience.

He had never before thought seriously of death. Its arrival to himself he had never pictured in concrete form. In the abstract he had often risked it, never fearing it, because mentally too inert, too lazy to apply such a contingency to his own familiar body.

Now, for the first time in his life, he closed his eyes and saw himself, just as he lay, but still, wet, muddy and horribly silent. He opened his eyes and looked soberly at the fire. After a little he closed his eyes again, and again he saw himself lying as he lay, wet, muddy, motionless, as only the dead can lie. He had known fear, but never before the dull foreboding that now crept into his heart. To open his eyes and see the fire was to live: to shut his eyes was to reflect the image of death upon his closed lids. At first he disdained to shake it off—this mental shadow that passed across his sense. What if it were true? He had lived. It was the old selfishness stifling the sense of responsibility—his responsibility to the world, to himself, to Hildé. To Hildé?

He sat up in his blanket and stared into the fire. Slowly the comprehension of his responsibility came to him, his duty, all that was due to her from him, all that he owed her, all that she should claim, one day, claim in life or in the life to come. Die? He couldn't die—yet. There was something to do first! Who spoke of death? There was too much to do, there were matters of honour to arrange first, there was a debt to pay that neither death nor hell nor hope of paradise could cancel. Was death about to prevent him from paying that debt?

He was walking now, moving aimlessly to and fro under the porch of the church. A sentry, huddled against a column, regarded him apathetically as he passed out into the street. And always his thoughts ran on:

“If I have this debt to pay, what am I doing here? What right have I to risk death until it is paid? And if I die—if I die—”

His thoughts carried him no further. Hildé's pale face rose before

him. He read terrible accusation in her eyes. And he repeated aloud, again and again, "I must go back." For he understood now that his life was no longer his own to risk—that it belonged to Hildé. Nor would he ever again have the right to imperil his life until they had risen together from their knees, before the altar, as man and wife. He looked out into the mist, ruddy with the camp-fire glow. Would morning ever come? Why should he wait for morning? At the thought, he caught up his pouch and blanket, rolled, strapped and adjusted them, and stole out into the darkness.

Almost at once he heard somebody following him, but at first he scarcely noticed it. Down the main street he passed, over the slippery cobblestones, eyes fixed on a distant fire that marked the last bivouac in the village before the street ends at the ruined bridge across the Mollette. It was as he approached this camp-fire that he realised somebody had been following him. He paused a moment in the circle of firelight and turned around. Nothing stirred in the darkness beyond. He waited, then started on again, crossing the Lille highway to the line of bushes that marked the water's edge. No sentinel challenged him; he waded the ford below the wrecked stone bridge, climbed the bank opposite, and started across a wet meadow, beyond which lay the muddy road to Paris. Half-way through the meadow he halted again to listen. The unseen person was wading the ford—he could hear him in the water; now he was climbing the bank; the bushes crackled; a footstep fell on the gravel.

Harewood waited, peering through the gloom. He could see nothing; the silence was absolute. Whoever was following him had stopped out there somewhere in the darkness.

A little unnerved, Harewood turned again and hastened through the meadow to the highway. When he reached the road he could scarcely see it, but he felt the mud and gravel beneath his feet, and started on. In a moment he heard the footsteps of his follower, not behind, now, but in front—between him and Paris. He stopped abruptly and drew his revolver. A minute passed in utter silence. Then there came a soft footfall close in front, a whining voice:

“Monsieur!”

“Who are you?” said Harewood, sharply.

“The Mouse, monsieur.”

In his astonishment, the revolver almost fell from Harewood’s hand. “What the devil are you doing here?” he demanded; “and why the devil are you sneaking about like this? Answer, you fool! I nearly shot you just now!”

The Mouse crept up to Harewood as a sulky, vicious cur comes to his punishment.

“Answer,” repeated Harewood; “why are you following me?”

“I wasn’t sure it was you,” muttered the Mouse.

“What? Why did you come to Le Bourget?”

“I don’t know,” said the Mouse, sullenly.

Harewood’s amazement turned to impatience.

“You’d better answer me,” he said; “you certainly didn’t come here for love of my company!”

But that was exactly the reason why the Mouse had come. The instinct of a savage cur for its master, the strange attraction that decency and courage have for the brutally vicious, the necessity that dwarfed intelligence feels for the companionship and guidance and protection of healthy mentality—all these started the Mouse out of Paris as an abandoned mongrel starts to find its missing master.

Harewood understood this at last, and it touched him—not that the Mouse explained it. He could not have explained it even if he himself comprehended the reason of his seeking Harewood. All he knew was this—that he missed Harewood, that he was used to him, that he felt uncomfortable without him. So he came. Even a gutter cat, forcibly transported into distant parts, turns up again in its old haunts. Harewood’s company had become the haunt of the Mouse. So he came back to it.

The wretched creature was nearly starved. Harewood drew him into the thicket beside the road and gave him his last morsel of bread and meat.

“Imbecile!” he whispered, while the Mouse gnawed the crust,

squatting on his muddy haunches, “there may be Prussian pickets anywhere along the fields. Didn’t you know it?”

“Yes,” said the Mouse, tranquilly; “there’s a picket of Uhlans just ahead.”

This was startling news for Harewood.

“Where?” he demanded under his breath.

“About a kilometre over that way,” replied the Mouse, jerking his thumb toward the southeast. He was going to add something more when the sudden tinkle of a horse’s shod foot striking stones broke out in the night. They crouched low in the thicket listening. The road was lighter now: a grey shadow passed, a horseman trailing a lance. Others rode up, mounted on wiry little horses, all carrying tall lances that rattled in their saddle-boots.

As Harewood strained his eyes, the moon broke out overhead—a battered, deformed moon, across whose pale disk the flying scud whirled like shredded smoke.

A guttural voice began in German:

“Where are the scouts—eh?”

Then in the moonlight Harewood saw Speyer and Stauffer, clad in the uniform of the carbiniers, salute the Uhlan officer and hand him a thin packet of papers. The Mouse beside him trembled like a terrier at a rat hole; Harewood clutched his arm and stared at the group in the road.

There was a brief parley, a word of caution, then the Uhlans wheeled their horses and galloped back toward Paris, and the two traitorous carbiniers struck off across the meadow toward Le Bourget, then made a demi-tour and followed the bank of the river. Very cautiously Harewood crept out to the road when the gallop of the Uhlans had died away.

The Mouse stood beside him, an open claspknife in his fist, nostrils quivering in the freshening wind.

Harewood glanced at the knife and said, “What are you going to do? Cut your way to Paris? Come back to Le Bourget, you fool!”

Half-way back across the wet meadow the Mouse asked: “And if

we overtake Speyer?"

"Are you the public executioner?" said Harewood sharply. "Put up that knife, I tell you!"

The Mouse closed his knife and plodded on in silence.

After a while Harewood asked him about Bourke and Hildé and Yolette, but he knew little more than Harewood did, for he had left the house on the ramparts the morning after Harewood's departure, and since then had been following him up.

Morning was breaking as they forded the Mollette and answered the sentry's challenge from the ruined highway. It was Sunday, the thirtieth of October—a desolate Sunday in a desolate land. They hurried through the main street, where sleepy reliefs were marching to replace the pickets along the river, and at last they reached the church, where a group of officers stood on the steps in attitudes of dejection.

"Colonel Martin," cried Harewood, "send a file of men to arrest two captains of the carbiniers, Speyer and Stauffer. I charge them with treason! Here is my witness!" He dragged the Mouse up the steps and led him forward. In half-a-dozen sentences he told what he had seen; the Mouse nodded his corroboration, stealing cunning glances about him and shuffling his muddy shoes, partly to inspire self-confidence, partly because he appreciated the importance of his present position.

"But," said an artillery officer, "the carbiniers have already gone. I heard them breaking camp before daylight."

"Gone!" repeated Harewood.

"They followed the river bank toward Blanc-Mesnil."

Before Harewood could speak again, a cannon shot from the end of the street brought the soldiers out of the church on a run. At the same moment a shell struck a house opposite and burst.

Colonel Martin, now ranking officer in the village, turned quickly to Harewood and said: "If I live to get out of this I'll have the carbiniers before a drum-head court-martial. Are you going back to Paris?"

"If I can," said Harewood.

"If you get there have these carbinier officers arrested by the first

patrol.”

Harewood started again toward the river, calling impatiently for the Mouse to follow. The bombardment from the Prussian guns had suddenly become violent; shells fell everywhere, exploding on slate roofs, in court-yards, in the middle of the street.

The Mouse, half dead with terror, shrieked as he ran, ducking his head at every crash, one hand twisted in Harewood’s coat, one shielding his face.

“This won’t do,” cried Harewood, dragging the Mouse into a hallway; “we’ve got to wait until the bombardment stops. Here, break in this door! Quick!”

Together they forced the door and entered. The house was dark and empty. Harewood climbed the stairs, groped about, unfastened the scuttle and raised himself to the roof. North, east and west the smoke of the Prussian guns curled up from the plain. In the north, vast masses of troops were moving toward Le Bourget, cannonaded by the Fortress of the East at long range.

There was no chance to reach Paris; he saw that at the first glance. He saw, too, the French pickets being chased back into Le Bourget by Uhlans, and he heard the drumming of a mitrailleuse in the west end of the village, where columns of smoke arose from a burning house. Far away in the grey morning light the Fortress of the East towered, circled with floating mist, through which the sheeted flashes of the cannon played like lightning behind a thundercloud.

And now began, under the guns of Saint Denis and Aubervilliers—almost under the walls of Paris—that first of a series of terrible blows destined to reduce France to a moral and physical condition too painful, too pitiable, to describe. For the storming of Le Bourget made the Commune a certainty, and, although the second and third attempts at anarchy were to prove abortive, the fourth insurrection was inevitable; and the political triumph of Monsieur Thiers assured its success.

As for the miserable village of Le Bourget, it was already doomed. Black masses of the Prussian Guard gathered like a tempest in the

north, and swept across the plain in three columns. From Dugny, from Pont-Iblon, from Blanc-Mesnil, they poured down upon Le Bourget, firing as they came on. Right through the main street they burst, hurling back the Mobiles, sweeping the barricade, and turning again to batter down doors and windows, where, through the blinds, the soldiers of the 128th of the line were firing frenziedly. From the slate roof where he crouched Harewood saw the Mobiles give way and run. In a minute the interior of the village swarmed with panic-stricken soldiers. The Prussians shot them as they ran. Shells tore through them, and whirled them about as winds whirl gaily-tinted autumn leaves. A battery, a mass of wrecked limbers, dying horses and smashed guns, choked the transverse alley. Behind it a company of the 128th fought like wildcats until the Prussian "Queen Elizabeth Regiment" took them on the flank, and bayoneted them to the last man. And now, from the west, two splendid regiments swept into Le Bourget—the "Emperor Francis" and the "Emperor Alexandre," Regiments of the Prussian Guard Royal—driving before them an agonized mob of Mobiles, Franc-tireurs and linesmen. The massacre was frightful. The Prussian bayonets swept the streets as scythes swing through ripe grass. South and east the village was on fire. In the west the firing had ended, and the Uhlans capered from garden to garden, spearing the frightened fugitives, and shouting, "Hourra! Hourra! Mit uns ist Gott!" In the north, however, the 128th line regiment still held out. The men had barricaded themselves in the stone houses lining both sides of the main street, and were firing from the windows into the thick of the Germans. The street swam with smoke, through which the Prussians dashed again and again, only to stagger back under the blaze of rifle flames.

Harewood, on the roof, was a mark now for the German riflemen. Bullet after bullet thwacked against the chimney behind which he clung. He waited his chance, then crawled along the slates and dropped into the scuttle, where the Mouse stood speechless with terror.

It was time that he left. A shell, bursting in the cellar, had ignited

some stored fagots, and the first floor of the house had already begun to burn fiercely.

“Come,” he said, “we must make a dash for the church!” And he seized the Mouse, dragged him down the smoking stairs to the street door, and out over the cobble-stones, where a group of officers and a couple of dozen Voltigeurs of the Guard were running toward the church, pursued by Uhlans.

Up the steps and into the dark church they tumbled pellmell, Harewood and the Mouse among them. They closed the great doors, bolted and barricaded them with benches, pews and heavy stone slabs from the floor. Already the Voltigeurs were firing through the stained glass across the street; the officers climbed beside them and emptied their revolvers into the masses of Prussians that surged around the church in a delirium of fury.

Harewood, looking over the shoulder of an officer, saw the Prussian pioneers digging through the walls of the houses across the street, saw the German soldiers pour into the breach, saw them at the windows bayonetting the remnants of the 128th and flinging the wounded from the windows. From house to house the pioneers opened the walls. It was necessary to exterminate the garrison of each separate cottage, for none of them surrendered.

The houses that adjoined the church were swarming with Prussian infantry. They fired into the church windows, shouting, “Hourra! Hourra! Preussen! No quarter!”

The officer next to Harewood was killed outright; two others fell back to the stone floor below. At the next volley five Voltigeurs were killed or wounded; a blast of flame entered the church as a grenade exploded outside a window.

The Mouse, in an agony of fright, was running round and round the church like a caged creature looking for some chink or cranny of escape. A soldier was shot dead beside him and the Mouse stumbled over the dead man with a shriek. That stumble, however, almost pitched him through the back of the east confessional, which, in reality, was a concealed door leading directly to the rear of the church.

The Mouse thrust his muzzle out, saw a garden, a dismantled arbour and no Prussians. His first instinct drove him to immediate flight: he crawled through the door on hands and knees and wriggled into the arbour. Then came a second instinct—to tell Harewood. Why it was that the Mouse crept back into the church at the risk of his miserable life nobody perhaps can tell. It is true that frightened animals, when unmolested, often return to a companion in trouble.

Harewood was standing by a high stained-glass window doing a thing that meant death if captured; he was firing a rifle at the Germans.

How he, a non-combatant, a cool-headed youth, who seldom needlessly risked his skin, could do such a thing, might only be explained by himself. In case of capture he would not have been harmed had he minded his own business. But he knew very well that a swift and merciless justice was served out for those civilians who fired on German troops. Yet there he stood, firing with the rest—a mere handful left now out of the thirty. Two or three officers still kept their feet, half-a-dozen soldiers were yet firing into the 2d division of the Prussian Guard Royal, numbering nearly 15,000 men. Outside the shattered windows, dirty fingers clutched the stone coping: already helmeted heads bobbed up here and there, inflamed Teutonic faces leered into the church; there came the scrape of scaling ladders against the wall; worse still, the rumble of artillery in the street close at hand.

One of the half-dozen survivors glanced around the church. It was a butcher's shambles. Then from the street came a shout, "Our cannon are here! Surrender!"

"Surrender?" repeated Harewood, vacantly. Then, as he saw a wounded creature stagger up from the floor holding out a white handkerchief, he realised what he had done. Stunned, he stepped back to the altar as the firing died away. He saw the great doors open; he saw the street outside, wet and muddy, choked with throngs of helmeted soldiers, all staring up at the door; he saw a cannon limbered up and dragged away, the mounted cannoniers looking back at the portal where three dozen French soldiers had held in check 15,000 Germans.

A soldier, streaming with blood, rose from the floor of the church and stumbled blindly out to the steps; two more carried a wounded officer between them on a chair.

Then, as the German troops parted, and the wounded man was borne out and down the steps, Harewood felt a tug at his elbow and heard a whine:

“Monsieur—there’s a hole!”

The next instant he stepped behind the confessional, crawled through the dwarf door, and ran for his life.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE THIRTY-FIRST OF OCTOBER.

All day Sunday Hildé sat at her window, looking out over grey landscape beyond the fortifications. Few of the forts were firing; at long intervals the majestic reverberations from Mont-Valérien shook the heavy air. The southern forts were mute. At times she fancied that she could hear cannonading in the north, far away toward Le Bourget, but, when she held her breath to listen, the beating of her own heart was more audible.

She slept badly that night, dreaming that Harewood was dead, and she awoke in an ecstasy of terror, calling his name. Yolette came to her and comforted her, curling up close to her in the chilly bed. But she could not sleep, and when at length Yolette lay beside her, slumbering with a smile on her lips, Hildé slipped from the bed and climbed the dark stairs to Harewood's empty room. It was something to be in his room—it helped her to look out into the darkness. For he was somewhere there in the darkness.

Shivering, she sat down by the window. On the fortifications below, the unwieldy bulk of the Prophet loomed up, tilted skyward, a shapeless monster in its waterproof covering. Rockets were rising slowly from Mont-Valérien; in the east, the sky lowered, tinged with a sombre lurid light, perhaps the reflection of some hamlet fired by the Prussians, burning alone at midnight.

A wet wind blew the curtains back from the open window; her little naked feet were numb with cold. The never-ending desire to see his room, his clothes, his bed again, came over her. She dared not light a candle—it was forbidden to those who lived on the ramparts—so she rose and passed along each wall, touching the objects that had once been worn by him. She knew them already by touch, his grey coat, his riding jacket, his hats and caps and whips and spurs. She rearranged the brushes and toilet articles on his bureau, her light touch caressed his books and papers and pens where they lay on the little table. Then

she went to the bed and buried her head among the pillows, crying herself to sleep—a sleep full of vague shapes, a restless sleep that stole from her heavy lids at dawn, leaving her to quench the fever in her eyes with tears again.

It was the last day of October. Bourke had gone away to the city before breakfast to verify an ominous rumour concerning Metz, published in a single journal of the day before, and vigorously denied by the Official Journal.

