

## THE PUCK NOVELS

UNDER the above title will be issued, in rapid succession, a series of stories by the most popular Foreign and American authors. These will be stories with a single continuous plot, containing the pith of what in more pretentious works is usually extended over a wide field. The series will be handsomely printed, tastefully bound in cloth, and published at 75 cents.

No. 1.—THE COMING RACE. By BULWER LYTTON.

"Together with his usual strength of style and power of arousing interest, '*The Coming Race*' contains a vein of philosophy peculiarly interesting to those who study social questions and science."

No. 2.—THE BELLS. A Romantic Story from the French novel, "*Le Juif Polonais*." By MM. ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN, authors, also, of the play "*The Bells*," which is founded upon this story.

No. 3.—POWDER AND GOLD. A Story of the Franco-Prussian War. From the German of LEVIN SCHUCKING.

No. 4.—A BROWN-STONE FRONT. A Story of New York Society. By CHANDOS FULTON.

HENRY L. HINTON, Publisher,

No. 744 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

# PUT TO THE TEST

A NOVEL

BY

CHARLES CHAMBERLAIN JR.

All thy vexations  
Were but my trials of thy love, and thou  
Hast strangely stood the test.—PROSPERO.



NEW YORK  
HENRY L. HINTON PUBLISHER 744 BROADWAY  
1874

---

Entered, according to Act of Congress, in the year 1873, by

HENRY L. HINTON,

in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

---

## CONTENTS.

—o—

### CHAPTER I.

A SUNSET SCENE, . . . . . 13

### CHAPTER II.

AN OUTLINE OF A CHARACTER, . . . . . 22

### CHAPTER III.

A BIT OF FAMILY HISTORY, . . . . . 32

### CHAPTER IV.

THE IDIOT AND HIS MASTER, . . . . . 41

### CHAPTER V.

THE LOVERS' SECRET, . . . . . 49

### CHAPTER VI.

ALMOST A COMPACT, . . . . . 57

## CHAPTER VII.

A SUIT OF HEARTS, . . . . 76

## CHAPTER VIII.

A WHITE RIBBON, AND A CONSCRIPT, . . . 83

## CHAPTER IX.

THE SLIMY TRAIL OF A SERPENT, . . . 99

## CHAPTER X.

A COUNCIL OF EXPEDIENCY, . . . . 109

## CHAPTER XI.

FOILED, . . . . 118

## CHAPTER XII.

PRIVATE PIERRE NIEGE, . . . . 129

## CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE ROAD TO DANTZIC, . . . . 139

## CHAPTER XIV.

A FAMILY JAR, . . . . 153

## CHAPTER XV.

THE VIVANDIERE, . . . . 165

## CHAPTER XVI.

A BIVOUAC QUARREL, . . . . 176

## CHAPTER XVII.

A SINGLE RAY OF SUNSHINE, . . . . 187

## CHAPTER XVIII.

A RUSSIAN PRISONER, . . . . 197

## CHAPTER XIX.

A DISCOVERY, . . . . 205

## CHAPTER XX.

ALMOST A RIVAL, . . . . 216

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE WORK OF A PRUSSIAN SPY, . . . . 223

## CHAPTER XXII.

THE STORY OF A NECKLACE, . . . . 236

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE IDIOT'S MISSION, . . . . 244

## CHAPTER XXIV.

THE REMNANT OF A SECRET, . . . . 255

## CHAPTER XXV.

A TRIP OF EXPLORATION, . . . . 262

## CHAPTER XXVI.

WHAT A MESSAGE MEANT, . . . . 274

## CHAPTER XXVII.

DUPREZ'S UNCERTAIN VISITOR, . . . . 281

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RENEGADE'S PRISONER, . . . . 286

## CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT A SPY DISCOVERED, . . . . 296

## CHAPTER XXX.

AN ESCAPE NOT COUNTED UPON, . . . . 305

## CHAPTER XXXI.

AN INTERRUPTED STORY, . . . . 313

## CHAPTER XXXII.

A DEATHBED SECRET, . . . . 320

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE RETURN TO ALSACE, . . . . 327

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

A COUNCIL OF THREE, . . . . 332

## CHAPTER XXXV.

SOME INFORMATION FOR DUPREZ, . . . . 340

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE, . . . . 346

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE IDIOT'S WORK COMPLETED, . . . . 353



# PUT TO THE TEST.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### A SUNSET SCENE.

A PRETTY Alsatian peasant was tapping upon the pane of a half-open window. She was trying to attract the attention of a woman who was lazily resting in an old-fashioned, high-backed rocking-chair. Neglected knitting had partly fallen from her lap, and the ball of yarn had quietly rolled away and stopped full half way across the floor.

Failing to arouse the sleepy dame, the girl ceased her tapping upon the diamond-shaped panes, and throwing open the sash, caught the woman's face in her hands, and kissed her.

The widow aroused herself, rubbed her eyes, while her face was still held in the girl's embrace as she leaned through the window. It was a pretty

picture in the warm glow of an early Autumn sunset.

"Nodding, mother, as I live, and the sun not yet gone down behind the mountain!" exclaimed the girl, releasing the woman's face, and standing beside the window-sill, turning her cheek to the sunset; "am I so late, that you have grown tired waiting for me?"

"No, child; but all the girls came down from the mountains an hour ago. Come in."

Without an answer, the girl closed the window, and then stood for a moment leaning on the lower half of the cottage door, watching the sun go down and the wood-cutters toiling up the hill, each with his bundle of faggots across his shoulder with a heavy woodman's axe passed through them as a handle.

The short silence was broken by the widow, who closed the window, stooped to pick up the ball of yarn, and then joined her daughter at the doorway.

"Have you seen Pierre, Marie? He is late this evening, and he went away almost at daybreak."

The girl started as the woman spoke to her, and stood in silence, looking down the steep and stony path leading towards the mountain.

"He may have had ill-luck—the chamois, he says, have been wild lately, and that may have detained him."

"Then the sooner he should find his way home

again, Marie. Come in; the air is chilly, and you must be tired after your walk. I was half asleep, I do believe, and almost dreaming."

"You are always 'almost dreaming,' mother, when the sun goes down. Your dream to-day has been a pleasant one, I hope."

"It was of you, my child—and Pierre. I hope nothing has happened to him."

The girl trembled for a second only, and still continued to look anxiously towards the mountain where the shades of brown and green, alternate rock and verdure, were fast changing color from the fading sunlight, and where the shadows were deepening as the daylight passed away.

"I was dreaming," she continued, quite heedless of the girl's abstracted air, "of the night when I found Pierre; and I saw the storm, and the flood, and the broken trees rushing down the stream, just as plainly as though it were but yesterday. But he will soon be back, my child, and then he will have some tale to tell us of a hard chase after a chamois, and he will be tired and hungry."

"Then he shall have a supper ready, mother, and I will get it for him."

Marie closed the door and began her preparations for their supper, working in the twilight, and humming the refrain of a mountain song as she fanned the fire into a blaze and stood in its ruddy light before the wide, tiled fireplace.

It was an unpretending cottage, and an unpre-

tending room, quite comfortable for their own immediate wants or shelter, and Julie Lascour was proud of her lithe and joyous daughter.

They were simple peasants of the Canton Alsace, and lived as all the peasants did throughout the wildly beautiful regions of Northern France, where the Rhine formed the boundary on the eastern limits, and the peaks of the Vosges served as a hiding place for the setting sun upon the western borders.

Their cottage lay, as if by accident, snugly nestled down in a patch of green sward, and the low, pointed roof marked it as one of the prevailing style in the times of the Bonaparte ascendancy in 1806-7, before the sun of the great man's glory had verged to its decline.

"I have heard you tell of that storm so often, mother," said the girl, as she spread the tablecloth and set the dishes for their meal, "that I can almost see it myself, with poor little Pierre lying by the roadside ready to be picked up and brought home and nursed by you."

"I sometimes wish that I could forget it, Marie," sighed the widow, "but God gave him to me just where I found him, lying at the foot of the Travelers' Cross in the Southern Pass. All that he had about him was a little crimson cloak, with a great large letter "P" worked in silk upon the corner, and a fine gold chain about his neck. I found him in the snow; that letter must have stood for Pierre,

and so I called him Pierre Niede, and that is all I know about him."

"Not *all*, mother! You know that he is brave, and good, and generous, that he loves you as his dear good mother, and he loves me—"

"With a little more than a brother's love, my child. But tell me, Marie, what news is stirring at the inn—what of Napoleon and the war?"

"Why always of the war, mother? That is a long way off from us. Nobody seemed to know anything about it except Jean Duprez. He talked of Austerlitz and heavy losses."

"And what does Jean Duprez know of this war more than other people? Did he speak with you?"

"Only a few words, mother. He was at the inn with Gaspard and others, and he walked part of the way with me. He says they will be coming here for conscripts, and asked me what had become of Pierre. I wonder why he seemed so anxious—do you know?"

"Yes, my child, I do, and you should know it, too. That man, Duprez, loves you and he knows that you love Pierre. A conscription in Alsace and Pierre sent off into the army, would please him only too well."

"But Pierre cannot go; and if Jean Duprez asks me again about him, I will tell him so. I hate that man, mother, and I sometimes think there

must be some awful crime hanging over him with its shadow!"

She shuddered as she spoke, and dropping her work, stood scanning the pathway with an earnest gaze. Then turning suddenly towards her mother, she placed her arms about her, and sobbed bitterly in her girlish sorrow.

"He cannot go, mother! He shall not go, I say! He is all the world to me, and you love him so—"

She turned pleadingly to the widow as she spoke, as if to seek some consolation from her grief.

"The grand army cares nothing for a woman's love, Marie, when the call is made for soldiers. But time enough for that, my daughter, when the trouble comes. See, there is some one coming down the mountain now, and it must be Pierre. There, dry your tears, and go to meet him, child, and tell him we are waiting supper for him."

There was a tone of deep and earnest sadness as the widow spoke, and it seemed that Marie knew its meaning. She struggled a moment with herself, and then brushing away the tell-tale tears, she went out into the warm glowing light of the sunset, and walked briskly towards the mountain to meet the man who seemed so dear to her.

The widow watched her as she sped away, and then, tired, it seemed, of her weary watching, sank into her chair, her eyes listlessly following Marie's retreating form as she toiled up the pathway.

"Ah, well," she murmured, "they love each other, and I suppose that it is right. And yet, I wonder *who* Pierre is?"

She could find no answer to her query. He was a snow-drift foundling. Twenty years before, when Jacque Lascour was living, they had been at the bedside of a dying neighbor and were hurrying homeward, when they found the child, lying close upon the edge of the narrow mountain road. The wild fury of the storm was just gathering, and the hand that placed the boy upon the roadside, had counted upon the rushing of the water to carry him down into the valley, and hide forever either the evidence of some fair, trusting woman's shame, or to remove the obstacle to some one's pride or heritage.

And so Jacque Lascour took him in his sturdy arms and kept him from the storm, and by the dim light of their cottage lamp, scanned the features of the foundling.

He was a pretty, helpless baby—nothing more. No trinket, excepting a thin chain of fine gold about his neck, no parchment gave him a title to their sympathy—nothing but the letter, worked upon the cloak in which he had been wrapped, and he was almost frozen with the dampness and the cold.

And so they nurtured him and cared for him—a kindly neighbor aided in his care, and when at last the young wife found her own child, Marie, given

to her, the boy had grown to be a prattling, toddling little one, and she loved the children, giving them both a shelter and a home.

A few years later—only a short space of years it seemed—and the dark shadow of death crossed her cottage threshold. Poor Jacque Lascour was brought home to her one day, all cut and mangled by the falling trees, and scarcely lived to give her one fond kiss, or look up into her tearful eyes, as he faded away and left the world, it seemed, alone to her.

Scanty was, at best, the store of the world's goods which Jacque Lascour bequeathed her. A purse of silver only, and their little cottage not free from mortgage liens, and the boy and girl to struggle and to live for. All the assistance which her kindly neighbors could afford was given her; but her cares increased, and at last at the solicitation of her friends, and under the persuasion of the good friars of the convent, Pierre was given to them and educated at the convent chapel. A few years previous to the opening of our story, he had been sent back to her, to find Marie a handsome, winsome peasant girl, the sunshine of the widow's house, the belle of the village when the merrymakings were in vogue, and queen of all their festivals.

It was not strange, then, that he grew to love his foster-sister. And the girl learned to love him, until the history of his being found by the way-

side had caused whispers in the Canton, and the neighbors spoke to Julie of her daughter's love for the foundling. And then, in her guileless woman's heart she only loved him more, and pledged herself to be his wife, when the good friars would give them both a blessing and consent.

## CHAPTER II.

## AN OUTLINE OF A CHARACTER.

JEAN DUPREZ, whose quick words and ventured opinions of Napoleon and the war, had caused the busy talkers at the inn to wag their tongues and rack their brains that day, was one of the noted characters of the Canton Alsace. He was one of the main springs of the little mountain village, claiming his ascendancy from being called the richest man in the neighborhood, and from having once been the steward to the Marquis De Briennes, a feudal magnate, long since dead.

Master Jean Duprez had grown to be a man of power. However doubtful his record as a steward may have been, the whispers in the Canton which concerned the administration of his late office, were often conveniently smothered by his presence, and were, in default of his personal attentions, often silenced by fear of his hard-dealing enmity.

Years before, when its owner counted nearly all

the laboring and vintage people as his tenants, Jean Duprez had full control over the affairs of the castle. A lazy lord at best, the old marquis had trusted all to him, and to his discretion or his will.

Julie Lascour—then Julie Marchaud—was hand-maid to the only daughter of the marquis; and so it came that Duprez and the widow were old friends.

Rumor had currently reported even more than ancient friendship between them. They were suspected of even more than casual regard; and one of the female servants had once whispered that the steward had made love to the pretty waiting-maid and had been refused.

Still the pretty Julie kept her place, and was the almost constant attendant of the daughter—a fair young creature who had been a poor sickly girl, and did not live to see her eighteenth year; then the marquis took to himself a second wife, whom he had wooed and won somewhere among the mountains of Spain. He brought her home to live at the castle a few months after the death of his only child.

The Spanish woman who had come to live in Alsace, was a dark-eyed, high-tempered beauty, differing widely in years from the marquis. She had claimed the privilege of bringing with her from her Spanish birth-place, all the mannerisms of her country, and ruled it over the castle with

a high hand, perhaps as an equivalent for having given herself to the owner.

Whether the kindred spirits of the new corps of servants suited the temper of the ex-steward or not, it became a matter of comment that the only women who could abide in comfort at the castle, were the half-breed servants of the new marquise. Julie Marchaud soon left, and found her home farther down in the Canton, receiving occasional visits from Jean Duprez. Then, for a time, the visits of the steward ceased altogether, and Julie Marchaud became lost to the acquaintance of those at the castle, excepting Gaspard Jarome, one of the attendants, a chum of Jean Duprez, but a man much better liked by the people of the Canton.

As time wore on there were days of merrymaking at the old grey pile. Jean Duprez made frequent visits to the village inn, and there was news of a christening to take place in the grand hall. All the village people were assembled to see the twin boys lately born to the marquise. The turrets of the grim old towers were lit with bonfires, and church service was said in the chapel at the convent for the mother and the new heirs to the De Briennes estates; prayers for their safety and for the long life of the marquis and his pretty Spanish wife. And so, while things were drifting lazily along with the good people of the Canton, the new marquise was seldom seen, except in her traveling carriage, and Julie Marchaud, having lost her

identity as one of the attendants at the castle, settled quietly down among the peasant women, and busied herself with her own affairs, while the visits of Duprez became too infrequent to be a theme of comment to her neighbors, or an annoyance to herself.

Then Jacque Lascour, a promising young wood-cutter, blithe, handsome, and generous, became her suitor. Soon after, there was a peasant wedding, a peasant greeting of flowers, and a bridal wreath was sent up to the castle. The new marquise sent the intended bride a pretty little present, and Julie Marchaud became the wife of Jacque Lascour.

For a time there was nothing new to be talked of, till there were lights seen at night in the rooms of the eastern wing of the castle De Briennes. Swift-mounted couriers were sent abroad, and stealthy visits to the distant city were made by Jean Duprez, and sometimes by Gaspard Jarome.

But the messengers went away in silence, and returned in silence, till finally, it became known that the marquis was very ill, and that the persons sent for were some of the dark-browed Spanish family of the new marquise.

At last the chapel walls were hung with mourning, and there were preparations for a funeral. The day of the burial was made almost a holiday in the Canton, and one by one the villagers trudged up the narrow road. They were admitted inside the castle walls, where, in the ancient ban-

quet-hall, there were prayers said for the repose of the old man's troubled soul, and the weeping widow followed her liege lord to his lonely grave.