Yolette and Red Riding Hood were in the cellar, storing more cases of canned vegetables, and mourning the loss of Schéhérazade, who had been sent on Saturday to the zoölogical gardens in the Jardin des Plantes. Bourke had insisted on it; food was becoming alarmingly scarce; there was no fresh meat to be had except horse-meat, and even that was to be rationed the first week in November.

The lioness had been carted off sorely against her will. She snarled and growled and paced her cage with glowing eyes, in which the last trace of gentleness and affection had been extinguished.

Hildé, deep in her own trouble, scarcely heeded this new one. Schéhérazade had been changing in disposition ever since the first cannonading. Sullen, furtive, she haunted the depths of the garden, ignoring Hildé's advances, until Yolette began to fear the creature. So now, when it was necessary to send the lioness away, Hildé said nothing and Yolette was not sorry. Mehemet Ali, the parrot, however, screeched his remonstrance, which amused Bourke, because Schéhérazade was the first living thing that the vicious old bird had ever shown any fondness for.

So the lioness was packed off to be fed by the government, and Bourke improved that opportunity by sending Mehemet Ali and the monkey also, which made two mouths the less to feed in case of famine.

Down in the cellar Yolette stood, piling tinned fruit and vegetables against the division wall, aided by Red Riding Hood. At the child's request, Yolette was varying the monotony of their toil by telling a fairy story. Red Riding Hood listened gravely as Yolette continued:

“And the princess waited and waited for her dear prince, who had gone to fight the Were-wolf. And he did not return.”

“I know,” said the child, “what you mean.”

“What?” asked Yolette, absently.

“The prince is Monsieur Harewood and the princess is Mademoiselle Hildé.”

“And the Were-wolf?” said Yolette, faintly amused.

“The Were-wolf—that is the Prussian army.”

Yolette’s face sobered.

“The Prussians are very cruel and very fierce—like the Were-wolf,” she said; “come, little one, we must go to the kitchen.”

At the top of the cellar stairs they met Bourke. His serious face changed when he saw Yolette, but his expression had not escaped her.

“Breakfast is ready,” she said, quietly; “I have not yet breakfasted myself. Shall we go in?”

She led the way into the dining-room and closed the door. He put his arms around her and looked into her clear eyes.

“It is bad news,” she said, slowly.

“Yes, Yolette.”

“Not—not about Monsieur Harewood?”

“No—I hope not.”

“Tell me, Cecil.”

“Metz has surrendered; Bazaine and his army are prisoners.”

Tears filled her eyes.

“What else, Cecil?—There is something else.”

“Yes, there is. Le Bourget was carried by assault yesterday forenoon.”

She sat down by the table, nervously twisting the cloth. He took a chair opposite, resting his chin on his hands.

“Jim was there,” he said, after a silence.

“Then—then he—”

“Yes, he will come back to Paris, because the sortie has failed to pierce the German lines.”

“He should have come back last night,” said Yolette.

Bourke nodded silently.

“And because he has not yet returned you are worried,” continued Yolette. Her hand stole across the table and his own tightened over it.

“He has been delayed—that’s all,” said Bourke, making an effort to shake off his depression.

“We will say nothing to Hildé about it.”

“No, not to Hildé,” murmured Bourke.

Red Riding Hood entered bearing the breakfast covers. Hildé came in a moment later and looked anxiously at Bourke.

He smiled cheerily and began to read from the morning paper, aloud, how Monsieur Thiers, who had been trotting around all over Europe to enlist the sympathies of the great powers in behalf of France, had just returned from Vienna and had entered Paris with Bismarck’s kind permission. It seems that Monsieur Thiers had sounded England, Russia, Austria and Italy, and found them in accord with himself that an armistice should suspend hostilities for a while until a national assembly could be convened and terms of peace discussed with Bismarck and his sentimental sovereign. Hildé scarcely listened, Yolette nibbled her toast and tried to understand a diplomatic muddle that needed older brains than hers to solve.

Outside in the street the newsboys were crying, “Extra! Surrender of Bazaine! Fall of Metz! Terrible disaster at Le Bourget! Extra! Full list of the dead and wounded!” Bourke tried to keep Hildé’s attention; she smiled at him and held out an extra that she had already bought and devoured.

“If he was at Le Bourget,” she said, “he was not hurt. See! Here are the names.”

She kept her eyes on Bourke as he read the long column of dead, wounded, and missing. When he finished she said:

“Will he come back to Paris now?”

“I hope so,” said Bourke cheerily; “Perhaps the Mouse is with him. Heavens! What a mess Trochu made of it at Le Bourget! It seems that General Bellemare was absent in Paris when the Prussians fell on Le Bourget. It’s somebody’s fault—that’s clear—and very safe to say,” he

added, with an attempt at gaiety that deceived no one.

Red Riding Hood, who now always held herself straight as an arrow when people spoke of soldiers—for had not her father died in uniform?—said in a clear voice: “If the Prussians are in Le Bourget—are we not in Paris?”

“Good for you!” said Bourke, heartily; “let Metz fall, let Strassbourg tumble down, let Le Bourget blow up; we are in Paris, two young ladies, a young man and Red Riding Hood. Vive la France!”

They all smiled a little; Bourke went out laughing, quite confident he had dispelled some of the gloom. It was raining again. He buttoned his overcoat close to the throat and hurried away on his daily visit to the war-office.

The streets he traversed were filled with people, the Place Saint Sulpice was black with a mob shouting and gesticulating. “Down with the ministry! Resign!” It was impossible to approach the war-office; the Place de l’Hôtel de Ville, the square in front of the Louvre, the gardens of the Luxembourg were swarming with excited crowds, indignant at the ministry’s suggestion of an armistice, which they considered preliminary to the surrender of Paris—furious at the news from Metz and hysterical over the disaster of Le Bourget.

At eight o’clock that morning the carbiniers had marched into Paris, spreading the report that Le Bourget had been betrayed to the Prussians, that they had escaped after prodigies of heroism, and that the government was responsible for everything.

Bourke, hoisting himself upon the railing of the Luxembourg, looked out over the vast throng toward a window, where, hedged in by the bayonets of the carbiniers, Buckhurst sat, pale and unmoved, beside Flourens. Mortier had just finished a venomous oration, and Flourens, booted and spurred, had risen and was facing the mob. His handsome face grew red with excitement, his gestures became more violent as the roar of approbation increased. “Vive Flourens! Down with the government!” The speech was a passionate plea for the Commune and a pledge that the city would never surrender.

“What is this senile ministry that it should seek peace for us who

demand war! war! war! What was its price when Metz was sold, when Le Bourget went up in flames! The day will come when the government must answer to the Commune, and the day of atonement shall be terrible!”

The uproar was frightful; the carbiniers discharged their rifles in the air and shouted, “Vive la Commune!” A mob of National Guards cheered them vociferously.

In the midst of the din Buckhurst rose. Slowly his white, impassive face bent to meet the sea of upturned faces; the drums were silenced, the explosion of rifles ceased, the harsh yells died away.

“The ministers,” he said, in a low voice, “are at the Hôtel de Ville. The government must resign; the Commune is proclaimed. Who will follow me to the Hôtel de Ville?”

There came a thundering shout, “Forward!” The throngs surged, swung back, and burst into cheers as the carbiniers, drums rolling, bayonets slanting, wheeled out into the boulevard Saint Michel.

Bourke followed the crowd, now almost entirely composed of National Guards, Mobiles, Franc-tireurs and swarms of ruffians from Belleville. As they marched they bellowed the “Carmagnole,” the sinister blasts of the buglers, the startling crash of drums, the trample and shouting combined in one hideous pandemonium of deafening sound. As they poured through the rue de Rivoli and flooded the square of the Hôtel de Ville, Bourke saw General Trochu come out on the marble steps and wave back the leaders, who were already smashing in the iron gate.

Buckhurst ran up the steps and faced the Governor of Paris. There was a sharp exchange of words, a menacing gesture from Buckhurst, then he shoved the Governor aside. In a moment the yelling pack swarmed into the splendid building. The ministers fled to the Salle du Conseil and barricaded the door. Flourens set his carbiniers to guard it. Buckhurst let the mob loose throughout the great marble building and the pillage began; the splendid rooms were looted, gilded mirrors smashed, furniture mutilated, walls and frescoes torn to atoms.

All day long the mob raged through the palace; the National

Guards fired their rifles into the masterpieces that adorned ceiling and panel, the Mobiles chopped down the rosewood doors to build fires with. A carbinier went out and shot an officer's horse; a dozen Belleville creatures cut it up, and a feast began, so nauseating that even Mortier could not endure it and ordered the cuisine removed to the Chamber of Mirrors. By nightfall half of the insurgents were lying about helplessly drunk. The rest of the mob had broken down the doors of the council chamber and surrounded the ministers. There they held them prisoners, insulting them, threatening to shoot them, while Flourens, seated aloft on a table, arms akimbo, alternately begged them to resign and promised them death unless they did. The high bald head of Mortier loomed up behind the speaker's desk; his little diseased eyes, burning with insanity, roamed restlessly over the chamber. Blanqui arrived to gloat over the prisoners; Millière shouted that they must resign and began to organise a revolutionary government of his own in the midst of howls and cheers. Jules Favre, Garnier-Pages, Jules Simon and General Tamisier, the Minister of War, sat crowded into a corner, constantly subjected to outrage and insult, and frequently covered by the levelled rifles of the carbiniers.

To Bourke the situation seemed a nightmare too absurd, too grotesque, to credit. The government of Paris was held prisoner by a mob of anarchists; the city itself was besieged by the enemy. War without, revolution within. What would happen in twenty-four hours—time enough for any one of the hundreds of German spies to carry the news to Bismarck.

As Bourke stood there in the shattered hall, half stifled with the vile atmosphere, crowded, pushed, shoved and cursed by drunken carbiniers and Belleville ruffians, a thought came to him that if General Trochu had a messenger, something might be done. He looked across at the General, hoping to catch his eye. After a moment, however, he met the gloomy gaze of Jules Favre, and, without a moment's hesitation, stepped up beside him.

"Quick!" he said, "Can I carry any message for you? I am an American correspondent. Don't look at me when you answer."

"There is a battalion of Breton Mobiles at the Napoleon barracks. They are loyal. The barracks connect with the Hôtel de Ville by an underground tunnel." Jules Favre spoke in a quiet voice, looking out of the window as he spoke, his back turned to Bourke. The young man heard every word. He dared not answer; he lingered a moment, gazing about with pretended curiosity at the wrecked chamber, then slowly turned and started toward the door. As he was passing out, somebody touched his sleeve. He looked up. Buckhurst stood beside him. Bourke stepped back.

Buckhurst cocked his revolver. All eyes were fixed on the two.

"Where are you going?" said Buckhurst, in his placid voice.

"About my business," replied Bourke, steadily.

Buckhurst's pale eyes contracted; a spasm twitched the muscles of his clean-cut jaw. It was his way of laughing.

"Get back there," he said, placing the tip of one slim finger on Bourke's breast. "I know you and your friend Harewood."

"And I know you," said Bourke, coolly. As he spoke he saw he had made a mistake. If ever a face expressed murder, Buckhurst's face at that moment meant it. His colourless eyes blazed, his thin lips scarcely parted as he said: "You will know me better presently."

Flourens, standing on a marble table, bent nearer to listen; Mortier's deformed head craned up over his desk with evil eagerness. A carbinier suddenly struck Bourke with the butt of his rifle full in the chest and sent him reeling back against the wall. General Trochu sprang forward to interpose, Jules Favre tried to force his way to Bourke's side, but the carbiniers thrust them back savagely.

"That man is a government spy," said Buckhurst. "He has watched us at the Undertakers, now he comes here with secret intelligence for Monsieur Favre."

"It is a mistake," began Jules Favre, haughtily, but was sternly silenced by Flourens.

"What do we do with spies?" suggested Buckhurst, looking up at Mortier and raising his revolver significantly.

A carbinier beside him made a lunge with his bayonet at Bourke.

The blow failed to reach him because Buckhurst gave the fellow a violent push.

“Don’t be too zealous, my friend,” he sneered; “it will be more amusing in my way.”

Bourke, breathing heavily from the blow on the chest, stood with his back to the wall, glaring at Buckhurst. “You damned cutthroat!” he said, “you ran away from America to save your neck! You’re a thief, a forger, a murderer and a communist, but you dare not lay your hands on an American citizen in Paris!”

“If that young man is an American citizen, be careful,” cried Flourens, dramatically.

“I’m responsible for my acts!” said Buckhurst, white with fury. “Send for Captain Stauffer and a file of men!”

“Captain Stauffer is a German spy!” said Bourke. “If there is a Frenchman in this hall he will arrest him for treason.”

Mortier, at the word “treason,” began to sniff like a vulture. His hideous long neck, swathed in a dirty red handkerchief, twisted and writhed; his little green eyes were like two points of flame.

“If citizen Stauffer is accused he must answer before this tribunal,” he said.

Flourens struck his fist against his sword hilt, and shouted, “All accusations shall be answered before me! Bring the prisoner here!”

At that moment Stauffer pushed into the room at the head of a file of carbiniers. The tumult increased as the soldiers cleared a space around Flourens and Buckhurst, and dragged Bourke before the table where Mortier sat, his grotesque head thrust forward, his great hairy hands gripping the edges of the table. In the midst of the confusion Buckhurst paced up and down, cold eyes never leaving Bourke, revolver swinging in one hand. Bourke, a little unnerved, was speaking to Flourens, glancing from time to time at Stauffer, who now recognised him, and honoured him with scowls of hatred.

“Your suspicions are nothing,” said Flourens, violently; “what evidence have you?”

Bourke was silent.

Buckhurst began to speak again in a measured, passionless voice:

“The prisoner charges me with crime; he charges Captain Stauffer with treason. I charge him with being a spy, and this is my evidence. I saw him at the Undertakers, and I saw him a moment ago secretly approach Monsieur Jules Favre, deliver a message, receive one, and attempt to leave the council chamber. Let him deny it.”

“Do you deny it?” croaked Mortier, clutching the table harder.

Bourke looked at Buckhurst; that look was enough. All his nerve came back to him; the flush that had left his cheeks returned. He drew himself up and turned to Flourens. “That criminal,” he said, “is determined on my murder. If you can save me, you must speak now.” But Flourens walked away without an answer, and Mortier caught Bourke’s arm in an iron grip. “March!” said Buckhurst placidly.

Mortier passed first with his prisoner, Stauffer followed heading a file of carbiniers; Buckhurst brought up the rear, revolver poised.

They had decided to shoot him in the court, but the railings were already torn down, and the crowd covered every inch of pavement. To get through with their prisoner was not possible; besides, they were doubtful of the temper of the crowd. Mortier said that the safest plan was to shoot him in the underground portion of the palace; Buckhurst agreed, and the cortège took up its march. Flight after flight of steps were passed; the roar of the pillaging mob above grew fainter and fainter. Stauffer found lanterns, and they entered that dim system of vaulted chambers and passages that leads to the secret catacombs of the Hôtel de Ville.

There was a vast underground hall, lighted by double rows of lamps, and littered with packets of documents, printed forms and musty papers, later to be sorted and arranged for the archives of the city of Paris. The huissiers in charge rose in a body, protesting, as Buckhurst and his soldiers entered. “Nonsense,” said Buckhurst, “we only want to shoot a man. Don’t let us disturb you, gentlemen. Pray keep your seats.” Then he sat down at one of the long tables, laid his revolver beside him, motioned Mortier and Stauffer to withdraw with their men, and beckoned Bourke to sit in front of him.

Bourke listened to the footsteps of the carbiniers as they retreated into the adjoining chamber. He looked at the huissiers, who gazed back at him, fascinated by the sight of a condemned man. Even when Buckhurst had begun to speak, Bourke scarcely heard him. The despair of his position, the healthy and natural horror of death occupied his thoughts. He could not realise that he was about to die—he could not believe it, and when he noticed that Buckhurst was speaking, he listened without understanding. Buckhurst was talking of himself. For now the dominating trait of most criminals was revealed in Buckhurst: that trait is vanity. Keen, shrewd, merciless, daring, he was not above the weakness of vanity, although he was too reticent, too shrewd, to exhibit it to any human being who might live to reproach him with his weakness. But now it was different; this man was about to die—if necessary, by Buckhurst's own hand. So Buckhurst blabbed and babbled on about his crimes. He eagerly owned up to robbery and forgery; he claimed as his own a notorious murder, long wrapped in mystery. By degrees he grew confidential, speaking in the easy slang of the period. He became reminiscent, even sentimental, about New York. Then, suddenly changing, his pale eyes gleamed with a ferocity indescribable as he spoke of his prison days, his jailors, and his hope that their reckoning would come. He boasted of women, of conquests made, of deceptions practised. At times the spasm which served him for laughter twitched his pallid face.

Once Bourke asked him if he would let him go for money, but the ghastly smile on Buckhurst's face was answer enough. "No," said Buckhurst, "you know too much, you knew too much before—and now you know I'm a damned fool besides." He rose abruptly and went into the passageway where Mortier, Stauffer and the carbiniers were waiting. The carbiniers had found a wine-bin and were rifling it, and cracking the necks of the municipal claret bottles. They objected to leaving off, and Buckhurst strode into the passage, revolver raised.