Duprez, then, was sole master of the estate. In a few days the relatives of the Spanish lady went away as stealthily as they came, for it soon became known that the estate was much encumbered, and that a fear of confiscation for some old alleged political offence, cut short their generous expectations; and so the steward ruled it with a high hand, and did as he pleased with land and tenant, with only the marquise to check him in his expenditures. As for the lady, she was scarcely familiar enough with the workings of the estate and castle to inquire into the management.

With no easy hand Duprez wandered among the tenants, each day adding new tithes and taxes to their rentals, and each month adding to the hatred which they felt for him. The marquise was seldom seen abroad, and there were frequent whispers among the tenantry that matters were not progressing as they should be, within the limits of the castle or without. Duprez was, as usual, sullen and exacting. Gaspard Jarome seemed in thorough fear of him, and when questioned, carefully avoided all successful inquiry by flimsy prevarication. Even the more curious of the people in the village looked up at the towers of the old castle, as though each had secrets of its own, and caught at rumors as they came from the

lips of some of the incautious under-servants, with avidity and doubt.

Among this latter class of retainers there were some captious ones who did not fear to tell the truth. Their miserable stipend of wages had been from time to time reduced, and then again cut down. Duprez, on being pressed for settlement, told them in his sullen way, that the estates were mortgaged and in debt; and so the servants left the marquise, and she was seldom seen beyond the castle walls.

Then scarcely a month after, there were rumors of her sickness, and Gaspard was heard to say that Madame la marquise was very ill, that her physicians had forbidden her staying at the castle, that she was going back to Spain, and intended to take her children with her.

It was a matter of no surprise, then, when Duprez was making his preparations for the departure. When the snows were beginning to fall, he came down to the inn and told the women that they must prepare to bid farewell to Madame la marquise and the twin boys; and all the servants excepting old Lisette, the housekeeper, and Gaspard Jarome were discharged and sent away.

Early one morning, before people were fully awake, there was a rumbling of wheels upon the stony road, and a heavy traveling-carriage, with outriders by the windows, came down from out the castle gates. The grim face of the steward



was seen at the carriage window, and a dark-eyed lady, wrapped in a heavy traveling shawl, put her pale cheeks close to the glass as they hurried by, and passed away from Alsace.

It was a matter of comment only for a few days, a month, perhaps, and then even curiosity grew threadbare, and people merely wondered when, if ever, Duprez was coming back.

Gaspard and Lisette knew nothing—at least, they said so; except that the marquise was ill, and that they feared that neither she nor the children would survive the journey. It was a cold and stormy season, and they were but poorly provided for their route. But the young widow had insisted on taking the journey, and so it would be her own folly, and not their fault, or Jean Duprez's, if harm should befall her.

At last the steward showed his face to them again. At the close of the day, in the early Spring time, he came slowly up the narrow road, mounted on a jaded horse. He was tired, he said, after a long journey, and sent for Gaspard Jarome to meet him at the *auberge* at the foot of the mountain.

Both Gaspard and the steward seemed gloomy and foreboding after their long interview. They were closeted in one of the upper rooms for the better part of the night, and a notary from the adjoining Canton was sent for by a courier. He came, and went away again, carrying with him a bundle of heavily sealed papers, given him by

Gaspard, and securely fastened in a pouch behind his saddle.

And then the story of the twin boys' death was told; and how the young and feeble mother, unable to endure the grief of their demise, had found an early grave in a small town just over the Spanish border, and had sent her faithful steward home to discharge the debts of the estate, with what there should remain to pay them with.

Papers of great value to the empire had been found among the records and parchments hidden away in the strong, iron-bound boxes of the old marquis, and the estates were, for some political offences of long standing, confiscated and ordered to be sold.

Before the sale, however, and while Duprez was away pleading with the officers of the state to release their hold upon the castle, and while old Lisette and Gaspard were keeping vigil at its gates, a fire occurred, and all of the northern wing and turrets were destroyed.

There was but little left to purchase, so Duprez contrived to arrange a settlement, and took the ruins in his own hands, living in them for a time, and finally, with Gaspard Jarome as comrade, and old Lisette as housewife, he had left the crumbling pile and established himself in a cottage down among the people in the valley.

A few words concerning this cottage and its occupants will be essential, as a necessary link in

the chain, explanatory of Jean Duprez's relations toward Gaspard Jarome.

Master and servant they were, and yet sometimes companions. They lived pent up within the narrow circle of their own home. If they fought and quarreled no one cared, and Lisette was doubtless used to their eternal growling at each other.

Besides themselves, there was one other occupant of the cottage. Franz, an idiot boy, a protegee of Jean Duprez, to whom he had given a home and took good care to give but little else. The story of the lad's life was a mystery. He had wandered into the castle a few years before, with a band of gypsies, so the villagers had been told, and Duprez had given him a shelter.

If there was any secret connected with his history, no one knew of it, for Gaspard as a general thing, and Lisette, when any one dared to question her, were commendably reticent.

Once, and once only, Lisette had mentioned that before the fire at the castle, the lad had lived with them, but who his parents were, she either would not, or could not divulge. He had run away, they said, and they were glad to escape the infliction of his presence till he came back again with the wanderers, and then Duprez had given him a home, either from caprice or possible necessity.

Whatever mysteries there may have been at the old castle, they were either obliterated by the fire, or hidden away in the forbidden precincts of Duprez's

house, and they were thoroughly safe in the keeping of Gaspard, Duprez, and their sombre and snarling old companion, who wandered about at a respectful distance and was cheerfully allowed to maintain her reserve intact.

The homely stone-founded house in which they lived was scarcely more inviting within than its outside appearance would suggest. Jean Duprez, however, well as he may have lived at the castle, where the purse of its careless and confiding owner paid the reckoning, was by no means lordly in his hospitality at home.

They lived frugally and carefully. Duprez at best was a man of uncertain nature and peculiar habits; and had, moreover, imbued those living with him with the same odd fancies.

Lisette was a fitting helpmate to the worthy twain. She seemed to have some affection for the idiot boy, only. Gaspard was scarcely a shade better than Duprez, watching and waiting for the ex-steward's return from his daily walk or business, for he seldom rode, and had a habit of coming home just when it pleased his fancy or suited his convenience to do so.

He expected a welcome also, from his other lodgers, and while they lived in such seclusion, Duprez was a lord of wide means but small domain it seemed, and had less than a guard of honor for his tenantry, to whom his social relations were rather more of a problem than a certainty.

## CHAPTER III.

## A BIT OF FAMILY HISTORY.

At the cottage door of Master Jean Duprez, just as the sun went down, there was an ill-natured couple; Gaspard and Lisette were ugly towards each other, perhaps because they dared not be ugly towards Duprez.

"Jean is late to-day," the woman said, as she crouched with her shoulders bent low and her head resting on her hands. "Have you seen him yet, or do you know where he has gone?"

Her inquiry was a mild but decisive one, and, being addressed in quick tones to Gaspard, he turned lazily, as he sat smoking in the doorway, and curled the smoke up at her, leaning back familiarly towards the chair in which she happened to be sitting.

"No—but I am getting hungry."

"And not the first time either, Gaspard, that we have both been hungry. I wish that we were clear of Duprez and his house together."

Then why not rid yourself of the burden? It's

a very easy thing for you to do," suggested Gaspard in a mocking tone, as if insinuating that there was some hidden relationship with Duprez, which the woman would gladly sever if she dared to do so.

"And have *you* tattle on me, I suppose," she growled in answer. "You love him no better than I do, my man, but you have not the courage to show your hate."

Lisette was not wide of the truth. Why she remained so constant to Duprez, was a secret from Gaspard; and why Gaspard seemed almost inseparable from the ex-steward was a secret from Lisette. All that she cared to acknowledge, was that she submitted to growlings and grumblings from them both, and moved about the house in a shadow of uncertainty as to her life and actions.

The taunt she gave him kept him quiet for a few moments, and then, with a hasty leer at her, he quietly remarked:

"Why, marry him, Lisette—you're old enough, and then adopt that half-witted lad for a step-son, and make him the heir to all your large estates. He'd be an ornament to your household, and a match for some gypsy girl who fancied such a fellow for a husband."

There was a biting, keen-edged sarcasm in the words, and the woman glared at him like a tigress.

"I adopt no children whose parentage is doubtful," she replied. "You may well say *marry* him,

Gaspard. It would have been a good thing had he married me before he linked his future with yours. I know too much of either of you to be turned adrift; and too much for my own safety, if I went away. That fire at the castle was well contrived."

"Was it? Well, who helped us in the scheme, I wonder?"

"I did, fool that I was, and that because I fancied that I loved Duprez. Do you remember it?"

"Things like that are not soon forgotten. It was a bold piece of work that, and served its purpose well."

"Bold enough for Duprez, indeed! And yet, he walks about the Canton as unconsciously as though he had no hand in the rascality."

Lisette spoke clearly and distinctly in her whining voice, and Gaspard walked lazily to and fro, watching her preparations for the supper, and casting occasional anxious looks down the roadway, as if waiting and watching for Duprez with more than ordinary anxiety. Then he paused in his walking, and stopped suddenly, placing his hand upon the woman's shoulder so heavily as to cause her to start and brush his hand away.

"Lisette—" he spoke quickly, and the woman looked up at him inquiringly.

"Gaspard—" this time she stood erect and gazed full in his face—"what are you thinking about? What *new* mischief are you hatching now?"

"Well said, Lisette. Your compliments are generous, to-day."

"You are always serious when you have work to do, and you were in close conversation with Duprez last night."

"While you were snoring loudly enough to wake the dead!"

His gaze was an inquiring one, and he waited for an answer to his remark with an earnestness which betrayed too much anxiety for safety in his plans. The fox was too keen in his scent.

In a moment Lisette saw it, and she again stooped over the fire with the spoon in her hand, and began stirring the soup which was in waiting for Duprez's supper, while Gaspard resumed his walk towards the door.

"Lisette—" he began again; and this time he shook the ashes from his pipe, and, refilling it, stooped down to the fire to light it, looking up with a steady gaze into her face. "Lisette—are you true to us—are your secrets all untold to *any* one?"

The question was ill-timed; for the woman, who at best was rarely good-natured towards him, turned sharply from her work and replied:

"*So far*, they are safe. I am too much committed to your schemes to turn traitor to you now. Last night you were at work, you two, and I was *not* asleep."

"Then you overheard our talk, and gained some information?"

"Quite enough, Gaspard Jarome, to make me valuable to you and to Jean Duprez. You are not altogether safe, it seems?"

"Safe, Lisette? From what?"

"Discovery of the murder of the heirs to the Castle De Briennes. No one but Lisette, you think, knows that Madame la marquise went *alone* to Spain?"

She was prepared for her companion as she spoke; and as she announced to him the conversation which she had overheard, she stood erect before the fire, almost expecting some attack; for Gaspard had carelessly moved towards the table, his fingers working nervously as he stretched his hand out towards the knife which lay close to the edge.

His eyes were bent upon her, and in the uncertain glimmer of the fire-light, she could see the cool determination which lurked within them.

In a moment she had thrown the spoon aside and darted towards the table. The movement was so sudden that Gaspard was totally unprepared for it.

She placed herself between him and the knife, and with a quick clasp at the long bright blade, she snatched it from the table and hurled it through the open doorway.

"Not yet, my man! not yet! I know you too

well;—I know your secret, too, but I'll keep it till—"

The words gurgled hoarsely from her throat, for the firm grip of Gaspard's hard hand was upon her, and he bore her to the floor and forced her down upon her knees.

"Another word, and you will tell no tales on me, or on Duprez! You know too much to live in safety!"

Lisette, though pressed down to the floor, was quick and strong in her movements. With both hands she grasped his arm and bore her weight upon it. Then, as for a moment his hold relaxed, she broke away from him and sprang beyond him, through the doorway, into the road, picking up the knife which she had thrown away.

Every feature of her wrinkled face was hard and callous to all fear of the man before her, and she came back to the threshold of the house with the knife in hand, ready for any new movement that he might make.

"A coward like you would kill a woman as readily as make way with two sickly boys! A word now, Gaspard Jarome, and I mean it!"

"Well—be quick about it. What do you mean to do?" He stood at bay a moment, and Lisette on guard.

"Nothing—till it suits my purpose. I know the secret of the children's death, and I will keep it—at least, it shall not harm you. *You* have never

done me harm, and there is no reason why I should injure you—that I will agree not to do.”

“And Duprez?”

“When the time comes, I say again, I have an account to settle with him. The fire at the castle buried some traces of his crime, but not all of them. I know more of it than you do, and I will make a compact with you.”

“And would you keep it? What are the secrets which you guard? You do not know—”

He advanced towards her as he spoke, but she stood firmly in the doorway, brandishing the knife before her breast.

“Keep my secrets? Yes; better than you would keep your faith with me, Gaspard Jarome! Stop where you are, and hear me out. When the old turret fell, you thought that it buried one of the boys beneath the ruins; Duprez thought so, too, but it did not. The boy whom he thought starved and dying was not there. The other one *you* disposed of, and the crime is on your hands.”

“Then by the mass you shall not live to tell it!”

He started forward and attempted to wrest the knife from her, but she struck him full in the face with the heavy handle, and claspings his hands suddenly over his forehead, he retreated into the room, the blood oozing through his fingers; then reeling for a moment, he fell heavily backward upon the table and from thence to the floor.

With the fierce fury of a desperate woman, Lisette followed him; and as he lay, stunned and bleeding, she placed her knee upon his breast and held him down with all her strength.

“I’ll keep your secrets if you will keep mine, Gaspard Jarome,” she muttered. “I am no weak and puny woman, and you have seen my strength before. One word, and quick, for Duprez will be here soon, and then—”

“It is a bargain—I’ll keep my faith with you.”

The look which passed between the fallen man and the now thoroughly aroused Lisette, was one of quick and sudden, almost deadly meaning. They were partners in a common crime, and Gaspard knew that for the present, he must not quarrel with her.

She released her hold upon him, and he flung her off, standing erect before her, while she stood ready, knife in hand, to meet him.

“Well, well, we will not quarrel—I was hasty. Come, Lisette!”

He extended his hand to her. She did not answer, neither did she accept the proffered hand of sudden friendship. She threw the knife from her upon the table, and with her eye upon him, bent over the pot again, and just as coolly as before, she stirred the steaming soup.

“You forgive me then?” he pleaded, as he came towards her, wiping the blood from his face, as it slowly trickled down his forehead.

"Yes, on one condition: not a word of this to Jean Duprez. You hear me?"

"Not a whisper of it, since you want it so."

He sat down in the chair which she had left, and lighted his pipe again.

They had measured secrets and strength with each other, and Gaspard knew the importance of concealing the encounter from their expected host.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE IDIOT AND HIS MASTER.

As Marie Lascour ran away towards the mountain to meet her lover, the widow, sad and thoughtful for a while, roused herself from her reverie, and took up the preparations for the supper, just where her daughter had left off.

It was a source of relief to her, so she found a pleasure in it, and soon became so intent upon her work that the cautious opening of the half door was unnoticed, and Franz, the idiot protegee of Jean Duprez, who was leaning over it, remained unseen.

Observed at last, the boy nodded playfully to her and waited for some answer before he ventured to come in. She did not speak to him, but smiled in a sort of pitying, kindly way at the cautious manner in which he looked at her.

"I'm coming in Madame, and just as the great big soldier jumped upon his horse to-day—I'll take this door for a saddle, and over it I go—just so, Madame!"



He vaulted over the low door as he spoke, and almost fell as he stumbled into the room.

"That was a good jump, Madame Julie, wasn't it?" he innocently asked, surveying the door with an apparent gratification at its height, and as if awaiting some word of commendation for his performance of the feat of jumping over it without a stumble or a touch, at least, without a heavy fall.

"Yes, Franz, come in."

"Thank you, Ma'am Lascour, I *am* in—but you won't tell me to go out, will you?" replied the boy, advancing towards the fire and standing in the light from it, looking down at the widow.

As he stood there he was the picture of a pantomimic portrait. He was, in simple words, a changeling. One of those waifs in the sea of human life which float about the surface of its great ocean, not utterly wrecked, but scarcely of any use or purpose. His dress was a curious combination of charity garments, given him from the half-worn out stores of the boys of the Canton, and a contribution from Duprez's cast off wardrobe. Thanks to the kind interest of the donors, it was suited to the season. The grey blouse of a wood-cutter was the most prominent, and that blouse from the extreme length of the skirt, served to hide any deficiencies in the coverings afforded to his legs. In fact, the lad seemed to be *all blouse*, except where a pair of wooden shoes finished the bottom of the picture, and a well-worn blue cap, gave it a heading.