In an instant Bourke turned to the huissiers who stood grouped behind him, and said hurriedly: "One of you run to the Breton Mobiles in the Napoleon barracks and bring them by the underground

passage. Hurry, or they will murder the ministers as they are going to murder me!" The huissiers hesitated, then, as Buckhurst's voice was heard in the passage, one of them opened a door behind the table where Bourke was sitting and pointed. Bourke jumped for the door and ran as he had never run in his life. Twice, as he ran, between unseen walls, holding his arm before him, he fell, but sprang up again and plunged on, his hands before his face. How long he had been running he did not know, when, rounding a corner, he saw a light ahead. The floor of the passage became visible, the rough stone walls, the ceiling. Little by little the passage ascended, growing lighter and lighter as he advanced, until he staggered out into a stone-paved court, where soldiers were passing carrying pails and kitchen utensils, and an officer, mounted on a horse, stood looking on.

He stammered out his tale to the officer, and he had not finished before the bugles were sounding the assembly, and the officers were shouting, and the brave Breton Mobiles came tumbling into the parade. In ten minutes they were entering the tunnel; their officers could not hold them back. Bourke, carried away with the onset, held tightly to a lantern that somebody thrust into his hand, and hurried along with the soldiers, who even wounded each other with their bayonets in their eagerness to be in at the death.

And they were in at the death, for, even when Bourke entered the underground hall, they had a dozen half-drunken carbiniers by the throat. Buckhurst had vanished, so also had Mortier and Stauffer. Bourke led the way to the council chamber above; the stairs were stormed, the halls carried by the bayonet. He saw the Mobiles burst into the council chamber, hurl the insurgents out, and beat them with clubbed rifles until they howled for mercy. He saw the pale-faced ministers withdraw, protected by the bayonets of the brave Bretons; he witnessed the stampede of Flourens and his cohorts—a flight as ridiculous as it was precipitate.

Outside in the rain an enormous crowd stood and watched the fight in the palace. Night had fallen swiftly, and, in the frightful uproar and confusion, the insurgents escaped with broken heads, Flourens,

Stauffer, Buckhurst and Mortier among them. But the Bretons had some hundred or so of the carbiniers prisoners, and now, as other loyal battalions began to arrive, the ministers left the Hôtel de Ville, where what once threatened to be a brutal massacre had turned into a farce as grotesque as it was unexpected.

Bourke pushed his way out into the crowd. There were no street lamps lighted; a few of the cavalry, escorting General Ducrot, who arrived on the scene, carried torches, with the long butts resting in their stirrups, but the darkness seemed denser for the scattered lights, and Bourke was glad of the lantern he still held, to guide himself across the bridge and through dusky alleys toward the boulevard Saint Michel. As he stopped at the Café Cardinal to swallow a little brandy, he heard a soldier say that a company of carbiniers under Captain Speyer had sacked a house on the ramparts during the riot at the Hôtel de Ville.

“What house?” asked Bourke, pushing through the group that surrounded the soldier.

“I don’t know,” replied the cavalryman; “it was somewhere on the rue d’Ypres.” He added mischievously, “You needn’t look so frightened, my friend—unless it was your house. Hey! Wait! *Sacré nom d’une pipe!*—take a drink with us, comrade—”

But Bourke had already vanished.

CHAPTER XXII.

BOURKE DOES WHAT HE CAN.

It was pitch dark when Bourke reached the rue d'Ypres, but the red glare of torches lighted up the ramparts, and cast lurid reflections across the fronts of the shadowy houses opposite. A constantly increasing crowd of people surrounded his house. He hastened on, pushing, struggling, forcing a path through the throng to his own door. The flare of petroleum torches fell red on scores of sombre faces. He saw Yolette near the doorstep, surrounded by half-a-dozen men, some of whom he recognised as neighbours. When Yolette heard Bourke's voice, she took one uncertain step forward. The next moment her white, frightened face was hidden on his shoulder.

"What is it?" he said. "Speak to me, Yolette! Don't tremble so. See, you are safe! Nothing can harm you, my darling!"

Somebody in the crowd said: "It's her sister. She can't be found."

"Hildé!" gasped Bourke.

The same voice spoke again: "The carbiniers sacked the house. There was nobody there except Mademoiselle Hildé and the little servant."

Yolette trembled violently and raised her head.

"I had gone to the butcher's to have our rations renewed," she said; "when I returned they—they had done this. I cannot find Hildé."

"I saw them," said a man in a blue blouse. "I heard people say that there was a revolution at the Hôtel de Ville and that we were to have the Commune. Many of us started for the Cité—we numbered perhaps fifty—when, sapristi, the bayonets of the carbiniers filled the streets—two companies, monsieur, with drums and bugles sounding, and their Captain Speyer shouting to us to get back. Then the artillerymen yonder, who were exercising with the Prophet, came over the street to see what the carbiniers were doing, but their Captain Speyer waved an order from the Hôtel de Ville—so, monsieur, there was nothing to do."

The man spoke cautiously, appealing to the crowd to corroborate

him. Bourke, his arm around Yolette, who seemed too dazed to understand, listened with a sick fear at his heart, eyes helplessly roaming through the throng of eager, sympathetic faces that pressed on every side.

The spokesman of the group wiped his face on his sleeve, shrugged, and continued:

“Dame, it was soon finished. Speyer went into the house. Somebody said he had a mandate of arrest for you and also for Monsieur Harewood. A carbinier told me that the Commune was proclaimed and that your house was to be reserved for the carbiniers’ headquarters. He added that you and Monsieur Harewood were known as suspects of the Commune and that they would catch you sooner or later. Then, monsieur, they began to bring out your papers and portfolios. These they placed in an ambulance, along with books and clothing and some cans of preserved meat. It was then, for the first time, that I, standing in the crowd behind the row of bayonets, saw Mademoiselle Hildé in the hallway among all those bandits. What happened after that I cannot say, for there came a soldier galloping who cried: ‘Treason! We are betrayed at the Hôtel de Ville!’—and the carbiniers ran out of the house like rats—this way and that way, until their Captain Speyer shouted for them to charge and drive back the crowd.” The man paused and added: “After that, monsieur, we ran for our lives, and that is all I know.”

Bourke cast one glance around the crowd at the door, beckoned to the spokesman, whose name was Maillard, and who, in days of plenty, had supplied the street with bread—then he led Yolette into the house, motioning Maillard to follow. Yolette sank on the sofa, stunned, unable yet to comprehend the catastrophe. Maillard stood, hat in one hand, holding a petroleum torch in the other. The thick stench of the oil filled the dismantled room. The floor was littered with table linen, kitchen utensils and overturned furniture. In every corner lay heaps of curtains, bed-clothes and towels, tied up for removal when the carbiniers had been interrupted in their work by the news from the Hôtel de Ville.

“Yolette,” said Bourke, gently, “where is Red Riding Hood? Was she with Hildé when you left for the butcher’s?”

Yolette’s pallid lips motioned, “Yes.”

With an effort, Bourke spoke again.

“Will you stay here quietly with Monsieur Maillard until I come back? I am going to find Hildé, dear. We will find her very soon; I shall go to the Governor of Paris at once, and he will get her back.”

To Maillard he said: “Get your wife to come and stay here; I may be gone until morning. God knows whether there is authority enough in Paris to-night to punish this outrage, but if there isn’t, I’ll try it alone.”

As he passed into the street, not daring to linger, not daring to look at Yolette, he saw Maillard’s young wife in the crowd that still waited around the door.

“Go in,” he said; “tell Mademoiselle Yolette that her sister will be safe, and that she will soon have her again.”

To the people who looked at him with wistful, kindly eyes, he said:

“This helpless girl is your neighbour. I leave the house in your keeping. Do what you can.”

Before he turned into the city, he crossed the street to the bomb-proofs, where the officer of the gun-squad met him with an anxious shake of the head.

“Not a word, not a word, Monsieur Bourke! I am overwhelmed with this terrible thing. They showed me a forged order from General Trochu; I could only fold my arms and let those brigands search your house. Now they tell me that the government still exists, that the Commune is routed, that the revolution is ended. I only wish I had known it sooner! And is it true that they carried off Mademoiselle Hildé Chalais?”

“Yes,” said Bourke, quietly; “it was their Captain Speyer who did that. Monsieur, will you place a sentry at my door? I am going to see the Governor of Paris.”

“I will do so at once, monsieur,” said the gun captain. They saluted

each other, and, as Bourke hurried on, he heard the order given, the trample of a file and the double jar of grounded rifles on the ramparts.

It was midnight when Bourke was ushered into the presence of General Trochu, Governor of Paris; it was one o'clock in the morning when he went out into the street, stunned by the shameful avowal that the government was without authority in the distracted city and that the general in chief of the armies of Paris was unable to aid him to rescue Hildé from the insurgent carbiniers. News had arrived that Flourens and his legion, retreating from the fiasco at the Hôtel de Ville, had seized and barricaded the church of Menilmontant; that Belleville was a seething cauldron of revolution; that the whole quarter was preparing to rise en masse and hurl themselves again on the Hôtel de Ville.

During his interview with General Trochu, Bourke saw the stream of staff officers constantly arriving with bad news from Belleville, and leaving with urgent instructions to General Ducrot, commanding the only reliable and efficient corps in Paris.

General Trochu, head bent on his medalled breast, hands nervously clasped behind him, accompanied Bourke to the door of his cabinet.

"I am sorry, monsieur; believe me, I am covered with shame to confess my helplessness at this moment," he said. "But I can do nothing yet, absolutely nothing, until the revolt is stamped out. And," he added, sadly, "this revolt may cost France dear. Our negotiations with Monsieur Bismarck were going well, but no sooner did he hear of this riot in Paris than he abruptly broke off all negotiations in which we could honourably participate. You see, he believes his allies are here in Paris, and that we, once embroiled in the horrors of civil strife, will fall easy victims to the German armies."

"Then," said Bourke, despairingly, "the Governor of Paris can offer me no aid in arresting the so-called Captain Speyer?"

"It is impossible," said General Trochu, with reddening face lowered in mortification. "I am responsible before God for the defense of this city; I dare not provoke an open conflict with these insurgents, under the muzzles of the Prussians' guns."

Bourke bowed; the anxious Governor of Paris returned his salute in silence. Then an orderly conducted Bourke to the street, the great doors closed, and he walked out into the darkness, utterly discouraged.

It was not yet dawn when he entered the house on the ramparts. The sentinel saluted him gravely, and asked what news there was. At Bourke's answer he shook his fist and swore that the day should come when Belleville would be summoned to a bloody accounting.

Yolette's terror and grief, when she saw Bourke enter alone, completely unnerved him. The terrible fatigue of the day, the strain, the shock he himself had undergone when Buckhurst arrested him at the Hôtel de Ville, and the constant haunting fear for Harewood, tortured him till his aching head seemed ready to burst. He had eaten nothing since breakfast. Maillard brought him a basin of hot soup and a bit of bread.

When he finished, he rose unsteadily and went to the door. Dawn had scarcely begun—a horrible, yellow light crept out of the horizon, dulling the lamps on the bastions, tipping the bronze muzzle of the Prophet, touching the surface of the road puddles with sickly reflections.

Scarcely knowing where he was going, he started out again, stumbling through the rank, dead grass of the glacis toward the Porte Rouge. The gate was closed, but from the ramparts he looked off over the desolate landscape to the south. And, as he looked, a shaft of flame shot out of the hazy half light; another and another, and the hollow booming of cannon filled his ears. The forts of the south were awaking; the game of death had begun again.

He sat down on the crisp, dead grass of the talus, aching head clasped in his hands. To think of Hildé in the clutches of Speyer and Buckhurst almost drove him mad. He shrank from going back to Yolette; he could not bear to see her grief. He thought of Harewood; how could he face him when he returned? One thing he realised—that he must make an effort to find Hildé at once, whatever happened to the government in the meantime. The American Minister could not aid

him, for there was no responsible authority to apply to in Paris except General Trochu, and Bourke had already seen enough of that official.

Suppose he should go to Belleville? It was not yet daylight. Perhaps dawn would be the safest time to venture through that quarter; anarchists and kindred ruffians prowl late and sleep late. He rose to his feet and looked out across the dim city. Far away in the north he saw the sombre profile of Montmartre and the heights of the Buttes Chaumont. Before he started, he went back to the house and took a revolver from Harewood's dismantled desk. Then he went noiselessly down the stairs again and hastened out into the city. There was nobody afoot in the streets but himself.

He went by the way of the Luxembourg and the boulevard Saint Michel. In the gardens of the Luxembourg he saw lights moving, where Sisters of Mercy were passing among the wounded, who lay in the temporary hospital behind the palace. As he passed the river, the gunboats, one by one, battle lanterns set, swung noiselessly below at their moorings, sinister, shadowy bulks on the dark tide.

He noticed the absence of life on the boulevard. There were no early vehicles, no market wagons, no omnibuses, no pedestrians. Even the sparrows had vanished; nothing of life awoke with dawn; the silence was absolute, save for the deadened, measured booming of the guns in the southern forts. That, too, was inaudible when he turned into the ancient Faubourg du Temple and began the ascent of the silent, foul, greasy streets that marked the beginning of the revolutionary zone.

On high mountains the vegetation limit is sharply marked by stunted growth, then rocks.

On Mount Aventin the vegetating growth of anarchy was marked by filth. The streets reeked with it, the unutterably foul canal Saint Martin ran filth, the very balconies sweated it as the evil grey mist lifted above the canal, higher, higher, exposing the mean, naked, treeless streets that twisted and coiled round and round the heights where, crowned and enthroned, sat anarchy, hatching murder.

The first faint flicker of daylight that had been struggling through

the mist died out under a sudden burst of rain. The streets grew darker again; the rain raged furiously for a minute or two, then changed to a thick drizzle.

There were no street lamps lighted with petroleum, there was not a flicker of light from the long, grisly rows of houses, but he knew his way, and he found it, even in the darkest alleys, even through dank passages that reeked like the hold of a pest ship.

And at last he came to the church of Menilmontant. Almost at once he saw what had been done by the insurgents. The statement of General Trochu had led him to believe that the church had been turned into a fortress and strongly barricaded. The truth was that almost nothing had been accomplished toward fortifying Menilmontant. Across the street stood a rambling, partly finished barricade of paving-stones. Two houses had been converted into barracks for the carbiniers; this was patent to anybody, partly because of the two empty sentry boxes before each house, partly on account of a strip of canvas nailed across the front of the two houses, on which was painted:

“CASERNE DE LA COMMUNE.”

On the church a similar strip of rain-soaked canvas hung, bearing the legend:

“AMBULANCE
HEADQUARTERS.”

and a red flag, that the rain had soaked almost black, hung from the church door to the steps.

There was not a soul to be seen at the barricade; the sentry boxes protected no sentinels; the church was dark and silent.

Bourke crept forward and mounted the barricade. He walked along the top to where it crossed the sidewalk. Here the wall of paving-stones was higher; he could lift himself into the balcony of the house against which the barricade ended. This he did cautiously, then

crouched there, watching a lantern that somebody in the house had lighted.

The lantern swung to and fro; somebody was moving down stairs; a shadow fell across the threshold, and a figure stepped into the street. By the light of the lantern he could see the uniform—the crimson reverses, the gilded shoulder knots laced with scarlet, that indicated an officer of rank in the carbiniers.

The officer stood a moment inspecting the barricade by the flickering lantern light, then turned, and, crossing the street, entered the church.

It was Speyer.

Bourke waited a moment before he rose from the balcony. He had no plan, no idea. What to do, now that he had crept into the hornets' nest, was a problem too intricate for him. And as he crouched there, hesitating, something in the open window behind him caught his eye—a dark mass huddled above the window ledge. Then, to his horror, he saw eyes watching him in the shadow—and the shadow itself seemed to expand and glide toward him. Quick as thought he had his revolver levelled; there came a gasp, a sudden movement, and a man leaped softly into the balcony, whispering, "Don't shoot, comrade, it's all right."

Before Bourke could understand, another figure climbed out of the window and made toward him.

"Voyons, comrade," they protested, "we are deserting, too. Don't be selfish, but lend a hand."

They let themselves down to the barricade, one after the other, then turned and motioned Bourke to follow.

"What did you do with your uniform?" asked one of the men. "You're lucky to find those clothes."

"Zut!" said the other; "we can sell our uniforms at the Temple and buy blouses."

There was something not altogether unfamiliar to Bourke about the two carbiniers. He looked into their hard faces. The one expressed sodden, sensual brutality, the other vacant viciousness. Suddenly it

came to him. They were the Mouse's pals, Mon Oncle and Bibi la Goutte.

"Are you coming with us, or are you going to stand there all day?" asked Mon Oncle.

Bibi added: "The captain will be looking for us in ten minutes, to help on that damn barricade."

"Listen," said Bourke, with sudden inspiration; "I am not going to desert empty-handed. Are you?"

"Hey?" demanded Bibi, vacantly. "There's nothing to pocket in that barracks there, and I know our captain looted the church."

"Captain Speyer?" asked Bourke.

"No—Stauffer."

"Is Speyer your captain?" asked Mon Oncle.

"Will you wait till I finish?" blustered Bourke; "or do you want to run away empty-handed?"

"I'll take anything on God's earth," said Bibi, solemnly, "but there's nothing left to steal in this part of His earth. Is there, Mon Oncle?"

"Yes, there is," said Bourke, savagely; "there's that girl that Speyer stole in the rue d'Ypres."

"What do we want of her?" asked Bibi in genuine astonishment.

"Want! You want the reward, don't you?"

"Reward!" muttered Mon Oncle; "is that why Speyer stole her? I thought he was sweet on her."

"Zut!" said Bibi, "of course it was for a reward. But I don't see how we are to get her, as she's in the church yonder."

"Of course she's in the church," interrupted Bourke, impudently, but his voice shook in spite of him at such un hoped-for fortune—"of course she's in the church, and all we'll have to do is to wait until Speyer comes out with his lantern."