Half-witted—an idiot with some sane moments—"Poor Franz" was an object of commiseration to the people of the neighborhood, and an object of curiosity to those who chanced to visit it. He worked at odd times with the wood-cutters, carried water and piled up fagots for the women, and ran with messages or did the drudgery for Jean Duprez, his especial protector, and his unrelenting master, for the bread which he gave the lad was far more scanty than his blows, and his curses and chastisements were far more frequent than his kind indulgences.

The boy was a frequent visitor at the cottage, and the widow often suffered herself to be annoyed by his prattling inquiries, rather than to rudely cast him off. He made himself most thoroughly at home, it seemed, for he scanned with a hungry eye the food upon the table, and helped himself to a piece of brown bread, biting huge mouthfuls from it as he moved away from her. He was next attracted by Marie's work-basket lying on the little wicker stand by the window, in which he found some pieces of gay-colored ribbons, and some worsted, and commenced at once to wind the ribbons about his fingers.

"Ain't they pretty Ma'am Lascour?" he asked, in foolish glee. "See how they flutter, just like the big long streamers that the soldiers had upon their flags to-day!"

"Where have you seen any soldiers, Franz? There are none here." His remark alarmed the widow, and her inquiry was earnest.



"Oh, yes—I saw them—there were four soldiers and a general here to-day, and they had a blue flag with them, with a big gilt eagle on the top of it. They were talking with Master Jean a while ago, and he told them he was coming here."

"What for? I did not send for him—what does he want of me to-day, I wonder?"

"Why, Ma'am Lascour, Jean Duprez is my master. He doesn't tell me what he is going to do when he goes out."

"What did he say to the soldiers—did you hear them talking?"

"They told him they were coming here to get more soldiers, and he gave them the names of lots of men upon a paper."

"Did he give them Pierre's name, too?"

"Oh, yes, he did; the first one of them all. I heard him, Ma'am Lascour. He wanted them to tell him all about the drawing for the soldiers, and who the great big general they waited for was."

"Was that *all* he said, Franz?" inquired the widow, somewhat anxiously, fearing lest the boy should lose the thread of his replies, so fraught with interest to her.

"I couldn't hear them talk, for they went into the inn, and he gave them wine to drink, and pipes to smoke. And then he kicked me, and I went away. See, Ma'am Lascour," and the boy pointed towards the door, "there's some one coming—and it's Master Jean."

The words were true. Jean Duprez, while he had been expected home to supper by Lisette and Gaspard, had been creeping silently and watchfully towards the door, and had overheard the closing sentence of the conversation.

With a quick, smart blow, he struck the boy across the shoulders with the cane he carried, and would have continued his beating, had not the widow interfered.

"Don't, don't Duprez! the boy has done no harm, and your blows to him are hard and frequent. 'Tis a shabby sort of pastime to beat a boy, to say the least of it."

"Then let him take himself off, and stop prating lies about his master! I wish to have a word with you, alone."

Too glad to escape a second beating, the lad shrunk from him, and, still with the ribbon in his fingers, left the cottage, as Julie handed a chair to Duprez, motioning him to sit.

"No—I have no time to waste;" was the sullen reply to her politeness. "My business can soon be told; you know it."

"And I cannot meet your demands. You know the cattle have failed me, and, though the sum I owe you is a small one, I cannot pay it," said the widow, sadly.

"Tut, tut, Julie, I do not want the rent. But I want your pretty daughter, Marie."

Julie Lascour trembled as she heard the words,

and for a time, both were silent; then, with an air of patronizing impudence, he continued:

"You are poor, and she is poor—and I am rich. At least, the people here-about accuse me of being so, and I don't deny it. You know, Julie, you and I are old friends—"

"No more of that, Duprez," said the widow, quickly. "Those feelings of old friendship died years ago. Go on."

She seated herself by the window as she spoke, waiting with cool indifference to hear his story out.

"Well, it matters little what we *were*. You called me a fool, once, for loving you—and I called you a fool for trying to run away from the castle De Briennes with a visitor to the marquis."

"Yes, I was young and foolish, then; but I am wiser now. Enough to know that I escaped a ruin which an idle fancy, and perhaps dislike to you, would have led me into. None knew of that but you, and it is so long ago that if you told it now, it would—"

"Sully the fair name of Jacque Lascour's widow, whom all think immaculate. But I don't love your daughter the less for it, Julie."

"Why should you—if indeed you *can* love any one, except yourself?"

"Yes, why should I?" retorted Duprez, with mock severity. "I love her, as all men love a pretty woman. And I mean to marry her. I am

here to-day,—in just so many plain words, Julie Lascour,—to ask you what you say to it."

"Have you spoken to Marie?"

"No—nor will I, till the matter is arranged. I love her, and I mean to marry her. She can *learn* to love me, as you did her father."

"Leave the dead alone, Duprez! He was a good man, and a true one. Marie does not love you, and you cannot marry her. She and Pierre—"

The mention of the foundling's name vexed the ex-steward. It seemed to be a tender point with him, and he turned fiercely towards the speaker.

"*Your* Pierre, perhaps—a fitting foster-brother!"

"That is a lie, Jean Duprez, and you know it! I wish I knew *whose* boy he was, and then—"

"Then, you would give your pretty daughter to him? And you cannot do so now. He is a waif of the snow storm, who, perhaps, does not know the history of his fond protectress. He should be told the story of the young Count Eric, whose romantic runaway with pretty Julie caused the scandal at the castle years ago;—would it not sound well?"

"Make it known then, if you wish. You knew me—"

"As the pretty handmaid of the Spanish marquise; and you knew me—"

"As Jean Duprez, ex-steward to the Marquis De Briennes, who silently took away the mother with her infant children, and reported them dead, a few months afterward."

"Rumor has a way of saying things, sometimes, Madame. Enough of this, to-day. You have a secret of mine, and I have one or two secrets of yours. We should learn discretion. I love your daughter, and I would marry her."

"Settling on her a thousand livres of your confiscated wealth, perhaps? She does not need it. She is betrothed to Pierre, and at her twentieth year, she will be his wife, unless she chooses to accept your gold. You may have me in your power, Duprez; but you cannot have my child. For the rest, you must settle your account with Pierre Niede!"

A crafty smile passed over Duprez's face as the widow spoke, and he walked towards the doorway. For a few seconds, he stood in silence; then, as she turned carelessly away from him, he bowed to her in mock civility, but with hardly the courtly grace of a cavalier, which he tried to effect.

"I thank you for the hint, Madame. As everything is fair in love and war,—at least *you* thought it so, and undertook, years ago, to teach me the lesson,—I will settle my account with your snow storm foundling, Pierre Niede. Good day to you."

"Good day to you, Jean Duprez."

It was a sullen and a disagreeable parting, almost portentous of some hidden purpose; and so, the shadow passed away from the widow's door, leaving Franz still busy with the contents of the basket on the work-stand.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE LOVERS' SECRET.

WHILE Jean Duprez was pressing his claim to Marie's hand, if not her love, Marie Lascour was winding her way down one of the steepest mountain pathways. She carried in her arms an old-fashioned carabine, such as the Alpine hunters used, while Pierre Niede labored along behind her, with the carcass of a young chamois slung over his shoulders, the legs bound together across his breast, as was the custom with the Alsace trappers. Marie had gone to meet her lover, and was tired after her walk, so they had stopped awhile to rest.

"My little pet is weary," said the not less tired hunter, as he pressed a kiss upon her cheek, and threw the chamois kid down at her feet. "You should not have come so far."

"Then you should have hurried home to hear the news to-day."

"The news, Marie? What is it?"

"News of the war, Pierre, and bad news enough

for both of us! News from the grand army. They have been fighting bravely, and Duprez said—"

"Nothing good of any one, I warrant," interrupted Pierre, with sudden warmth. "He is a traitor to his own conscience, and to his country."

"He said that they were coming here to Alsace for recruits, and that you would have to go away with them. But you *cannot*, Pierre—they cannot take you from me?"

She clung to him fondly, pausing for an answer, which the young man did not give. She saw that he was annoyed; she did not care to offend him by pressing her inquiry, and so, they started again, in silence, towards the cottage.

The little news that had already spread throughout the Canton, from the few stragglers who had reached the inn, was conflicting. There was but little satisfaction given in answer to the peasants' questions; and Marie's detailed account of what she had heard, was at best a doubtful one.

"These are strange times, Marie," at length he said, as they neared the cottage. "There are rumors of a long and tedious war with Russia, and Austerlitz has been a bloody field of battle for the French. To-day, I learn there was a notice posted up of the conscription."

"But *you* are safe, Pierre—they cannot take *you* from me?"

"Perhaps, my darling. You know your good,

kind mother's pledge, that you should not be my wife till the wreaths were woven for your next birthday. She has given her word to Father Eustace."

"But we *are* married, Pierre, for all that. And that is the secret between us and Father Michel. You know I have the scrip from him, the day we were made husband and wife at the little chapel. You cannot be taken in the army, then?"

She seemed doubting as she spoke, and turned her eyes to him, as if in supplication for that assurance of his exemption from the conscription, which should give her some relief.

"I must stand my chance with them, my little black-eyed darling!—It is our secret now, but it may serve to save me, if I am conscripted. You have that paper still, Marie?"

"Here, in my bosom, close to my very heart, and there it shall remain, till it may save you from the war," she answered gladly, and pressed her hand upon her breast, to feel that the important paper was still hidden there.

"You must not meet trouble in advance, Marie. It will come soon enough; and time enough to meet it when it comes."

They were close upon the cottage now, and he flung the chamois from his shoulder by the doorstep, passing Jean Duprez, who had been lurking near, waiting to see Marie.

She scarcely spoke to him, and returned his

salutation coldly, as he joined the group of peasants who were toiling up the hill, stopping only a moment to watch the lovers as they disappeared, then walking quickly onward, with a steady and determined step.

Madame Lascour had left the house, and save the idiot boy, Franz, who had stealthily returned to the room after following her out, and was searching in the rubbish on the table for more ribbons, there was no one to welcome the lovers. Pierre threw down his hat, and loosened the girth which held his flask and ammunition pouch. He went carelessly into the little chamber to put away his carabine, and Marie, leaving the boy still searching for the ribbons, sat listlessly near the fire, glad to find the warmth in the dull blaze, and shivering from the cool night air.

She stopped in her musing for a moment and glanced anxiously around her, and then closed the door to the chamber into which Pierre had gone.

Then, taking a piece of yellow parchment from her bosom, she held it down by the firelight, and studied the hurried writing across its face.

"Yes, there it is," she murmured—"the scrip from Father Michel, which may be more than life to me. It is not safe—I may lose it—and I must hide it somewhere."

The boy Franz had by this time secured the playthings which he had been looking for, and as he saw that she was watching him, he held his

hand full of ribbons towards her, in mute appeal to be allowed to keep them.

She answered him by a smile of approval, which he was but too ready to understand. He seemed expecting some reproof from her, and, glad to escape it, sat down in the doorway, busy with his playthings and intently engaged in twirling them about his fingers.

A single glance at the chimney decided Marie how and where to conceal the precious evidence of her marriage. She tore off the lower half of the parchment, which was blank, and tossed it towards the fire. Then, searching among the wide stones of the fireplace for a crevice, she folded the remaining portion of the scrip, and placed the parchment in the opening between the stones. This done, she resumed her work just as Pierre emerged from the adjoining room, and walked down towards the meadow to meet Madame Lascour, and take the pail of milk which she was carrying; as he left he called to Marie to come and see the sun as it died away behind the mountains.

Eager to meet her mother, and to make amends in a loving kiss for her long absence, Marie, with a light step, passed the boy, who was twining the ribbon around the ear of the chamois lying near the door, noticing him as little as though she had never known him. She went out into the twilight, and ran down towards the meadow among the tall grass, seeing only her mother and her lover,

who were silently watching the shadow of the sunset.

Not so with Franz. The mischief which prompted him to secure the ribbons, tempted him also to watch Marie. While busy with his play, with the foolish instincts of a changeling, and with the curiosity peculiar to his kind, he had noted her movements in and around the chimney. Nothing had escaped his seemingly idle notice, and he was silent in watching her.

He wondered what she had hidden away, and where she had hidden it, and what for. The half-scorched parchment lay in the full light of the fire, and he soon saw it. Though he could not have told one character from the other, much less their meaning, had it been written over, he knew that the remainder of the parchment was of value from the care the girl had taken to conceal it.

It was but a moment's quick work to discover the crevice in which she had hidden away the other half so carefully, and he picked it out from its hiding-place with the knife that she had used, putting the discarded piece in its place and hiding the precious portion in his hand.

"She's worse than Master Jean," he laughed. "He hides his papers and his money in the old vault below the wine-cellar, but Marie hides bits of old dry paper in the chimney. It is a joke, to take it. I wouldn't steal it either—I can keep it with my other playthings, and I'll get Master Jean to write his letters on it."

Marie and Pierre were close upon him by this time, and he crept back to the door and began playing with the chamois, just as they reached the steps before it.

"See Marie, see," he said, in guilty tones, as she looked down at him, "how pretty the ribbons are in the ears of my new pet! I wish that Pierre would kill the big ones, though, don't you?"

The peculiar tone in which the boy had spoken stopped them all, and for a moment, Marie paused and looked down at him as though to find out what reason he could have had for his evasive remark, so strangely put and with so trembling an accent. He did not look up, however, but kept busy with his work. Then seeing that she noticed him, continued in a childish way:

"The kids are all so soft and pretty, and their round eyes look so ugly, and they stare so when they're dead."

There was a touching pathos in his words, and she kindly bade him get up and take his ribbons and go home.

"It is late, Franz, and Jean Duprez will whip you if you get home after dark. Come, get your piece of bread, and you may have the pretty ribbons if you want them. You are whipped enough without deserving it, so you must not stay here to get a beating when you do go home."

Without an answer, the lad unwound the silken streamers from the ear of the dead chamois, and

followed Marie into the cottage for the promised piece of bread, with his ribbon carefully guarded in his clenched fist. With a word of thanks, and eating the bread which she had given him, he passed down the roadway as she closed the door, shutting the sunset and the idle changeling from the cheerful light and glowing blaze within.

## CHAPTER VI.

## ALMOST A COMPACT.

THE news from Napoleon which the straggling soldiers brought from the front, soon had its effect upon the people of the unpretending mountain village. Every rumor from the war was eagerly watched for, and from the ominous silence of the more knowing ones, those less interested in the events of the campaign were busy in the circulation of the news that the balance of power seemed turned against the French, or at best, that Napoleon had been temporarily checked in his victorious march.

In the grey dawn of the early morning, a dusty courier mounted on a jaded horse, had been quartered at the *auberge* on the road leading towards the Travelers' Cross. The story of toilsome and fatiguing marches and hard fighting had been poured into the ready and over-credulous ears of the landlord, and a strange crowd had collected in and around the tap-room. Throughout the day there had been a general suspension of work, and



by nightfall there was a solemn, ominous silence, broken only by an occasional murmur. The women gathered in knots, and the wood-cutters paused idly in their journey towards the mountains. Gaston, the nervous landlord, had done a thriving day's work in the bottles of new wine that he had already opened. Not a few women were among the throng, with anxious faces, feeling that news of some importance was soon to be told. One or two invalid soldiers reclined lazily in the sunlight, watching the increasing crowd with the look of complacent knowledge to which their service in the battles had given them the privilege, and were exchanging jokes or grumbling at the few soldiers who wore the soiled uniform of the grand army, and who were not yet fortunate enough to be counted off duty.

The agony of waiting was soon over. An old veteran, with a soiled and ragged emblem of the Cross of the Legion of Honor dangling on his breast, was tacking the notice of the conscription on the door-post, and groups of young men with anxious, and some with sad faces, were pressing around him.

The order was an imperative and an urgent one. But one day's warning had been given, and already a carefully prepared list of the names of those eligible to the drawing had been posted up beneath the printed notice.

While they were interrogating the old soldier as

to the news from the war, and while he was busy answering their questions in short, quick sentences, all non-committal as to defeat, and all indefinite as to victory, Jean Duprez came towards them.

Instinctively the crowd parted at his coming. He seemed a fitting accompaniment to the dreaded notice, and there was no impediment to his studying it attentively.

With what seemed to be a smile of satisfaction, he read it, and ran his eye carelessly over the list of names beneath it, and then, without a word, passed into the inn, calling for some wine and biscuit, and inviting the old soldiers to drink with him.