"And crack his skull," blurted out Bibi, eagerly, "and—"

"And walk into the church and get her—hey?" suggested Mon Oncle.

Then Mon Oncle and Bibi began to dispute about the reward,

utterly ignoring Bourke. The latter saw that his troubles would only begin, even if he could get Hildé out of Speyer's hands. He said nothing, however, until Bibi suddenly squatted down behind the barricade, and Mon Oncle followed him, dragging Bourke to the ground.

"He's coming now," whispered Bibi, picking up a jagged bit of stone, "wait—I'll fix him."

Speyer, swinging a lantern, entered the barricade and started toward the barracks of the carbiniers. He hummed a tune as he walked, and dangled his lantern this way and that, stepping mincingly over the puddles of rain water and drawing his capucin closer.

Then, as he passed Bourke, Bibi stole out like a shadow, swifter and yet swifter, and struck Speyer a terrible blow with the heavy stone. The lantern fell—that is all Bourke saw—except something lying in the street, and Bibi kneeling above it. Presently Bibi came back, holding the lantern, still lighted. A single spot of blood blotched the glass.

Without a glance at Bourke, he beckoned Mon Oncle, and they both entered the church. Before Bourke could rise, they reappeared at the door, vehemently disputing with a sentry who seemed loath to allow them there; but they had their way and again disappeared.

Bourke crouched behind the barricade, revolver cocked, eyes on the church door. His heart was suffocating him with its double beating. Second after second dragged by.

And now came the lantern light again, nearer and nearer the door. Bibi stepped out alone, then a child—a little girl came, clinging to a woman—Hildé! Mon Oncle, still disputing with the sentry, brought up the rear.

As they passed the barricade, Bourke saw Mon Oncle glance fearfully around, but Bibi shoved him forward, and, seizing Hildé's arm, he hurried down the street and entered the maze of sombre lanes and alleys that honeycomb the quarter like holes in a rabbit warren. Bourke followed them. Once or twice Bibi looked over his shoulder suspiciously; Mon Oncle was always on the alert. So they crossed the

anarchist quarter, Bourke following, and began to skirt the interior of the city, where already a few people were stirring and where the morning light, in spite of the rain, glimmered on wet streets and closed shutters.

Their intention was, obviously, to gain the rookeries of the southern quarters, by the faubourgs and outer boulevards. Bourke's time had come and he glided more closely on their heels, until Bibi, turning prudently to inspect his trail, saw Bourke standing at his elbow with levelled revolver. Mon Oncle whipped out a knife and Bourke shot him dead at his feet. Bibi, in an ecstasy of fury, struck Hildé a murderous blow, turned and ran for it, ran hard for his life; and Bourke shot at him as he ran, standing as still and composed as though he were shooting at a target. Every bullet struck its mark, but the miserable creature ran on, headlong, until the last shot sent him spinning and reeling into a tree, at the foot of which he crashed down, doubling up like a dead rabbit.

Then Bourke knelt and lifted Hildé in his arms. Over her eyes the blood was pouring from an open cut. Her white face fell back on his shoulder as he rose on one knee in a circle of citizens and soldiers who had gathered from heaven knows where, and now stood staring at Bourke and Hildé.

"Where is your post?" asked Bourke of a National Guardsman who bore the number 252 on his cap. "I want a stretcher to the rue d'Ypres."

"Send for a stretcher," chorused the crowd, and the soldier hurried off to his post down the street, where already two men of the hospital corps were hastening toward the group.

"Has the fighting begun in Belleville?" asked another soldier, turning over the dead body of Mon Oncle with his foot and scowling at his carbinier uniform.

"It has ended as far as I am concerned," said Bourke. As he spoke he felt a little hand seek his; Red Riding Hood, pale and composed, stood beside him.

"Have they killed Mademoiselle Hildé?" she asked.

"No," said Bourke, "see, she is opening her eyes—see!—little

one.”

Then Red Riding Hood began to cry at the strange words that Hildé uttered—strange, senseless words that meant nothing at first to Bourke. When the stretcher came, he walked beside it as they bore her to the rue d’Ypres. The delirium increased; she spoke of Harewood, of love, of lost souls—lost through love. She spoke of Harewood as though he lay in death on the edge of hell.

And Bourke walked beside. And he understood.

CHAPTER XXIII.

ASHES OF EMPIRE.

From the first of November the situation in Paris became more alarming day by day. During the beginning of the siege the fear of bombardment had driven people to hang out ambulance flags or hoist the colours of neutral nations over their houses, hoping that the German cannon might spare buildings so protected. Over the dismal freezing streets thousands of dingy, tattered flags, mere rags for the most part, still fluttered in the November wind, although the inhabitants of the wretched city began to regard the Prussian siege guns as myths. In all the weeks of fighting that had passed since the first Uhlans cantered into Versailles, not a single cannon-shot from the Prussian lines had been fired against the city. Now the people no longer believed in the Prussian cannon.

Yet, with the opening days of November, there came into the streets of Paris something new, something mysterious, intangible, vaguely dreadful. It was reflected in the thin pinched faces of the people, it lurked in the hollow eyes of the soldiers—it was everywhere, in the cold grey waters of the Seine, in the sad twilight of the lampless streets, in the brooding November clouds. It was not fear, it was not despair. It was the fear of despair.

The boulevards were no longer frequented; the cafés, the vital sparks of life to boulevard and street, were now closed at ten o'clock. With the closing of the cafés the last sign of animation left the streets, and at ten o'clock the city lay in darkness, save for the black figures on the icy ramparts, clustered to watch the flash of some great gun, the flare of the shell, the monotonous rockets climbing to the zenith from the forts of the south.

But the sickly light of dawn now fell on crowded streets instead of empty ones, for everywhere at the doors of butcher-stalls interminable lines of women stood, card in hand, waiting to draw their meagre rations of horse-flesh.

There were few cabs and fewer omnibuses left in the city; the government needed horses for artillery and cavalry; the people needed food. Factories had closed everywhere, save where the Cail steel works flamed, turning out cannon. Most of the railroad stations stood silent and empty; the Orléans station, however, served for balloon manufacture.

One by one the last gas-jets were cut off and public buildings were lighted with candles and petroleum, until even these gave out. The police existed no longer; the National Guard was supposed to perform police duties.

There was no communication with the outside world except when a rare spy evaded the Prussian lines—or by balloons and pigeons. Once or twice, spies, sent from the provinces, crept into Paris, a few pigeons found their way into the besieged city, but no balloons ever returned.

The balloons left Paris at night to avoid the fire of the German outposts. Some were never again heard from, some were lost at sea, some fell in Belgium. A number, however, descended in the southern provinces, where Gambetta was performing prodigies—to his own satisfaction—and occasionally deluding Paris with foolish announcements of success for the French arms in the south, and the imminent arrival of the Army of the Loire before the walls of Paris.

The Army of the Loire! What heights of hope, what depths of despair marked its brief career! On the ramparts the starving soldiers looked out into the south for the army that never came; in the filthy streets starving women and sick children listened for the sound of its cannon. Rumours grew to certainties; the Army of the Loire had hailed Issy; its cannon had been heard in the west—in the south; its rockets signalled victory and rescue from the east! Then the freezing streets echoed with din of galloping batteries; sudden columns of cavalry filled the outer boulevards, trampling past in eager silence; endless masses of infantry swung through the icy streets with the startling out-crash of drums echoing and re-echoing from window to pavement, while the great guns boomed on the Point du Jour, and the forts took

up the burden from Vanves to Saint Denis, and from Romainville to the battery of the Double Crown.

Then, after the sortie came the ambulances, file after file, threading the frozen roads to the battle-ground. And the return!—the creaking wagon-loads of dying, the stench of musty blood-soaked straw, the spectral regiments tramping through the gates, the ragged crowd looking on, freezing, starving, dumb with misery, yet ready for another sortie when the dull Governor of Paris could stir from the shadow of his shadow-haunted chamber.

Little by little the rations of horse-meat were reduced to the miserable scrap of thirty grammes for adults and fifteen grammes for children. White bread had disappeared; there was no flour left. A hard, dry morsel of black bread was rationed daily to the people, scarcely enough to sustain life until the dawn of another day brought another crust.

The newspapers published schedules of prices from week to week; the poor, shivering in the bitter November dawn, stood hour after hour, ragged, sick, ankle deep in slush, patiently awaiting their rations of lean horse-flesh, and reading the weekly schedules to pass the time;

	FRANCS.
Horse-flesh (per kilo)	8
Mule-flesh (per kilo)	10
Dog	8
Turkey	180
Goose	125
Rabbit	60
Chicken	35
Rat	3
Eggs (each)	3
Cabbage (each)	10
Butter (per kilo)	80

Nobody except the very rich could dream of paying such prices. The poor, trembling in the cutting sleet, read the schedules as they waited hour after hour until their turn came in the long file. Then, wrapping the bit of frozen bone and flesh in their rags, they crept back to fireless homes. And no one murmured; no one complained; no one thought of surrender. Here and there in the line some woman, weak with starvation, fell down in the snow; here and there some young girl, cheeks flaming with fever, screamed out in sudden delirium and staggered off into the city—raving of warm fires and white bread and the mercy of God. The rest looked on in silence; the shivering line closed up; the next old woman hobbled away with her food, mumbling and muttering of battles to come and the honour of France.

There was no fuel left for the poor; mothers burned their furniture to save their babies from freezing; the green wood from the bois de Boulogne and the forest of Vincennes gave out little heat and a great deal of smoke for those who could afford to buy it. Bands of ruffians sacked the Government wood-yards at night, scarcely recoiling before the bayonets of the National Guard; troops of gamins hunted the sewer holes for rats, or watched the gardens of the rich for the gaunt cats that had almost disappeared from the famine-stricken city. The animals in the zoölogical gardens, with the exception of the lions and tigers, were killed and eaten one by one, their bones boiled for broth, even their skins scraped and steeped to gather the last shred of nourishment.

Yet, in the frightfully stricken city, nobody spoke of surrender—unless it were Monsieur Rénan, dining comfortably at his café, where, napkin in hand, he could discuss human brotherhood and the wickedness of resistance—where he could wipe his fat hands and lips and button his great coat, and go out into the desolate streets to ponder on his dexterity in hair-splitting debate, and the degeneracy of his native land. Now God help such as he—in France, in the western world—abroad and at home. For the foulest thing that creeps on earth is the creature who besmirches the motherland in evil days, and days of need—although that motherland be less sinned against than

sinning.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN HILDÉ'S CHAMBER.

When Hildé was carried into the house on the ramparts, unconsciousness had already succeeded her brief delirium. Yolette's first transports at sight of Hildé and Bourke were followed by days of terror and agonies of doubt. Hildé was very ill—so ill that Bourke brought a Sister of Mercy to the house in the first days of November, and spent his money, almost to the last franc, for the necessities that meant, perhaps, life to Hildé.

But now the good Sister of Mercy had gone to the hospitals again, and Yolette sat all day long at Hildé's bedside, watching her sister grow better and stronger.

The scar on her forehead healed, promising to show, however, as a tiny white crescent; the reaction from the horror of that October night left nothing of nervousness or fear behind. As she grew stronger, her beauty, too, returned; the hollows in temple and cheek disappeared, the scarlet came back to her lips, exquisite whiteness to neck and brow. But in the dark eyes Bourke saw that the last sparkle of childhood had died out forever; only the sadness of woman remained—the tenderness, the wistfulness, the sweetness of a woman who loves, who fears and who waits.

When, in the last weeks of November, she was well enough, she told Bourke how Speyer and his carbiniers had forced her into an ambulance, how they had traversed the distracted city, how Flourens had met Speyer and his detachment and had ordered him to place Hildé and Red Riding Hood in the fortified church, where already a dozen frightened grey nuns had been imprisoned.

What fate Flourens designed for the grey nuns, Bourke could not conjecture; what fate had been reserved for Hildé, he dared not imagine. He told her nothing of the murder of Speyer except that he was dead; he never spoke of the fate of Mon Oncle or of Bibi, nor did she ever mention it, although both Hildé and Red Riding Hood had

seen the killing of those eminent ruffians.

Bourke read in the newspapers that the government troops were hunting for Flourens and Buckhurst and that, for the moment, the carbiniers had slunk off and mixed in with their equally ferocious fellow-citizens of Belleville. The Undertakers club, however, continued, and, as this was really the head and heart of Flourens' battalions of bandits, and the government weakly permitted its doors to remain open, it was clearly only a question of time when Flourens and his carbiniers should once more reappear on the scene and raise the red flag of revolt. Buckhurst, it was known, in company with a creature named Sapia, and the veteran Blanqui, was already deep in a mysterious secret society that pretended to represent the entire National Guard, and called itself the "Central Committee." Naturally, it was a revolutionary group, an obscure band of cutthroats, who sat like buzzards watching the agonized city, until their moment should arrive to fatten on its ruins.

When, in the early days of October, Bourke's foresight had provided tins of preserved meat and vegetables as a reserve in time of famine, Hildé and Yolette had laughed at such precautions. But now these cans and tins of provisions had become the only food of the little household. Even while Hildé was ill, Yolette obstinately refused to take any of the delicacies provided by Bourke. The marauding carbiniers had only begun to loot the cellar when the news of their defeat at the Hôtel de Ville sent them packing, therefore the provisions remained practically untouched up to the day when Bourke refused to renew the government card that entitled the little household to rations of horse-flesh and black bread for three adults and a child.

Yolette baked tiny biscuits in the kitchen. Red Riding Hood made soup. And now that Hildé was well enough to come down stairs, they had dinner in the dining-room again, where, from their store of fuel, a good fire burned in the grate, and a candle sent its cheerful yellow rays into the chill of the black hallway. The shadow that fell on the house did not come from the battle clouds gathering swiftly in the south, nor from the sleet, the bitter cold, the rain, nor yet from the spectacle of the

splendid, desolate city, naked and famished, filthy and diseased. There was something else that touched Hildé's face with the subtle pallour, that made her silences heart-breaking and her forced smiles terrible. Bourke knew. At such moments he would begin: "You see, Hildé, my theory is this: Jim, finding that Le Bourget was threatened, struck out for himself, and wriggled through the Prussian lines somewhere between the fort de la Briche and Saint Denis. That's what I would have done myself, little sister."

Then he would bring his map and stick pins all over it, and talk very cheerfully, until Hildé, lying in her arm-chair, turned her head away to conceal the tears that came. At such moments, too, Yolette would read aloud from Hugo, and her clear young voice, pronouncing the superb lines of "Les Chatiments," sent the blood tingling to Bourke's cheeks. And then the deep, strong love in her blue eyes when she raised them to meet the eyes of the man who worshipped her. The room would become very still; Hildé, resting motionless among her shawls and cushions, eyes closed, sometimes heard the rustle of Yolette's dress, the light footfall, the breathless whisper, scarcely audible, "I love you, Cecil." But it was on Hildé's eyes that Yolette's kiss always fell. As for Bourke, he hoped against hope. He knew what the others did not know—he knew that Harewood had remained in Le Bourget, at least during the first assault, for the soldier had brought him Harewood's letter, and he had not dared to show it to Hildé or to Yolette because it had been delivered three days after the fall of Le Bourget. At night he could not sleep for thinking how Harewood might have fallen a victim to his rashness. Often hot anger succeeded uneasy foreboding—anger that Harewood should have dared risk death, when, by all the ties of honour and manhood, he was bound to Hildé until he had fulfilled his duty to her, to Yolette, to Bourke.

Often his face would harden as he thought of all that Harewood had promised, all that he had not fulfilled, of the wrong he had wrought, of the debt he had incurred that should be paid one day or the next, on earth or in the life to come. Again and again he thought of Hildé's words, uttered in delirium, and strove to believe that there had

been nothing in them, nothing except the innocent babble of a sick child. But their significance, terrible in its simplicity, appalled him; he thanked God that Yolette had been spared that; he remembered that Hildé herself was unaware of having spoken. At moments he almost wished Harewood dead. What was life worth to such a man or to his friends? What did love or honour mean to him? The demon of selfishness had taken possession of him. Selfish he had lived; his death, if death had overtaken him, was but the last whim of his selfishness, self-satisfaction at the expense of honour, a reckless risk of self, heedless of the most solemn duty he owed to Hildé, which was to live merely to live until he had a moral right to die. "Let him die," thought Bourke; "it will be better for her perhaps, whatever be the verdict of church or state—better for her, if the blow does not kill her." He could say this almost aloud, as he lay in his dark room at night, and yet, often starting awake from dreams of his comrade, he would sit up praying, for he often prayed, that Harewood, his friend, might return.

The month of November passed in an almost constant downpour, sometimes rain, sometimes snow, more often driving sleet or fierce icy storms, where sheets of fine frozen dust drove through winds so bitter that sentries froze at their posts and every dawn broke on such scenes of suffering among the ragged troops beyond the enceinte, that the newspapers scarcely dared record the details.

Combat after combat was delivered under the walls of Paris, but it was not until the end of the month that the great series of battles began along the Marne, culminating in the frightful slaughter at Champigny—a victory for France perhaps, because the Germans had failed to hurl Ducrot's troops across the Marne and destroy the bridges—but the victory was a sterile one, and the laurels fell on heads too weak with sickness and starvation to bear the weight of even withered wreaths.

Then, on December fifth, came the news that Orléans had fallen and the Army of the Loire was destroyed—news sent by letter under a flag of truce from Moltke—a grim letter, devilish in its courtesy:

"Versailles, Dec. 5, 1870.

"It might be useful to inform your excellency (General

Trochu) that the Army of the Loire has been defeated near Orléans, and that the city has been re-occupied by German troops.

“If, nevertheless, your excellency judges it advisable to convince yourself by one of your officers, I will not fail to furnish him with safe conduct to go there and return.

“Permit me, General, to express the high consideration with which I have the honour to be your very humble and very obedient servant.

“(Signed), The Chief of the General Staff,
“COUNT VON MOLTKE.”

The news stunned the people; at first nobody credited it. The Governor began ostentatious preparations for another sortie, alas! against the very village he had abandoned when it was in his own hands—Le Bourget.

But it was not until the end of December that he was ready to begin, and then the cold became so frightful that 900 men froze on a single night in the trenches, and during the last ten days of the month 20,000 soldiers were carried to the hospitals. The attack on Le Bourget was abandoned.

The moral and material sufferings of the miserable people of Paris were terrible beyond description. The mortality among children reached a figure that seemed unbelievable—2,500 in a single week. There was no milk for them, they could not swallow the black bread, the flesh of horses and mules, so they died, some from fevers, many from the cold, many, many from starvation.

In December, toward Christmas time, the first signs of discouragement appeared among the people. Deluged with false despatches, manufactured by the wholesale and printed in the government’s official journal, the poor people at last became aware of the bitter deceptions—the false news of victory followed inevitably by tardy avowals of disaster. Their hopes each day reborn, each night dead, their momentary joy and pride at the announcement of successes ruthlessly destroyed by the lying government, led them more surely

and more swiftly toward despair than if they had been told the truth, no matter how sad.

Yet even then nobody spoke of surrender—always excepting Monsieur Rénan, who once wrote a life of Jesus Christ.

The month of December passed slowly in the rue d'Ypres. Bourke often went into the cellar to count the sticks of wood remaining. They were easily counted. Provisions might last for several weeks yet, but the last candle had been burned and the last drop of oil used up.

All day on December thirty-first he wandered about the sombre boulevard, which, in happier times of peace, had swarmed with holiday shoppers for the New Year. Now nothing remained of the crowds, the splendid stores all a-glitter with lights, the rush of gorgeous carriages, the flutter of silken gowns. Under the Grand Hotel a sick man sold little cakes at exorbitant prices; a few old women peddled wooden toys; that was all.

He found, in a shabby store, one or two little gifts for Yolette and Hildé. For Red Riding Hood he bought a tiny box of bonbons and a pair of shoes. It was all he could afford.

So they celebrated the New Year together, trying to be cheerful, forcing themselves to talk, until the thunder of the forts, culminating in a series of terrific crashes, drowned their faint voices and left them silent, each to dream the same dream, each to think of the absent one, and pray a little, too, for their comrade, wherever he might be on that first sad day of the new year. As for Red Riding Hood, she always had something to pray for, and late that night she crept into Hildé's room, and said her prayers for France, and for the repose of her father's soul, who had died as soldiers die—so she thought. Hildé, shivering in her chilly bed, listened to the childish voice:

"Upon us have pity, upon our land of France, upon our city, upon our soldiers, pity, sweet Holy Virgin; intercede for papa, who is dead—for General Trochu and General Bourbaki and General Chanzy—and the Army of the Loire."

"Amen," whispered Hildé. The child rose from her knees; Hildé drew her into the bed and warmed the cold little body against her own.

The cannonade grew louder; toward midnight all the southern and eastern forts were firing. An hour later the batteries at the Point du Jour joined in, swelling the majestic volume of the cannonade until the floors of the house seemed to sway and tremble in the splendid rhythm of the guns' deep thunder. "Can you not sleep?" asked the child. "No," said Hildé. After a silence the child spoke again.

"Mademoiselle Hildé?"

"Yes, little one."

"Was it Our Lady of Paris who gathered the cannon balls in her veil of lace when they fired at the city hundreds and hundreds of years ago?"

"I don't know," said Hildé, faintly.

Presently the child said, "I should like to hear about Sainte Geneviève and about Sainte Hildé of Carhaix."

"Can you not sleep, Red Riding Hood?"

"Yes, but you have tears on your face."

"They are often there now, little one."

"Since he went away, Mademoiselle Hildé?"

"Since he went away."

The child's arms sought Hildé's neck; their faces touched now.

"Hear the cannon," whispered the child; "they are very loud to-night. Do you think our Lord Jesus is listening to the cannon?"

Hildé did not reply. The child spoke again, as though to herself:

"He is somewhere up there near the stars, you know. The cannon cannot hurt Him. He is sorry for us when we are cold and when the Prussians shoot our fathers. When we sin He is sorry, for we go to hell unless—unless—"

"Hush," murmured Hildé; "sleep, little one."

The child whimpered.

"Mademoiselle Hildé, I cannot sleep, because you are crying."

"Hush," said Hildé, "those who weep are sometimes pardoned."

"Have you sinned?" asked the child innocently.

"Sainte Hildé of Carhaix, witness for me! I do not know," sobbed Hildé. "O, God! O, God!—to have him back!—only to have him

back!”

“There is some one knocking,” said the child.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

The knocking was repeated; Hildé sat up in the darkness, staring through her tangled hair at the dim outlines of the door.

“Who is it?” she asked, striving to steady her voice.

There came the shuffle of feet, a sound of whispered consultation. Suddenly a voice spoke out:

“We want your house for a hospital. The wounded are coming in by the Porte Rouge.”

Hildé sprang from the bed and groped in the darkness for her clothes, bidding them wait and she would open. And now Yolette was stirring in the next room, and Bourke came down stairs, half dressed, and lighted a fire in the dining-room, for there was no other means of illumination.

When Hildé appeared, soldiers of the hospital corps were piling straw in the hallway. Outside, the street, was choked with cavalry, helmets glimmering in the frosty dawn. Already a red-cross flag hung over the doorsteps, its soiled folds floating lazily with every icy air current.

When the first stretcher appeared, borne by priests, the cavalry moved on, endless lines of them, and the trumpet’s sad peal was echoed by steel cuirasses clashing and the chiming of spurs and sabres, and a thousand horse-shoes’ flinty clink. One by one the ambulances creaked up the street from the Porte Rouge; one by one the stretchers passed. Every house received its load of wounded, every house hoisted the Geneva cross.

Yolette and Hildé helped the soldiers spread straw on the floor; all the rooms on the ground floor were taken, and the wounded lay there side by side, half frozen, pale as corpses. There were a few Germans among them, quiet, blond fellows, staring at everybody with mild blue eyes. One of them, a mere boy, watched Hildé as she moved about with cups of hot brandy, silently awaiting his turn—which never came, for

he died without a sound before she reached his side.

It was late in the afternoon when the surgeons appeared. Hildé and Yolette gave up their places to some sad-eyed Sisters of Mercy, and Bourke insisted that they should go to Harewood's room on the floor above. They slept there that night, keeping each other warm as best they could, for they had given most of the bed-covering to the wounded.

At daylight the dead cart came to their door, halted for its load, then rumbled on to the next house. Other wagons passed, creaking under their weight of wounded; sounds rose from the kitchen, where already the good Sisters of Mercy were making broth and splitting green wood. Hildé, her head on Yolette's breast, could hear Bourke stirring in his room. Yolette heard it, too, and opened her blue eyes. It was daylight.

"Did you sleep, Hildé?" she asked. "You are so pale—"

"Yes, I slept. Did you hear that wounded man groan? O, Yolette! Yolette—I think I heard him die—die down there in the cold and dark."

She rose, shivering, to break the ice in her water pitcher. Her shoulders, white as the snow outside, shrank under the icy sponge.

"The awful odour of chloroform makes my head ache," said Yolette. "The whole house reeks of carbolic acid, too. Shall I open the window?"

Hildé crept into her grey wool gown, held her wrists out for Yolette to fasten the linen cuffs, then, pinning on the nurse's apron, she went down stairs. Around one arm, just above the elbow, she wore the white band and red cross of the volunteer nurse.

The Sisters of Mercy greeted her in low voices, and told her that the empty places on the straw had already been filled. A fresh convoy of wounded was at the Porte Rouge. The whole quarter had been turned into a vast hospital, and nurses and surgeons were coming from the Luxembourg and Sorbonne.

That night, however, orders arrived to transport the wounded to the Luxembourg, and, amid the confusion of passing cavalry, the crush of

ambulances, the endless processions of stretchers, the throngs of nurses, priests and soldiers, the wounded were carried out once more to their straw-wadded wagons. It was snowing heavily; across the lurid flames from the torches the flakes fell thickly, covering the blankets of the wounded and the cloaks of nurses. The whole quarter echoed with the noise of departure; from every street the wailing of the sick, the groaning of the stricken, the sharp, nervous orders of the surgeons rose and mingled in one monotonous plaint. At length, when the house was empty, and the last stretcher had passed out to join the torchlit procession in the snow, Hildé sat down on the sofa and buried her head in Yolette's arms. Her tears were tears of sheer physical weakness, for she had eaten nothing since the night before, saving every scrap for the wounded in spite of Bourke's protestations.

And now, because the wounded had needed so much, Bourke found his cellar empty. He had sent Red Riding Hood to procure a ration card, and that night they ate the government rations for the first time.

Yolette tried to make light of it, saying that the soup was good, and that she did not believe it could be anything but beef broth. Hildé and Bourke ate their portions and swallowed the coarse lumps of black bread, too tired to care what they were eating.

"This can't last long," said Bourke; "the siege will end one way or another." He looked anxiously at Yolette as he spoke. Her forced gaiety was heart-breaking. What in the world was he to do? His money was gone; the last tin of provisions had been given to the wounded.

"Who cares?" said Yolette, lightly; "if the army eat horse surely we can eat it. Shame on you, Cecil—you, a great, strong man! What would Monsieur Harewood say?"

"Jim is probably not dining on horse," said Bourke, cheerfully. "Ten to one he's in Bordeaux, living like a prince and wondering how long we Parisians are going to stand it."

"I know," said Hildé, flushing, "that if he could come back he would come."

"Of course he would," said Bourke, "He'll come the minute the

gates are opened, anyway. It won't be long now, one way or the other."

"There is but one way," said Hildé, gravely.

"Of course—of course we must win. I don't mean to say that the city will surrender," said Bourke, hastily.

"The Governor of Paris has promised not to surrender," announced Red Riding Hood, as though that settled the matter for ever.

After a moment Yolette began; "Have you noticed that the cannonade grows louder every evening? I have thought that perhaps the Germans are getting nearer the forts of the south. To-day I could see smoke all along the Meudon hills."

Bourke said nothing. He knew that, to the astonishment of the government, the Germans had suddenly unmasked a siege battery, and were pounding the barracks of Issy to powder.

"I have been thinking," he said, after a moment, "that perhaps we had better move this week. In fact, I have already engaged three rooms for us in the rue Serpente."

Yolette looked at him in amazement.

"It is well to be prepared," he continued, with a smile. "Our ramparts here are not far from the southern forts, and, in the event of the Prussians establishing siege batteries, they might take it into their heads to send their big shells sailing over the forts to our own ramparts!"

"And if Monsieur Harewood returns?" said Hildé, faintly.

"He'd rather find our house in ruins than its tenants blown to pieces—wouldn't he?" smiled Bourke. "Anyway, this house is not the place for you at present."

Hildé said nothing; Yolette leaned across the table and began a low murmured conversation with Bourke that only ended when Red Riding Hood woke up from the sofa and began to whimper with the cold.

The next morning Bourke went to the house in the rue Serpente, taking a man to carry his personal luggage. By afternoon Yolette's and Hildé's slender wardrobes were deposited in the furnished rooms at 19 rue Serpente, and, in the tiny kitchen, Red Riding Hood was installed

on a cot.

It was the fourth of January; on the fifth they were to take possession, and the house on the ramparts was to remain closed until the end of the siege of Paris.

All day long Yolette and Hildé were busy with the furniture and bedding. They dusted and aired the familiar rooms, packed table linen and plated-ware away, arranged the kitchen dishes, locked and bolted the garden doors and windows, and closed the shutters.

There had been a meagre distribution of rations that day. Bourke had no money to buy food, and there was nothing to do but wait for the morrow.

As they sat there by the dining-room windows late in the afternoon, Yolette thought of that afternoon when Bourke had told her that he loved her. He was sitting now, just as he had sat that day—the day that seemed already years away. Bourke raised his head.

“Are you thinking of it too?” he asked gently.

“Yes, Cecil.”

Hildé rose and slipped away to her own silent chamber. The azure-mantled faïence Sainte looked down at her with the same complacent smile on her china face, the rosary hung beneath. For the last time, she knelt and prayed for the man she loved—for his return if living—for his forgiveness if dead. Her eyes filled, her hot head swam; she sank back against the bed in a passion of weeping, her hands clasped over her head.

Through the evening clouds the setting sun gleamed for an instant, a long red ray stole into the room. She rose to her knees and looked out at the clouds, where, for the first time in so many days, the sun glittered. As she looked, a speck grew before her eyes, nearer, nearer, slanting downward, seeming to strike her window. She sprang up. A white pigeon fluttered at the pane—a tired, frightened little thing that let her take it in her hands and smooth it, and murmur to it senseless, pitiful words. Under one wing, fastened to a quill, was the message for the Governor of Paris. She touched the quill with hesitating fingers, and, finding it secure, folded back the pigeon’s wings and warmed it

in her breast. Then, knowing it was rested and ready to resume its journey, she kissed the little feathered head and let it go. The bird rose high in the air, circled twice, then slanted westward and was lost in the cannon haze drifting in from the distant forts.

An hour later the Governor of Paris knew that the Army of the East had been annihilated.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BOMBARDMENT.

On the fifth of January, at seven minutes after five in the afternoon, the first shell fell in Paris. The projectile entered the city a little northeast from the fort of Vanves, and plunged into the street, exploding with frightful force. A moment later the ominous quaver of another shell was heard from the Porte Rouge. The huge projectile seemed to hang above the rue d'Ypres, growing larger and larger as it neared the street. Suddenly it exploded, sweeping the rooftops with a hail of iron fragments, wrecking chimneys and tiles, and showering the street with shattered slates.

An old woman ran shrieking along the sidewalk, her grey hair dripping with blood, a cannonier on the ramparts lay writhing beside the Prophet. The artillerymen recovered from their amazement, and swung the great gun southwest. A clap of thunder shook the bastions, a white cloud, ever spreading, wrapped the Prophet. But again came the terrifying shriek of a shell, nearer, nearer—then the street trembled with its impact, and the houses rocked and reeled to their foundations as the Prophet thundered its reply.

The forts of the south were flaming and blazing from every embrasure; the batteries, the redoubts, the southern bastions of the fortifications were covered with smoke; but still into the city plunged the Prussian shells, blowing houses to ruins, setting fire to roofs, exploding in the streets, on the sidewalks, on bridges and quays, squares and boulevards, hurling death and destruction to the four quarters of the city. Three little children, crossing the rue Malaise, were blown to atoms; a woman running for shelter to the Prince Murat barracks was disembowelled in the rue d'Ypres. A convent was struck repeatedly, two shells entered a hospital and tore the helpless wounded to shreds, another killed a poor American student in his room in the rue de Seine. Faster and faster came the shells; night added to the horror of the scene; the darkness was lighted by the flames of

burning houses. The uproar of the forts, the scream and hiss of shells, the deafening explosions of the cannon blended in a tumult indescribably frightful. At moments, in the brief lulls of the uproar, the iron knelling of the tocsin was heard, the fainter booming of drums calling to arms, the distant rush of artillery, galloping pell-mell to the bastions.

In the rue Serpente, Hildé and Yolette crouched, half dead with terror. A shell had fallen at the corner of the street and had torn a café to pieces. Bourke had been away since early noon, and Yolette's fright and anxiety for him drove Hildé to forget her own fear.

In that dark, narrow street, with its rows of ancient houses, women and children, frantic, shrieking, dishevelled, ran hither and thither to escape the shells. Some shouted, "The other side of the river! Save yourselves!" Others ran back into the tall crumbling houses to cower on the worm-eaten stairs or crawl into the cellars.

"We must go to the cellar," repeated Hildé, with white lips. "Yolette, everybody is going to the cellar."

"I cannot—I will not stir until he comes back," whispered Yolette. "Go to the cellar if you wish."

Shell after shell, moaning, whistling, flew high overhead. The air hummed with the quaver, the windows vibrated. There came a terrific report from the corner of the street, a house bulged outward, falling slowly amid the crash and crackle of wooden beams. A heap of plaster choked the street; some woodwork afire lighted up the mass of lime and bricks under which something writhed feebly—a man perhaps.

Red Riding Hood knelt clinging to Hildé's skirt in an agony of fright. The child was still in her night gown, and her little limbs, numb with cold, quivered.

Somebody on the stairs cried out: "The roof is on fire!" Another rushed screaming to the cellar.

"Come!" murmured Hildé, "we cannot stay; Yolette—we shall be burned if we stay—O, come, come!"

"Not to the cellar!" cried Yolette. "What are you doing—the house will burn over you!" They were on the stairs now, Hildé dragging the

child by the hand, Yolette following and trying to make herself heard in the din.

“Don’t go into the street!” she cried again.

“We can’t stay in the house!” panted Hildé, desperately.

“Go back! Go back!” shouted a crowd of soldiers, who came stampeding through the street and poured into the houses: “The cellars are safe. Go to the cellars!”

They pushed past the doorway, motioning Hildé to follow. She shrank against the doorpost, holding tight to Yolette and Red Riding Hood.