He knew the way to reach the more vulnerable points in the hearts of the old campaigners. He had already given the list of conscripts to the recruiting sergeant, and he was on good terms with the men who were to conduct the drawing. His interview was short, however. After a few moments' watching of the anxious crowd, he sat down by one of the tables in the corner over his own especial bottle and biscuit, and the women moved away in groups to carry the news to their companions in sorrow, that there would soon be a scarcity of lovers among them. In the crowded cities, where the bulletins and the idlers gave the intelligence of each day's events, and where the hurry of preparation for the war gave an impetus to trade, and enriched the wine-sellers, the drafts



were easily made and there were thousands of careless and adventurous ones to whom a place in the ranks was almost a godsend, and the demands of the grand army were too imperative to give much time for choice in the selection of soldiers. But in the Cantons of France, among the peasants, there was the stern resolution to defend their firesides, but little of the enthusiasm in the war which would impel them to go beyond their own homes, and to seek glory in the ranks, though the glory should be a lasting one to the arms and to the cause of Napoleon.

And so it was in the Canton of Alsace. As soon as the news of the conscription had spread, the women went sadly away from the inn-keeper's door, leaving Duprez almost solitary in his seat in the corner.

As he was sitting in his sullen mood,—perhaps the humor may have been suited to the occasion, for secretly he was satisfied at witnessing the peasants' dismay,—the idiot boy, Franz, came slowly in at the door, and seeing Duprez, attempted to retreat.

The quick eye of the master discerned the boy's movement, and he beckoned him to come in. Franz stopped and mumbled something in a hesitating stammer, either alarmed at the unusual kindness, or framing some excuse for his intrusion, when Duprez grasped him by the arm and dragged him towards the table.

"Where have you been, you gaping fool? What new mischief have you done?"

"No mischief, Master Jean! I've been over to Madame Lascour's to help her eat her dinner, that is all."

As he stole away from Duprez, and ran over towards the tap-room counter, he tried, awkwardly, to hide something in his sleeve, and with his face averted, was making good progress towards the door, when a file of soldiers came near, and his attention was immediately fixed on them.

With the foolish and peculiar stare of a changeling, he stood in the doorway, watching them, clapping his hands merrily as the sound of the drum ceased, and they stacked arms in the road, scattering themselves about the rooms.

The motion of his hands served to betray him to his master, for he had forgotten the hiding of the stolen treasure in his sleeve. The scrap of parchment fell to the floor and he stooped to pick it up. Not, however, before Duprez had again seized him by the shoulder, and dealt him a quick, sharp blow.

The boy screamed with terror and glared at Duprez with a fierce and dangerous look. Duprez knew the glance well, and he knew that fear alone could keep him quiet.

True to his well-known means of subjection, he was about to deal him a second blow, when one of the soldiers interposed, and caught in his hand the uplifted cane.

"Come, come, my friend, your blows are heavy!"

With a quiet, but determined look, the soldier stood between Duprez and Franz.

"Well, if they are? The fool's a thief, and has been stealing something and hiding it in his sleeve. Look there!"

He pointed at the crumpled paper lying on the floor, and picked it up, watching the soldier as he did so, and carelessly claiming the paper as his own, although alike ignorant of its character or contents. Knowing the boy's peculiarities, he thought that Franz had stolen something of which he did not know the value, but it might be of value to him, and he meant to possess it.

He glanced at the paper as he held it in his hand, and then, in a careless tone, spoke to the soldier, in extenuation of his severity to Franz.

"He lives with me. I know him well, but he has a habit of stealing my papers, for fun, as he calls it, and gives me much trouble. It is nothing but a memorandum of some payments. Let him go."

It was no affair of any one but himself; and the boy, glad to escape, ran out and away from the inn, while Duprez put the paper in his pocket, without any further examination, and called for the wine and biscuit. He had seized upon the best way to enlist the favor or sympathy of the soldiers, and the men were quite ready, if not especially willing, to indulge in the refreshments at Duprez's

expense. Gaston was busy for his own profit, and the topics of the war were rapidly discussed, to the exclusion of the idlers, who gradually left the inn and wandered off in various directions, all speculating on the result of the conscription.

Thanks to the general dislike to the soldiery, an opportunity was soon given Duprez to learn from the veterans their mode of drawing. The preparations for the conscription were complete, and the examination of the census records had been a rigid one. The list, already prepared, had been corrected by a master hand. Duprez had omitted none, and he found a good appreciation of his onerous service in the boisterous and bibulous companionship of the soldiers who flocked around him.

"You have pretty women here, my friend," remarked the guide-sergeant of the company. "It is a pity for the lads to have to leave such sweet-hearts."

"But the army needs them," suggested the ex-steward, conscious of his own safety, and not especially solicitous for others, "and patriotism should be at a premium."

"Not quite so high as Napoleon would have it, then," incautiously remarked his companion, "for we have had hard fighting, and the recruiting service is a luxury."

The effect of the wine was quite apparent. The men were watching their sergeant with some anxiety. His words were incautious, and the idiot

boy and some of the peasants had again wandered into the room.

A quick whisper from his comrade brought the color to the cheeks of the talkative soldier, as he observed the men crowding around them. Duprez, with a forethought engendered by his own craftiness, had sense enough to check the conversation before it had been heard by those around him, and escaped the impending disaster to the cause of the conscription, by calling to Jeannette for candles and more biscuit. Aroused to a sense of his duty, the garrulous color-sergeant was soon silenced by an admonition from one of the drowsy veterans in the corner, in terms rather more expressive than polite, but quite effective.

The room was soon cleared of the stragglers, the arms were unstacked, the drum beat, and the men formed in line for marching before the door, eagerly watched by the women who had gathered about, and sullenly watched by the expectant peasants.

Left to himself, Duprez cautiously examined the paper taken from the boy. The flickering flame of the candle served his purpose well, and the brow of the ex-steward lowered as he spread it out upon the table, eagerly scanning its contents.

"So, they are married," he muttered to himself, as he carefully folded up the certificate, "and secretly. Ah, Madame Julie, you should teach your daughter to be far more careful of her mar-

riage scrip! A few cinders will tell no tales, and the boy has done me a good service, this time!"

With a stealthy look at the bar-maid, who was watching him, he paused, as he held the paper in his hand. He was curious and uneasy at Jeannette's impudence, but concealed his feelings, as he called for some port.

"Do you mean the old wine, sir, or will *this* do?"

She held the bottle up to show the brand upon it, as she spoke, still watching her customer and the paper he was carelessly twirling in his hand.

"No. I want your best wine from the cellar. You may bring it, please—Franz will hold the light for you."

He motioned to the boy as he spoke, and the lad raised the trap in the floor leading towards the cellar steps. The girl went down into the vault, and the boy stood half way down the stairway, shading the candle with his hand to protect it from the draught coming from below, as Duprez closed the front door, and raised the candle from his table, holding the paper towards the flame.

"A pretty safeguard for sweet Marie's evidence," he laughed, as the parchment began to burn. "It is safer here with me than where she would have placed it."

He turned towards the trap-door to watch cautiously for Jeannette's return. As he did so, the head of the idiot boy rose from the open trap, and it was too late to destroy the paper. The

quick opening of the door brought a blast of the cool night air, and the light held by the boy was, with a sudden flare, extinguished. The lad stumbled towards him, still watching him, and in the uneasy flickering light of the taper held in his own hand, Duprez could see the mischievous and inquiring expression on the lad's face; so he placed the paper carelessly in the pocket of his coat, and closed the trap-door after them.

It was well that he did so. A moment after, without so much as a knock for admission, the stout form of a captain in the recruiting service stood in the doorway.

"Ah, friend, I may salute you! This is an inn, I see, and, it seems, without a landlord!"

"I can answer sir," replied the girl, with a look of astonishment at the impatient soldier. "Can I serve you?"

"Serve me, yes—where are my men? They were to have waited here for me. My courier has been here already?"

The sharp manner in which he launched his words, annoyed Jeannette, and Duprez stepped forward to relieve her.

"Your courier was here to-day. I gave the list to him and he—"

"Then you are M. Jean Duprez?"

"I am—and you are—"

"Captain Maurice Fusil. I am as tired as a spent bullet, and as choked and dusty as a cavalry

charger after a hard run from an enemy. Come, girl, some wine, and of your best. Be quick about it!"

With an impatient tug at the buckle, the officer loosened his sword belt, and flung the weapon on the table before him. Then, with a glance at his dusty coat and boots, he surveyed his portly form in the glass hung over the back of the bar, and again turned to Duprez.

"Your roads are long, and rough, and dusty. You had the list prepared then, and it has been posted? I am late in getting here, and I have much to do—"

The conversation was interrupted by Jeannette, who placed candles upon the table, and set the wine before them. She seemed half afraid of the gold-laced soldier, and Franz, who had taken up the sword, was fumbling with the knots about the handle, with a curious and more than half-witted smile upon his cold, hard features.