The street outside was ruddy with the glare of burning houses; the shells streamed high overhead toward the Panthéon now, falling beyond the rue Serpente, some in the boulevard Saint Michel, some on the Sorbonne, many on the Val-de-Grâce and a few even in the river. The fire of the Prussian guns shifted capriciously; now the Montparnasse quarter was covered with projectiles, now the Luxembourg, now the Latin quarter. But always the shells streamed thickest toward the hospitals, the barracks, the churches, palaces and great public buildings.

As the shells ceased falling in the rue Serpente, the people crept from the cellars, the soldiers of the Garde Mobile slunk off, and a company of firemen came up on a run, dragging their hand machine. Bands of skulking vagrants prowled through the street, half bold, half timid, peering into doorways, hanging about shell-wrecked houses, shoving, prying, insulting women.

One of these ruffians entered the hallway where Hildé stood, and started to ascend the stairs, but, evidently considering the shabby house not worth his attention, turned and stood hesitatingly in the full glare of a burning house.

“Mademoiselle Hildé,” whispered Red Riding Hood, “Look! Look!” At the same moment the vagabond saw Hildé, and shrank back against the wall.

It was the Mouse.

Hildé sprang to the shaky stairs and seized the Mouse by his

ragged sleeve. That startled young ruffian suffered himself to be dragged up the stairs and into the little apartment, now brightly illuminated by the flames from the burning house on the corner. Yolette and Red Riding Hood followed.

“Now,” muttered Hildé, breathless, “tell me where he is? What have you done with him?” She stood before the Mouse, with flashing eyes and little fists clenched, repeating harshly, “You swore to me that you would be with him, that you would keep him from harm! You slunk out of the house with that promise to me—and I let you go—I promised to say nothing to the others. What have you done with him?”

“He’s been shot,” gasped the Mouse, “he was——”

“Shot!” whispered Hildé.

“He isn’t dead,” growled the Mouse. “I came to find Monsieur Bourke, but when I went to the rue d’Ypres you all had decamped. Then,” he continued, with a cringing gesture, “I started to look—and quite by accident, mademoiselle, I met some friends—but I was not stealing!” he whined, glancing furtively around, “no, indeed, I stole nothing as the others did,—you will tell Monsieur Bourke that! You will tell Monsieur Bourke I was not pillaging houses.”

“Where is Monsieur Harewood?” interrupted Hildé.

“I was going to tell you,” said the Mouse, submissively. “I was going to tell mademoiselle that Monsieur Harewood is in the casemates of the Nanterre fort—very sick since they cut the bullet out. And it is quite true I was not pillaging. God is my witness. I have never stolen a pin.”

He looked obliquely at Yolette, snivelled a little, hitched his tattered trousers and sniffed.

Twice Hildé strove to speak, but her colourless lips scarcely moved. Yolette put one arm around her and turned to the Mouse.

“What message have you for Monsieur Bourke?” she asked. “Did Monsieur Harewood not send a message?”

“Yes,” said the Mouse. “He wants to see him. It was not until last night that those sacré Prussians gave me a chance to leave the fort. We

have been there since Le Bourget, when Monsieur was shot as he left the church.”

He did not add that he had half carried, half dragged Harewood across the Mollette under a frenzied fusilade from the Prussian pickets. He was a coward as cowards go; his very ferocity proved it. Yet he had instinctively clung to Harewood, when a bullet through the leg knocked him sprawling; he had hauled him out of the Prussian fire much as a panther hauls its young from a common danger, with no reason in the world that human minds could fathom, totally unconscious that he deserved credit. The Mouse had received Harewood's thanks with ennui, if not suspicion, and now it never occurred to him to say that he had saved Harewood's life, although, like most criminals, he was a keen appreciator of the dramatic. No—what occupied the meagre brain of the Mouse was the fear that Bourke might return and learn from Hildé and Yolette that he, the Mouse, had been looting.

He looked sideways at Yolette, who was leading Hildé to the bedroom. He listened stupidly to the paroxysms of grief when Hildé flung herself on the bed. That was all very confusing, but what would Bourke say? He looked down at his blackened hands, at the bludgeon still gripped in one bleeding fist, evidences of his share in the riotous night's work.

“Mince! je me sauve!” he blurted out, and at the same moment he saw Red Riding Hood staring at him from the sofa.

“What are you making eyes at—hein!” he demanded sullenly. “Perhaps you are going to say I was pillaging houses!”

The child, seized with a fit of shivering, cowered against the wall, drawing her feet in under her nightdress.

The Mouse regarded her fiercely, twirling his bludgeon between his blackened fingers. Then, apparently satisfied that she was too terrified to understand, he pulled his cap over his sightless eye, put the bludgeon into his pocket, and started toward the door. Before he went out he hesitated. The sight of the frightened child seemed to exercise a certain fascination for him. He looked back, frowning, just to see

whether it would frighten her a little more. It did; but, strangely, enough, her fear gave him no gratification.

“Voyons, petite, do I scare you?” he asked, curiously.

“Yes,” whispered the child. A curious sensation, an unaccustomed thrill, something that had never before come over him, sent the blood tingling in the Mouse’s large ears. He peered at the child narrowly.

“Don’t look like that,” he said, “for I ain’t going to hurt you.”

The child was silent.

“You’re cold,” said the Mouse, awkwardly. “Go to bed.”

“I’m afraid,” she whispered.

“Of me?” asked the Mouse, with a strange sinking of the heart.

“Yes; and the shells.”

“I’ll knock the head off any pig of a Prussian who harms you,” said the Mouse, waving his club. “You never mind the shells, they won’t hurt you. Now are you afraid of me, little one?”

“No,” sighed the child. A glow of pleasure suffused the Mouse’s ears again. Then he felt ashamed, then he looked at the child, then he wondered why he should take pleasure in telling the little thing not to be afraid. For a while they contemplated each other in silence; finally the child said: “When you were in the rue d’Ypres, I used to make you split wood. Do you remember?”

“Yes,” said the Mouse, much gratified.

“And you were afraid of the lion,” pursued Red Riding Hood.

“Dame,” muttered the Mouse, “I am afraid yet.”

The child laughed—such a sad, thin little laugh. The Mouse, to please her, made an awful grimace and winked with his sightless eye.

“Will you stay with us now?” asked the child.

The innocent question completely upset the Mouse; the idea that he was wanted anywhere, the sensation of protecting anything, was so new, so utterly astonishing, that even his habitual suspicion was carried away in the overwhelming novelty of the proposition.

Red Riding Hood rose from the sofa, went to the bed and climbed in, then turned gravely to the Mouse.

“Don’t let anything harm us,” she said. “Good-night.”

For a long time the Mouse stood and stared at the pale little face on the pillow. There were blue circles under the closed eyes; the clustering black hair cast shadows over the hollow temples. The exhaustion from hunger, fatigue and fright brought sleep to tired lids. Even when Yolette and Hildé came in the child did not wake.

"I am going to stay," said the Mouse sullenly; "if the shells come the little girl will be frightened."

As he spoke he furtively felt for some purloined silver forks that filled one pocket, found them still there, glanced maliciously at Yolette, and coughed gently.

"Where is the Nanterre fort?" asked Hildé, faintly.

The Mouse explained in a weird whisper, apparently much relieved that nobody offered to examine his pockets.

"Is he all alone?" said Hildé.

"Parbleu! There's not much society in the casemates," observed the Mouse—"no, nor many surgeons to spare. I'm going back to him tomorrow." He said it indifferently; he might have added that he was going at the risk of his life, but risks were too common at that time to occupy the attention of even such a coward as the Mouse. Wherever he went there were shells and bullets and bayonets now, and it mattered little whether they were French or Prussian.

He boldly rattled the silver forks in his pocket, leered, pulled his cap lower, for the reflection of the flames annoyed him, and said:

"A la guerre comme, à la guerre, mesdames."

At the same moment hurried steps sounded on the landing. Yolette opened the door and Bourke entered.

When he saw Yolette and Hildé, he could not speak at first.

"Don't, don't," sobbed Yolette; "we are all safe—all of us. It was you that I feared for. O, if you knew! if you knew!"

"I was in the rue d'Ypres," stammered Bourke. "The shells rained on the ramparts, and I ran to the Prince Murat barracks. I never dreamed they were shelling this part of the city until somebody said the Luxembourg had been struck. Then I came. Yolette, look at me! Good God, what a fool I was!"

She clung around his neck, smiling and weeping, telling him she would never again let him go away. Hildé was silent. The Mouse fidgetted by the door. The child slept.

Then Hildé spoke of Harewood, of his message sent by the Mouse. Yolette cried out that she could not let Cecil go away again, and Bourke, devoured by anxiety, questioned the Mouse until that young bandit's mind was a hopeless chaos.

"You can't ask him to go, Hildé," implored her sister. "O, how can you ask Cecil to go to the forts, when you know what they are doing out there. I can't let him go—I cannot!"

"If Jim is not in danger, I can go out with the next escort," said Bourke gravely. "If he is, then I must go at once."

The Mouse was vague; he didn't know what might happen since they cut out the bullet. His habitual distrust of doctors, of science in all its branches, made it plain to Bourke that there was nothing accurate to be learned from him.

The Mouse lingered a minute or two, watching the sleeping child in the bed. Bourke told him he might go, and he went, as a dismissed dog goes, apologetically, half resentful, half conciliatory, clutching the forks in his pocket with dirty fingers. Hildé turned and went into her room, closing the door behind her.

"I must sleep with the child," said Yolette; "she wakes in the night and trembles so I almost fear she may die of fright. Cecil, is there any danger now from the shells?"

"I don't know," he said. "I will lie down in the kitchen. If they bombard the quarter again we must go to the cellar. To-morrow I am going to take you and Hildé and Red Riding Hood to the American Minister. And, my darling, before we go, you must marry me."

"Marry—now!" faltered Yolette.

"Otherwise the American Minister cannot protect you. If you are my wife, he is bound to do so. I can't stand this sort of thing; the city has gone distracted; nobody is safe outside an embassy. The Prussians must respect our flag, dear, and anarchists and kindred ruffians dare not enter the Legation. Shall I tell you what has happened in the rue

d'Ypres? A gang of communists, cutthroats and thieves have broken open our house and are carousing in the cellar with our red wine. Stauffer, Mortier and Buckhurst are there, and they will do us mischief if they have a chance."

He drew her head down to his shoulder.

"Will you marry me to-morrow, Yolette?" he asked, "so that I can leave you safe at the Legation and go to my friend?"

"Yes," she whispered, then threw both arms about him in a passion of tenderness and fear.

CHAPTER XXVII.

AN UNDERGROUND AFFAIR.

When the Mouse left the rue Serpente, the bombardment had shifted to the southern forts, and the southeast secteurs of the fortifications were covered with exploding shells. As he slunk across the city he could hear the fracas of the distant bombardment, and he gave the danger zone wide berth. His mind was preoccupied by two problems, how to conceal his silver forks and how to get back to the Nanterre fort.

The second problem could wait till morning, the first needed serious study. He already possessed one burrow. It was in the cellar of the house in the rue d'Ypres. For, while doing menial service for Bourke and Harewood, he had managed to abstract booty from neighbouring windows—a spoon here, a silk handkerchief there—nothing much, but still a modest little heap of plunder, which he had concealed in the cellar of the house on the ramparts. Therefore, his first instinct led him back to the rue d'Ypres, where, if the cachette in the cellar remained undisturbed, he could further avail himself of it by depositing the forks with the rest of the loot.

“Thrift,” muttered the Mouse, “cannot be too early acquired. Sapristi! One must live—in this world of bandits!”

As he crossed the boulevard Montparnasse he saw that the railroad station was on fire. For a moment he hesitated—there might be fine pickings yonder—but prudence prevailed, and he shambling on, scanning the passers-by with crafty face half averted, bludgeon swinging, cap over one eye, the incarnation of communism militant. Affrighted citizens gave him room, turned and looked after him as though in him they saw the symbol of all that was secret and dreadful in the city—the embodied shape of anarchy—the ominous prophet of revolution.

He passed on, swaggering when prudent, cringing when the sentries of the guard, pacing the devastated streets, halted to look after

him, lanterns raised. At such moments he cursed them as loud as he dared; sometimes, when far enough away, he would insult them with gestures and epithets, gratifying to his vanity because of the slight risk such amusement entailed. He rattled the forks in his pocket as he walked; once or twice he broke into song—a doggerel verse or two of some sentimental faubourg ditty that attracted him, because, like criminals of his type, he adored sentiment—in song. He thought of Harewood lying in the casemates of the Nanterre fort. Would he live or die? His wound had turned so bad that the surgeons began to look at him in that musing way that even the dying understand.

The Mouse scratched his ear; dead or alive he must find his way back to Harewood; for the necessity that he felt for Harewood's company left him restless as a lost cur.

He thought often of Red Riding Hood. She was so small and thin and so afraid of him that he wondered why he thought of her at all. In his burrow he had buried an infant's silver cup. This he decided to present to Red Riding Hood when he could do so without fear of aspersions on his honesty. He chuckled as he thought how it would please the child—she would look at him with those big eyes—she would perhaps smile—*Nom de Dieu*—what a droll young one! And so he came to the house on the ramparts in the rue d'Ypres.

The cellar of the house was reached from the garden through a flight of stone steps. The heavy slab that closed the manhole had no padlock.

The Mouse, on his hands and knees, groped about in the dark, stumbling among dead weeds and broken cucumber frames, puffing and cursing, until, without any warning, he almost fell into the manhole itself. Startled, alert, he crouched breathless by the slab on the grass. Somebody had removed it; somebody, then, was in the cellar!

Stealthily he crawled into the manhole, and descended the first three steps. His worn shoes made no noise; he crept three steps further.

At the end of the cellar, in the full light of a lantern on the floor, sat three men. Two of them wore the uniforms of officers of the carbiniers;

the third was in civilian dress. Their voices were indistinct, but their features were not, and the Mouse fairly bristled as he recognised them. They were Stauffer, Mortier and Buckhurst.

The first thought of the Mouse was instinctively personal. They had come to rob him of his plunder! It was that, rather than curiosity, that led him to creep toward them, nearer, nearer, wriggle behind a barrel, and crawl so close that, with outstretched arm, he could have stabbed Mortier—if Mortier had been alone.

Buckhurst, pale-faced, calm, bent his colourless eyes on Mortier, and spoke in the passionless voice that always struck a chill to the Mouse's marrow:

"Monsieur Mortier, you misunderstand me. I am not in this city for my health, nor am I here to preach the Commune. There is but one thing I am looking for—money—and I don't care how I get it or where I get it. Prussian thalers or French francs, it's all one to me."

Mortier raised his hideous head and fixed his little green eyes on the bloodless face before him.

"One minute," said Buckhurst, "then I've finished. Not to waste words, the situation is this: Captain Stauffer has arranged to open the Nanterre fort to the Prussians; I have agreed to run a tunnel from this cellar, under the street, to the bastion where the Prophet is—I think it's bastion No. 73. Powder exploded in the tunnel opens a breach in the ramparts, directly behind the Nanterre fort. Do you comprehend?"

He paused a moment, then added: "For this we divide 500,000 thalers."

Stauffer began to speak eagerly, his weak face lighting up as he proceeded.

"It was Speyer's plan; he had it in view before war was declared last July. He and I lodged in this house and planned it all out—even to excavating the tunnel to bastion No. 73—damn the man who knocked him on the head. But we can do it alone—all we want of you is to help with the tunnel. It will be worth your while—really it will!"

Mortier's eyes seemed to grow incandescent; the great veins swelled out on his bald dome-shaped head, his throat, under the red

flannel rags, moved convulsively.

As he spoke he rose. Buckhurst, with the easy grace of a panther, rose, too. Stauffer lumbered to his feet and began to speak again, but Mortier silenced him and turned on Buckhurst like a wild beast.

"I refuse!" he shouted. "I am an anarchist, not a traitor! I kill, I destroy, I burn. I murder if necessary, but I will not betray—no, not for all the thalers in the kingdom of Prussia!"

His eyes glittered with the light of insanity. His misshapen hands menaced Buckhurst.

"Judas!" he shrieked. "The Commune shall rise and live to judge you! Cursed son of a free people! Renegade! Thief!"

There was a flash, a report, and Mortier clapped his hands to his face, which the blood suddenly covered. The next moment he was at Buckhurst's throat, bore him down, twined him closer in his long, ape-like arms, and fastened his teeth in his throat; and Buckhurst shot him again and again, through the body. They swayed and fell together, the deadly light died in Buckhurst's glazing eyes. After a minute neither moved again.

Stauffer had gone, fleeing like one distracted, when the Mouse crawled out into the lantern light and gazed down at the dead.

Presently he picked up the lantern, grubbed a hole in the ground, deposited his forks with the rest of his booty, rose, glanced at the dead again, and picked up the lantern. He spat on the ground—for Buckhurst had tricked him once—so he insulted the corpse with a contemptuous gesture and went out, swinging his lantern and sneering.

"Give up the Nanterre fort, eh?" he repeated, mimicking Stauffer's effeminate voice: "O, ma sœur! O, la la! À nous deux, monsieur pipelet—à demain!"

The Prophet was firing as the Mouse left the city by the Porte Rouge; he looked up at the great cannon and mocked it: "Tiens! boum! boum! boum! O, la la! O, Seigneur Dieu!—que la guerre est ridicule tout d'même!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE NIGHT OF ATONEMENT.

That night, the zone of bombardment having shifted far to the southwest, Bourke went to the American Legation. It was eleven o'clock when he returned, thoroughly discouraged. He had seen the Minister, but that official could do nothing to protect Yolette and Hildé against the shell-fire. There was no room at the Legation. It was not even certain that the Legation itself would be safe, although the Minister, in some heat, denounced those responsible for the bombardment, and promised to protest against the destruction of foreign consulates and embassies. So Bourke came back to the rue Serpente, worried and anxious, for it was not possible for him to go to the Nanterre fort, and leave Yolette and Hildé alone, without the protection of responsible people. He and Yolette sat up late into the night, discussing the situation. Hildé lay on the bed, listening, perhaps, but she offered no suggestions. About midnight Red Riding Hood awoke, sobbing from hunger, and Yolette comforted the child, saying good-night to Bourke, and kissing her sister tenderly.

"Listen, Hildé," she said; "Cecil is going to the Nanterre fort, so you must not be so sad, my darling. Look up at me, little sister. I am not selfish and heartless, after all. Cecil must go."

"I will go as soon as you and Hildé are in safe quarters," began Bourke; but Hildé sat up on the bed and forbade him to go. "It is enough that one life is in danger," she said; "your place is here, with Yolette. You can do nothing for him; he is in the casemates and under medical attendance. What could you do?"

"I shall go when I see you and Yolette secure," repeated Bourke.

"Secure? How?" asked Hildé bitterly. "Your embassy has no room for us; and do you think Monsieur Bismarck will order his cannoniers to respect any part of the city? The people in the street say that convents and hospitals have been struck repeatedly. Have the Prussians not sent their shells into the crowded streets of the poor?"

It was the first time that Yolette had ever heard Hildé speak with bitterness. Bourke, too, looked at her sharply, wondering at the change in the gentle reserved girl he had known.

“No,” continued Hildé rapidly, “no! no! no!—the Prussians spare neither young nor old, man nor woman! You cannot go, Cecil; Yolette needs you now, if ever.”

She rose, putting her arms around Yolette, saying: “Dearest, he must not go to the Nanterre fort. It is wrong for him to leave you; it is wrong for him to expose his life.”

“Confound it!” said Bourke, helplessly, “I’d go to him if he were at the south pole, but I can’t leave Yolette in danger; my skin is no longer my own to risk.”

“Nor was his,” said Hildé, gravely; and she went into her own room and closed the door.

The night was bitter cold; the frost covered the window-panes with moss-like tracery, silvered by a pale radiance from without. And Hildé, opening the window, looked off over the dark city and saw the midnight heavens, blazing with stars. Her cheeks were burning now; the icy air seemed grateful. After a little she closed the window, fearing the cold might harm the others. But there was a short ladder in the hallway, leading to the scuttle, and she found it and climbed up and out onto the roof. Her hot cheeks and aching eyes grew no cooler in the freezing wind. She even threw back her shawl and bared her white throat.

The heavens were resplendent; the tremendous sky-vault, far arching, fathomless, was dusted with myriads of stars, among which, deep set, the splendid planets blazed, and the gigantic constellations traced their signs in arcs and angles and gem-set circles that spanned the diamond-showered heavens from horizon to horizon.

Spire on spire the city towered, domed, battlemented, magnificent in the starlight—the beautiful, sinful city, whose lacelike spires and slender pinnacles rose from squares and streets where men lay dying by the score for lack of bread. There was starlight on the bridges, on the quays, on the carved façades of palaces, on the strange towers of

Saint Sulpice.

The jewelled spire of the Sainte Chapelle, the silvery dome of the Invalides, the grotesque gothic tower of Saint Jacques, loomed distinctly from the endless mass of house and palace, monument and church. In the east an enormous bulk detached itself against the sky—the Panthéon! In the north the stupendous twin towers of Nôtre Dame dominated the shadow shapes of roof and chimney. And, through the world of shade and shadowy silhouette, wound the star-tinted, ghostly river—a phantom tide spanned by a score of fairy bridges, impalpable, vague, ghostly as their own reflections in the frozen, ice-bound stream.

And now, far beyond the walls, Hildé could see the forts. The tiny flashes ran from east to west, then south, then back again, a living chain of sparks. The cannons' solid thunder rolled and surged majestically, wave after wave, harmonious, interminable. On the heights of Meudon, Clamart and Châtillon the flicker of the Prussian guns ran parallel to the flashes from the forts of the south and west; their shells were falling on the Point du Jour.

Hildé could see the bright reflections of fires along the frozen river, the red smoke, the nearer blast from the great guns on the ramparts. Overhead raced the shells, streaming by with kindling wakes of sparks dropping and fading one by one. Then, from Mont-Valérien the rockets towered to the zenith and drifted and faded while the Point du Jour answered, rocket on rocket, and the bastions re-echoed with the double thunder of the shotted guns.

Could that be real war?—this Venetian fête of coloured fires, rockets, illuminations, dull reports? Hark! The jar of a great iron bell came quavering over the city. The faint rattle of drums broke out across the river—the tocsin and the alarm! Hildé did not hear them. She was talking to herself, under her breath, counting the forts on her slender fingers: Issy, Vanves, Mont-Valérien, Saint Denis. O, then there must lie the Nanterre fort—there where the darkness is shot with streak after streak of flame! At last she knew.

The fort was silent now, but within her breast a voice spoke. And she listened, leaning from the iron railing. She knew that God's justice

was passing—passing in fire through the heavens above the city—the fair city, brought low in shame. For the night of atonement was at hand.

Atonement! The sad knell rang through her brain, ominous, sonorous and the solemn tocsin bore it on, intoning atonement, atonement!

At first she wept, leaning on the icy parapet; for the justice of God is a fearful thing, and she was young. But her tears froze on her cheeks, and she went down through the house, and out, and far into the city to the gates. They would not let her pass. She came back through the blind, dead avenues, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, until, at her own door, she paused, her hand on the wall, her listless eyes closed. It was dawn. Red Riding Hood came out with a covered basket, to take her place in the line at the butcher's.

Hildé smiled when she saw her, and, stooping, kissed the child. "Tell them I have gone to the Nanterre fort," she said.

So she went away into the city, to the gates again, where cavalry were passing. And she passed out among the horses and the troopers. Nobody told her the road. At a crossway, in the centre of a dismantled hamlet, the stupid, freezing troopers wheeled to the west. Hildé kept on, her white face fixed on the road. The fiery dawn came up behind the Fortress of the East, the bombardment ceased as the sun appeared, but from the forts the smoke rifts fled away and the guns flashed steadily, pounding the heights of Châtillon and the parapets of Saint Cloud, where the sullen Prussian artillery lay breathless, waiting for the night again to strike. The frozen road seemed endless. The devastated, treeless fields stretched flat on either hand. To Hildé they seemed burning with the glitter of the sun, kindling each ice-crystal to a living coal. Her tired, hot eyes drooped, her feet dragged, but the fever in her breast gave her no rest, and she moved on, unconscious of her exhaustion.

There were men who called to her at times; she saw they were soldiers, but she neither heard nor answered their hoarse hails. Perhaps the pickets thought she was some crazed, starved young thing whose

suffering had driven her from the doomed city; perhaps they took her for a nurse, for she still wore the grey wool and the red-cross band above her elbow.

A squad of Franc-tireurs, outside the outposts, called to her to go back. She did not even raise her head. A peasant, crouched before a fire in a ditch by the roadside, warned her that Uhlans had been there the night before. She looked at him and passed on.

There was a shell of a blackened village beyond her—a mere hamlet, charred, crumbling, half-hidden in the snow. She entered the main street, dragging her tired little feet over burnt timbers and piles of brick and stone. Twice she stumbled to her knees, but she rose and went on, her grey skirt powdered with snow. There was a man in the street, walking ahead—a soldier. He heard her and waited for her. It was some minutes after he had dropped alongside that she heard him talking, but even then she did not look at him until he took hold of her arm, still talking and grimacing.

The man was Stauffer. He still had her arm; she wrenched it away and moved faster, but he followed and held her back. From sheer weakness she fell to her knees; then she hid her face in her hands, crying as though her heart would break. She could scarcely rise again; her head swam and the glare on the snow sickened her.

She noticed there were two men beside her now; how the other came she did not know, but she saw, with no surprise, that one of them was the Mouse. He had the other man by the arm and was leading him back toward Paris. “Tiens!” said the Mouse; “Captain Stauffer—here, don’t run away—Captain Stauffer, you are a little rough with ladies—come, now, admit you are a little ardent—eh, captain?”

Stauffer turned a frightened face to the Mouse. “What are you doing?” he cried, struggling; “let go!”

“Come on,” said the Mouse amiably, “let us get around this house—so—where the lady can’t see us. It might frighten her.”

“What do you mean?” stammered Stauffer, wrenching himself free and turning toward the road again.

“Wait!” said the Mouse, barring his way. “I want to tell you

something amusing. Do you remember giving me a German gold piece to march with you and your carbiniers on the Hôtel de Ville? Bon! You said it was for plunder. You lied: it was for Monsieur Bismarck!”

Stauffer took a step backward and drew a revolver; the Mouse cleared the space between them at a single bound; there was a shriek, a flurry of snow.

The Mouse stepped back, wiping his red knife on his trousers.

“Now go and sell the Nanterre fort,” he sneered.

Stauffer, stabbed through and through, rolled in the snow, trying to rise.

“Go and sell Paris. Hurry or you’ll be late,” said the Mouse, moving off. The miserable wounded wretch dragged himself after him, calling for mercy, moaning and sobbing, praying he might not be left to freeze in the snow. He followed the Mouse on his hands and knees, agonized face raised. The Mouse hesitated, watching the writhing creature askance. Then he went back and destroyed him.

When he came up with Hildé again, he said nothing. She neither looked at him nor spoke to him, for already, over the snowy plain, her strained eyes were fixed on a low hill that rose black and solitary from the spotless level. The Nanterre fort!

The Mouse saw it, too.

Fringing smoke draped the battlements, where, from an angle hidden on the hillside, a mortar fired slowly. Other guns, concealed by the rocks in the rear of the fort, sent the smoke whirling up over the citadel, obscuring the flag flying there until a current of wind revealed it again.

On they went, on, on, and still on. The fort seemed no nearer. They crossed a dismantled railroad track covered with snow. The Mouse slipped on the twisted rails and rose swearing.

The sun beat down on the expanse of ice and snow; the reflection was intolerable. Once, far out on the plain, something dark appeared. The Mouse knew what it was, and he halted, shaking from head to foot. But the squad of Uhlans either did not see them, or else feared a shot from the gatlings on the glacis of the fort, for they disappeared

after awhile, followed by the hearty curses of the Mouse.

About noon, when the fort seemed within stone's throw, a picket hailed them from a hillock to the left.

"Volunteer nurse and attendant!" bawled the Mouse in answer to the summons.

Twenty minutes later they were climbing an icy road that wound up the hillside. Dense thickets screened it; squads of artillerymen in sleeveless sheepskin coats passed, scarcely noticing them. The road took abrupt angles. Each angle was covered by a cannon. Gatlings and mitrailleuses glimmered behind parapets jutting from the rock; long field pieces peered through abatis work on every side. Two great iron gates were passed, the sentries falling back and saluting the red cross on Hildé's sleeve. Then they turned into a level street, paved, decorated with lamps, running between solid walls of masonry. Another iron gate admitted them to a square, also paved, and faced in with barracks of grey stone, badly shattered.

"You can cross the parade," said the artilleryman on guard, pointing with his sabre. "The Prussians only bombard us at night."

"Follow," said the Mouse, briefly, and Hildé followed across the parade, where squads of soldiers were repairing the barracks, through a narrow alley, deep set between towering ramparts, into another court, down flight after flight of broad stone steps, then into an arcade, dimly lighted by lanterns and crowded with soldiers, moving about aimlessly. Just above them a cannon thundered, shaking the ground under their feet.

"We're almost there," said the Mouse, peering at Hildé's bloodless face.

He pushed open a door in the wall; a lantern lighted the darkness. There were some beds there, half obscured. Around one a screen was pulled.

"That's not it—he isn't dying," muttered the Mouse; "I think he's in that other bed."

Then he raised a whining voice:

"Monsieur!"

In the half-light a head stirred on a pillow, was raised—then came a cry, “Hildé!”

And Hildé fell beside the bed and laid her tired head in Harewood’s arms.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SONG OF THE MOUSE.

On the twenty-sixth of January, a few minutes after seven in the evening, the artillery officers on the Nanterre fort reported signals from Paris to cease firing. From Charenton to Issy, from Saint Denis to Vincennes, the signals flew; the cannonade died out at Ivry, at Romainville, at Saint Ouen; the fort of Issy, the Montrouge fort, the Fortress of the East, the battery of the Double Crown lay silent under their floating crowns of cloud. One by one the forts of the east grew quiet, the last bombs soared upward from Vanves, the last shots boomed along the Point du Jour. A deathly stillness followed; then, as the bells in the distant city tinkled midnight, a clap of thunder burst from Mont-Valérien. That was the end. Paris had surrendered.

At dawn, through a cold grey mist that sheeted the desolate plain, two Prussian Uhlans rode to the foot of the fortified hill. The sad notes of the trumpet sounded nearer and nearer; the mournful echoes started along the rocks; the drawbridge fell.

Hildé, leaning from the iron door of the bomb-proofs, saw a tall, red-whiskered Uhlan officer, blindfolded, crossing the parade conducted by four Mobiles, rifles slung. Behind this Prussian officer marched an Uhlan trumpeter, escorted by four more Mobiles. The trumpeter's eyes were also bound with a white handkerchief, his trumpet rested on his right thigh; in his left hand he bore a lance, from which drooped a white flag.

All that day she sat beside Harewood, listening to the heavy tread of troops, the hushed commands, the creak of siege-guns, swinging inward from the ramparts.

At noon, the Uhlans left, blindfolded, reconducted in silence by famine-stricken soldiers. Again the melancholy trumpet sounded the salute, then stillness fell over rampart and glacis, bastion and parapet—a quiet so profound that Hildé, lying in the chair by the bedside, heard the flapping of the flag on its iron staff above the citadel. In the

starlight she saw the sentinels standing before the magazine, the corvée winding down to the frozen reservoir, the rare lanterns dimly burning as an officer made his noiseless rounds. She leaned over the bed, listening for a while.

“Are you awake, my darling?” He stirred in his sleep and held out one hand. She took it in both her own. There was a dimly lighted lamp in a steel socket above her head. Presently she rose, still holding his hand in one of hers, and turned the wick higher.

“The crutches are finished,” she said, returning to her seat by the bed; “a Breton in the Mobiles made them for you. You must remember to thank him. He took a great deal of trouble; there was no wood—so he filed off two lance shafts, and made the armrests out of wire and leather.”

After a pause she whispered: “Jim, are you awake?”

He laid his cheek against her hand in silence.

“What is it? Are you still unhappy, you foolish boy?”

He tried to answer; his voice failed.

“O, my darling,” she said, despairingly: “how can you feel so after all that has been said?”

She stooped nearer, touching his hair with her lips.

“I have forgiven you—there was but one thing for me to forgive, for it is true that you should not have gone away; if death had come, you were not fit to die—nor I, my darling.”

She kissed his closed eyes; the lashes trembled.

“We were so much in love,” she said, “so much in love—and I knew nothing—you can never know, Jim—how I love you—and it was even then—from the very first—the same—the same adoration! And, Jim, if you had died, and although I know the dreadful end—I would not have lost the memory of one hour, one second, one look, or one caress.”

He tried to speak; he could not. Again, through his closed lids, he saw her as she had come to him, fainting, exhausted, her frozen hands seeking his. Again he lived through the days that followed, the thunder of the guns, the casemates shaking, the bitter cold, the

darkness, and she always by his bed—her every touch, her every breath, telling him of a love so pure, so infinite, that his dark heart, heavy with the bitterness of self-accusation, sank subdued under the strength of such a passion.

He thought of the long nights, the pain, the fever, the piercing chill, the hunger, all borne in silence lest he should grieve for her. He remembered all this as he lay there, his eyes closed, his temples pressing the soft curls of the girl who had done all for him—who now was to be his wife.

“Are you still unhappy,” she whispered. “Think of to-morrow. Sins are forgiven; it is in my faith.”

“In mine; you are my faith,” he said. “There is nothing but you, Hildé—nothing in heaven or earth but you and God who sent you.”

“The crutches are here, shall I get them?” asked Hildé, smiling through her tears.

He took them gravely, praising the leather armpieces, the lance shafts, the rubber ferrules. She was contented. The splints on his broken limb galled him; she aided him to sit up to relieve the numbness, and he lay back, his head resting on her breast.

“The Prussians sent a white flag this morning,” she said.

“Then it is true?” he asked, “the news from Paris?”

“Yes. Paris has surrendered.”

He was silent; she bent her head forward, sighing.

“It was a good fight,” he said, “Hunger is the victor; the Prussians are incidents.”

“The garrison leaves to-morrow,” she said; “the Prussians enter the forts at sunset. Our soldiers will take you in the ambulance; we go by the Porte Rouge. Perhaps Yolette—” She broke down and wept bitterly. He comforted her, saying that Bourke was the wisest and best man on earth, and that Yolette was safer than if she had been in the Nanterre fort. After a little she dried her eyes and reproached herself for causing him anxiety. Then, beside his bed, she said her prayers for the night, kissed him peacefully, turned out the lamp and went into the

nurses' ward to sleep, flinging herself on the iron cot, dressed as she was. As for him, he lay awake, staring into the darkness. The beauty of this young girl's soul, the sacredness of her passion, overwhelmed him. Who was he that he should share her thoughts, her sacrifices, her ideals, her innocence? Her face was always before him in all its loveliness—exquisite, spiritual. In her eyes he read the secret of that chaste unselfishness that had given all and surrendered nothing. Sleep came and went like a brief dream. It was morning; the drums were already beating in the dawn, the parade resounded with the hum of departure.

Hildé knocked and entered, faintly smiling her morning welcome. The adoration in his face dimmed her sweet eyes a little; she leaned above his pillow, her lips rested on his. That morning he was to try his crutches. When he was ready she helped him to the window—he was scarcely strong enough to stand—and he laughed and adjusted the crutches, as she steadied him to the door, where the foot artillery were passing down the winding street to the monotonous tap! tap! of a drum.

After them came the Mobiles, bugles sounding stridently in the sharp crisp air. He wished to go to the ramparts, she dreaded the bits of ice and snow, but he had his way, and she guided him across the parade and up the sanded incline to the parapets above.

The sun hung over the distant city, glittering on a million windows, gilding dome and spire and frosty river, reddening the long grey palaces, flooding quays and roofs and bridges with a hazy radiance that turned the streets to streaks of rose and pearl. A mist of amethyst veiled the heights of Châtillon. Behind it the German cannon lay, stretching from Clamart northward, then east and south and west, in one enormous iron circle, back to Fontenay aux Roses. Across the river from the fort, between Châton and Croissy, the Prussian cavalry were plainly visible, moving at a gallop over a wasted meadow. Beyond them rose the smoke of camp-fires, marking the long line of trenches eastward to Houilles.

"In Paris there is little smoke," said Hildé, sadly. "Jim, I can

scarcely wait to go. What do you suppose the shells have done to the city? Think of it! Twenty days of ceaseless bombardment, and my sister there—”

“There was more risk in the fort here,” said Harewood; “we have been under fire longer. It has pounded the barracks to powder, but you yourself know that we have not lost many killed.”

He continued, “The Mouse has not reappeared, has he, dearest?” Hildé shook her head.

“Well,” said Harewood, “he’s in Paris again, unless he was shot outside the lower parapets. Did he say nothing about going, Hildé?”

“No, Jim. He hung around the casemates for a week. Then an officer complained of missing his gold watch, and asked me whether the Mouse was your servant. The Mouse was listening—I saw him behind the door. That night a Mobile lost some money and went about the parade swearing terribly. The shells were falling, striking the barracks every minute, but the Mobile didn’t notice them and kept on swearing that the Mouse had taken his money. In the morning the Mouse had vanished.”

“He’s a strange beast,” mused Harewood. “I know less about him than I did the first night I saw him. Yet Paris is full of such mice—and I have seen many.”

Hildé sat down on the parapet and looked out over Paris. Harewood watched her. Care and suffering had not narrowed the lovely oval of her face; her eyes were clear and sweet; the rounded chin, the delicate straight nose had not changed. Trouble had once effaced a certain child-like beauty in the lips and eyes; trouble perhaps brought it back, yet now that unconscious innocence—the frail bloom of childhood, was strengthened by something more subtle, more exquisite. A maid is always a child until knowledge of sorrow comes to make her a woman.

A sparrow, the first they had seen for many a month, alighted in the snow under the muzzle of a big gun.

“Hildé, do you remember when we freed your birds?” he asked.

“Yes, Jim.”

After a pause he said wistfully: "How young we were—in those days."

"Yes," she said, "we were very young."

Her serious, sweet eyes met his; her hand stole across the parapet and nestled in his. Some soldiers came through the snow, bearing a dead man on a stretcher. As they passed the cannon, the sparrow fluttered up, high overhead, flying across the gulf to Paris.

"To-night we will follow it," she murmured. "O, Jim, I am so tired of the snow! I am so tired of winter and whiteness and death."

"You shall see the spring come in the Breton forests," he said. "You shall see miles of primroses and pink-thorn, you shall see shaded glades purple with violets, and everywhere young leaves, young blossoms—a young world, Hildé, and all for us."

"A young world," she sighed; "that is what I love—green leaves, sunlight, and youth—everywhere youth. It is kinder——"

"Youth is kinder——" he repeated.

The clock in the citadel struck heavily; the flag on the iron pole fluttered to the ground.

"The garrison is going," said Hildé. "Do you think they will remember us? They promised me two places in an ambulance."

"Look at the high-road below," said Harewood; "see the carriages and wagons coming out from Paris. That is the Nanterre road. It leads to the gates of the north."

They leaned over together, watching the sunshine flashing on polished equipages, on wheels and lamps and harness trappings. The road from Paris was full of them; it was like a winter day in the Bois de Boulogne, save that the horses moved without spirit, and there were many shabby carts and wagons intermingled with the carriages.

As the procession of vehicles approached the base of the hill the coachmen and drivers, swathed in furs, became visible; and, after a while, Hildé could hear, far below the fortress walls, the tinkle of chain and hoof and wheel.

"Parents coming to the fort to look for their sons," said Harewood, soberly.

“Sweethearts, perhaps, for their lovers,” said Hildé.

On they came, rich and poor, the banker from his home in the Parc Monceau, the butcher from the long-closed Halles, the mother from the noble Faubourg, the mother from the “Faubourg Infect,” patrician and plebeian, sister and brother—and some who were childless and did not know it, and some who were widows and wore, as yet, no crape.

“They are coming,” said Hildé. “I hear carriages on the gun-road below. They will drive to the parade. O, Jim, Jim, think of the mothers who are coming, only to take back their dead sons! And those who are buried outside the glacis! What will the mothers and fathers do—and their children dead down there under that ice and snow.”

The parade was filling now, with vehicles of every description; coachmen were leaping to the ground, old men and feeble white-haired women stepped out into the snow. An old gentleman came toward Harewood, lifting his hat with an anxious smile.

“I am looking for my son,” he said, “could monsieur inform me where the barracks are?”

“The barracks are in ruins,” said Harewood: “the troops muster in the casemates, monsieur, where, I trust, you will find that all is well.”

Others came to seek information; an ancient dame, hobbling on two canes, asked for her son, “Jean Bornic, ma belle dame, of the Breton marine artillery, and so tall and handsome,—my son, madame.”

Hildé answered gravely in the Breton language; the old dame’s withered cheeks flushed faintly.

“From Carhaix, my sweet lady,” she said, with a little courtesy.

Hildé told her to go to the citadel, and she went, smiling and nodding her grey head.

“Her son was killed the last day of the siege,” said Hildé; “I sent her to the citadel, where they will tell her.”

There were tears in her eyes; she laid her head on Harewood’s shoulder.

“Life is too sad,” she said.

The bell in the citadel began to toll; a column of soldiers,

marching without drums or arms, entered the parade, already crowded with vehicles.

"That is the end," said Harewood, solemnly; "the fort belongs to the king of Prussia."

"Our fort," said Hildé, turning very white.

She trembled so that he drew her to him, holding her close.

"Wait," he whispered, "remember what we said of youth and springtide. The land needs sunshine and pure air and green leaves and stillness. Death will be a memory with summer. France can wait; her promise is in her youth."

The bell tolled monotonously; three silent files of men entered the gun-road and began the long descent.

"There is somebody in a carriage coming this way," said Harewood. The next moment he uttered an exclamation, half petulant, half amused.

"Hildé! It's the Mouse!"

She rose, breathless, excited, hands outstretched; a woman leaned from the carriage, then sprang to the ground.

"Yolette! Yolette!" cried Hildé; "little sister, I am here!"

"There's Bourke!" stammered Harewood, and tried to rise on his crutches.

Yolette was in Hildé's arms, sobbing: "Little sister! Darling Hildé! Don't cry so, don't—we are going home—home—really we are." Bourke's strong hands clasped Harewood's; his keen grave face questioned the younger man.

What he read in Harewood's eyes lighted up his own, and he stepped back and took Hildé's hands in his. When he turned again to Harewood, the latter was holding a little court of his own. Yolette, Red Riding Hood and the Mouse surrounded him; the child had both arms close around his neck; Yolette was grieving over his wounded limb, and holding his hand in both her gloved ones. As for the Mouse, he chewed a straw and looked on with mixed sentiments impossible to fathom.

"He brought me a silver cup," said Red Riding Hood, gravely.

The Mouse shifted the straw between his teeth and looked anywhere but at Harewood.

“We are to have white bread to-morrow in Paris,” observed Red Riding Hood, still holding Harewood’s neck encircled in her frail arms.

“And wedding cake,” he said, gaily, “but not if you choke me to death, little sweetheart.”

The leer on the Mouse’s face was impossible to describe. Whether he meant it well or ill is a problem. The chances are that he intended to convey the assurance of his benevolent interest in Harewood and Hildé. However, he only said that the carriage was ready and the drive to Paris a long and cold one, and he, the Mouse, was ready to start as soon as “ces messieurs” were ready.

Harewood laughed and took his crutches. Hildé, colouring faintly, placed one arm around him and aided him to rise.

“Come on, Bourke,” he said, with a touch of the old boyish impetuosity—yet, under it, there was something tender, even a little wistful, as though he needed the strength of his comrade to strengthen him in body and mind.

“I think,” he said, as Bourke picked him up unceremoniously and carried him off to the carriage—“I think, Cecil, that you’ll find hereafter that my conscience is straighter than my leg.”

“We’ll mend both, Jim,” laughed Bourke, as the Mouse opened the carriage door for Hildé and Yolette.

Red Riding Hood was set high on the driver’s seat beside the Mouse. Bourke placed Harewood gently in the corner beside Hildé, then, nodding to the Mouse, he entered the carriage himself.

“Yolette and I have taken a house in Passy,” he said, smiling across at Harewood. “Yolette says we must have a honeymoon if we wait ten years for it, so I’m thinking—if you and Hildé are married—and the blockade is raised—we might run down to the Breton coast until Paris has cleaned house.”

“We were thinking,” said Hildé, with sweet dignity, “of doing the same thing.”

Yolette suddenly leaned across the carriage and kissed her.
The Mouse, outside, cracked his whip and sang as he drove:

For what things shall our brothers plead?
A rope, a match, a barley seed;
A rope to hang the man of greed,
A match to burn his house, we need.
To feed the poor, a barley seed,
A barley seed,
A barley seed!

Crack! crack! went the whip; the sifted snow flew high, the wheels spun, slipped, creaked and whirled round in a shower of icy slush. And always the Mouse trolled his merry catch.

A barley seed,
A barley seed,
The rich shall bleed,
The poor shall feed,
So, brothers, sow the barley seed!

CHAPTER XXX.

SAINTE HILDÉ OF CARHAIX.

In Carhaix there is a rustle through the winter-tinted woods when the March moon dies in the skies and the blue starlight sinks trembling, fathoms deep, into the glassy sea. Then, through a breathless dawn, steals the pale light of April, tinting with gilt a world of primrose petals, creeping through woodlands mantled in grey and brown and silver, till in the deepest forest depths a bird awakes and ruffles and looks up amid a million tiny newborn leaves.

In Carhaix, league upon league of moorland grows sweet scented, the gorse is aromatic, the marsh is mossed with spongy gold; the blue sea ripples like a river, gilded with ribbed sand, flecked with reflections where white clouds blow and white gulls drift like wind-tossed thistle silk.

Three houses, woods, a chapel, and a shrine; miles of pink-thorn, silvery cliffs, and a still sail at sea—that is Carhaix. All day long the sea-swallows skim the inlet shores, the silver mullet, shoal on shoal, crossing the bar, lace all the shallows with their frothy ropes of foam. All day long the lançons spring above the sands, quivering, shimmering, delicate as pale patterns in the shuttle of a flying loom.

April had come in Carhaix. Hildé also had come to Carhaix—back to her own country—for the blockade had ended at last, the gates of Paris were opened, and the long Prussian columns, marching back, lined all the northern roads.

So she had come—her young heart vaguely wistful—to be wedded in the Carhaix chapel where she had been baptized, and where, all in filmy white, she had stolen through the dim aisles, an awed communicant. For her, atonement did not end at the confessional; there only sin might be put away, sadness was lifted with the bridal wreath; sorrow ended when the orange buds fell from her breast. Atonement never ended, but its bitterness would end like the memory of evil in the innocence of a blameless life. It seemed to her that all

would be well, now that she had come back. In all the world there was but this one place where, with her child's heart heavy with memories, her woman's heart thrilling with love and repentance, she could come and kneel and go forth, in peace for ever.

The April sun gleamed through the jewelled glass and fell in diamonds, staining her feet with violet and rose. She saw Sainte Hildé of Carhaix, high in her plaster niche, azure robed, smiling her placid smile among the shadows; she saw Our Lady of the Cliffs, tinselled, magnificent, holding the Child by the dim altar, where waxen tapers burned and the carved crucifix reared its slender arms. And there her childhood came to meet her. Again she saw the processional, the cross aloft, Our Lady of the Cliffs passing amid the kneeling crowd; again she heard the fresh young voices swelling in the wind, the chanting of the curé, the murmured prayer. The scene shifted seaward—she saw the tempest and the misty sea, the white coiffes on the headland, the men on the shore; then, as it seemed, years afterward, she heard the bell tolling in the chapel for lost souls.

She remembered her father, too, always in the forest where the horns sounded all day long and the hound's baying surged and ebbed with the shifting wind. He lay in the chapel yard, near the mother she had never seen, buried, as he wished, with his boar spear on his breast—the last ruined huntsman of a ruined race—the landless relic of a landed Breton line, old as the ancient chapel, which was older than Carhaix.

A bird twittered on the chapel porch; the vague odour of the sea stirred her heart. She turned and looked back at the altar, where to-morrow she should kneel a bride, then made her reverence and went out into the sunny world.

Yvette sat on the cliffs looking off to sea. Bourke lay full length beside her, sniffing the fresh wind and watching Red Riding Hood, who, skirts tucked up, paddled blissfully in the thin films of water along the shining sands below.

Harewood stood near the beach, critically inspecting a steamer's

trail of smoke on the horizon. When he heard Hildé's voice on the cliffs above him, he climbed up, slowly, for he was still a little lame, and met her, smiling.

"The child down there is in the seventh heaven," he said; "She's been nipped by a crab and bruised by the rocks, and when she's half drowned she'll be contented, I fancy."

"It's curious," said Bourke, looking up, "that the Paris papers have not come. The last mail arrived here on March eighteenth, and here it is April second."

"A mail did come; I brought it down—but I went into the chapel and forgot," said Hildé.

"Nobody expects brides to remember," said Bourke sarcastically; "do you mind letting me see my mail?"

Yolette looked up laughing as Hildé calmly handed the letters to Harewood. That young man sorted the papers, tossed a package and a parcel over to Bourke, and said: "There's only one letter; it's for me."

Bourke began to open the parcel; it was sealed and elaborately tied with a sort of rope.

"Hello! What in the name of decency is this!" he said, holding up a gold watch and chain. "Why, the packet is directed to you, Jim."

Harewood looked up blankly from the letter he was studying, then groaned and handed the letter to Hildé.

"Read it," he said; "I can't. It's from the Mouse."

In the midst of a breathless silence, Hildé took the letter and examined it in consternation. Then she read slowly:

"Belleville, 30th of March, 1871.

"Monsieur:—I take my pen in hand, hoping that these few lines may find monsieur in as good health as I am. I have to inform monsieur that the weather is as usual. We took the Hôtel de Ville and killed General Lecomte and Clement Thomas in a garden. It is raining, but I am quite comfortable, having been made Captain in the National Guard, and find myself much better with nothing to do.

"The Commune has been established, and there is food

and drink for all and no work. We frightened the bourgeoisie passably well, and Thiers has run away, where we expect that the citizen, Major Flourens, will catch him and shoot them all, as they are aristocrats and most perfidious to the poor.

"I have to inform monsieur that I wish him health, also to Mademoiselle Hildé, to Monsieur Bourke, and to madame, lately Mademoiselle Yolette. Also to the thin droll little one who was afraid of me. I send her some forks.

"The weather continues rainy. I send to monsieur a watch. Also to Mademoiselle Hildé for her wedding a diamond star. To Monsieur Bourke and to madame I send many spoons.

"Therefore, adieu. Your comrade,

"THE MOUSE."

"Citizen, Captain, National Guard unattached."

"I wish also to say adieu to the little one who is afraid of me."

Bourke would have laughed, but Hildé's horror-struck face sobered him.

"What on earth shall we do with that plunder?" said Harewood; "the creature has been pillaging women and children!"

"You and your citizen friend must settle that," said Bourke, trying not to laugh. "These spoons and forks have all sorts of initials on them. The watch is marked 'H. de B.,' and the diamond star is to a lady named Nini. Jim, I believe, this time, that the Commune means business."

He looked at Yolette, who shook her head decidedly, saying:

"If you think you are going to write about it for your stupid newspaper, I have the honour, monsieur, to inform you that you shall not."

Harewood glanced at Hildé, smiling faintly.

"I suppose I must go to Paris if you send me," he said.

"If I send you," murmured Hildé; "yes—you may go then."

They turned and looked at the house on the hill. The morning sun glittered on every pane; they saw Schéhèrazade sprawled on the porch, blinking at the ocean; they heard the sarcastic croak of the parrot, Mehemet Ali, tip-toeing down the garden among the hyacinths.

She passed her slender hand through his arm and leaned her cheek against his shoulder.

Down on the yellow sands Red Riding Hood, enchanted, waded ankle-deep along the frothy shore. A white gull rose from the shining waves, a distant sail glimmered.

Then, from the cliff a skylark rose, higher, higher into the azure, showering the whole land with song. And Hildé closed her eyes and listened, her fair face on his shoulder, her white hand close in his.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

Inconsistency in accents has been fixed.

[The end of *Ashes of Empire: a romance* by Robert W. Chambers]