"But you will have time enough to rest here awhile before your work begins. You have seen much service?" asked Duprez as he motioned the captain to a seat.

He saw that his best point was a friendly chat with the new arrival, and he at once determined to profit by it. The inquiry was intended to be a flattering one, and as such it was successful, though the answer to it was a strange one.

"Too much service, M. Duprez, believe me.

Hard marching, and bad work, this hunting after food for stretchers and hospitals. This recruiting service is no fun, with only the pay of a captain of infantry, and an occasional perquisite to settle one's bills with. I am looking for two things to-night—conscripts and a supper. What have you to eat here, my girl, in your poorly named inn of the 'Travelers' Rest?' I'd rather charge upon a larder now, and dispute possession of its contents with my sword, than to gain a victory over a pack of mongrel Prussians, disputing a passage with the guard!"

The suddenness of the inquiry, and the decidedly unwarlike expression of the doughty captain was amusing both to Jeannette and to Duprez. The bill of fare, scanty though good, was soon told over to the hungry stranger, and his order, given before it had been fully considered, to bring all that she had, and plenty of it, was an earnest one at least.

"You'll sup with me, Duprez? Jeannette, Susanne, Javotte, or whatever you may be, another glass and plate here for my friend."

He stretched himself out lazily as he spoke, and motioned Duprez to sit. The ex-steward paused a moment, as if in doubt about accepting so sudden an invitation. Then, as the thought struck him that he might offend by non-acceptance, he broached the bottle of port which had been set for him, and filling the glass, passed it towards Fusil.

With an air of importance, and an earnest look that would have read the captain through and through, had he been more penetrable, he placed his hand upon the soldier's shoulder.

"Rather with me, captain. This wine is old, and very rare. Let us drink it to Napoleon and to your conscript drawing here to-morrow!"

He raised his own glass to his lips. Fusil tasted the contents of his, and then, rising from his seat, threw himself backward with the air of a connoisseur, and held his wine up to the light.

"You're right, my friend. It is rare old port, and fit for Napoleon's drinking. I am thirsty, and here's to the grand army with all my heart. I have not drank since noon, and I am so thirsty, that, were my veins supplied with good champagne, or even with the sourest kind of German wine, I'd tap myself and hold a bottle to my jug'lar!"

Duprez was measuring the captain quite as fast as the captain was measuring the wine. In a moment he had formed his plan—a deep laid, and a subtle one, with just a little of the dangerous in it—and he saw in the officer who was so tired and hungry, the man who, of all others could best serve his purpose. While they had been drinking, he had formed in his own mind a plan of action, needing but one accomplice. He had discovered the weak point of the captain, and he determined to profit by it.

"Your supper is with me, if you'll accept.

Franz!"—and he called the boy towards him—"Tell Jeannette to cook a pheasant for us, and you help her pick it, and to bring my own brandy from the cupboard, for my friend, the captain!"

Used to do his master's bidding without look or question, the boy left the room, and went out towards the kitchen, from whence the smell of cooking was coming, in grateful essence to the hungry palate of the recruiting officer. Duprez saw his opportunity at once, and sat down with Fusil as neighborly and as friendly as though they had been old friends and comrades through many a hard campaign.

"You are ready then, for the conscription here?" he asked. "Do you look for any resistance? I see you have your men already stationed.

"Perhaps, but I hope not; still, we must be quick. I must march by nightfall to-morrow, and take my conscripts with me. The news from Napoleon is—"

"Not bad, I hope?" inquired Duprez, with as much anxiety in his tone as he could summon for the instant.

"No, not bad, exactly. But the Prussians are encroaching still further; some of our best men are in the fortified towns on the borders, and we must relieve them. My orders are imperative, and I must work quickly.

"You draw to-morrow then; how early?"

"The earlier the better; soon after sunrise, if I

can get the men together. There is less time then for crying among the women, and less time for trinket-giving among the men. These love-scenes are the worst phase of the recruiting service."

"Sweethearts may be had for the asking, after you have gone, and wives may be had without so long a courtship, captain. But pardon, how do you draw? by lot, or by name?"

"I shall draw by ribbons. The white ones go to glory and to war; the blue ones may remain at home to comfort the sweethearts whom their conscript lovers leave disconsolate. Why do you ask? you, at least, are in no danger of being drawn!"

There was a touch of sarcasm in his remark, and Duprez heard it. But it did not serve his purpose to take umbrage or give quick answers to the careless words of a good-natured and confiding soldier.

"No fear of that, my friend; I am past the age. I merely asked for curiosity;—here, boy!"

He threw a biscuit from the table towards Franz, who had come back from the kitchen and seemed to await his further orders, "and you may have this, if you want it."

He filled a glass of the wine and tasted it, then held it out towards the idiot. As the lad took it, and mumbled a word of thanks for so unexpected a luxury, Duprez wiped the liquor from his grey moustache, and bade the boy take his wine and biscuit towards the fire.

As he returned the handkerchief to his pocket, the quick eye of the lad followed it, and caught the momentary flash of a paper which fell from his master's pocket to the floor. Almost involuntarily he stopped in his shuffling gait towards the fire-place; but he was afraid of Duprez, so he crept away with his wine and biscuit, content to watch his master and the captain from his place beside the chimney.

The meal prepared by Jeannette, was soon spread before them, and for the most part, enjoyed in silence. Duprez had been somewhat surprised at Fusil's sudden sally of sarcastic wit, and Fusil was quite hungry enough to allow Duprez the full benefit and satisfaction of leading the conversation.

"You said you drew by ribbons, captain; the white ones to be drawn for service?"

"Yes—the white ones go with me."

"You have the choice of color, then, and have made your decision?"

"Yes; do you want some friend, or relative of yours, to draw a *blue one*?"

There was a keen look of cunning impatience on the captain's face as he spoke, and he raised his wine to his lips and gazed at Duprez across the table, waiting for the answer.

Duprez raised his own glass as he paused to reply. For a moment each studied the other attentively. Then, scanning the officer with a

careless look, Duprez smiled, and setting down his own glass, re-filled the captain's.

"Not a *blue* one, captain, this time. You can do me a service, may I ask it?"

"Yes, if it's honorable. You want some one to draw a *white* ribbon then, it seems. Who is it?"

"A worthless fellow who is a tax on me; a good-humored village vagabond, whom I would send off to the war to learn wisdom. You spoke of poor pay and perquisites. You can trust me, I assure you, and I will pay a fair price for a *white* ribbon."

The suddenness and coolness of the proposition startled even the good-humored officer. He joked Duprez upon his object, and Duprez laughed at his surmises, again repeating his request, but in a lower tone, and this time in a cool, deliberate voice which had the ring of money in its muffled accents.

"You will never hear of it again, and no one will be the wiser," he pleaded. "It is a whim of mine, and if you think that you can trust me, I should like to have just one white ribbon, and you may be certain of just one more conscript!"

The captain was tardy in his answer. He knew that he would do wrong in giving the ribbon, and yet he could see no reason why he should not trust Duprez. Besides, the ex-steward had been of service to him already, in his revision of the conscript list. He had saved him some trouble, and his



wine and pheasant were alike palatable. Duprez saw that he was gaining his point, and soon ceased to press it, turning the conversation on the topics of the day, and plying the willing captain with the old port and the brandy.

Supper concluded, they chatted over their cigarettes. Fusil was doggedly resolute in his refusal to comply. The demand was, perhaps, a slight one, yet his sense of honor forbade his humoring the generous-hearted ex-steward in his ardent desire for the ribbon. The growing anxiety evinced by Duprez to obtain the conscript-giving fragment of loyal silk was amusing to him, and he seemed to entertain the proposition.

"Come, captain, one more stoup of the best brandy in Alsace, and then we will talk the matter over," said Duprez, as he re-filled the glass and handed it across the table. "Shall we say a bargain for the ribbon?"

"At least, not till to-morrow."

Fusil was decided in his answer, and refused the liquor. He was already half unsteady, and Franz, at a motion from Duprez, assisted him in arranging his sword as he buckled the belt around him, and prepared to go out.

As he did so, the lad kept, as he had not for a moment failed to do, his eye upon the scrap of paper lying at Duprez's feet.

As he helped his master with his hat and cane, he carefully covered the piece of coveted parch-

ment or paper, whichever it might be, with his foot, and dragged it with him towards the fire. Then, seizing a moment when no one was looking towards him, he stooped to pick up the biscuit which had rolled away from him, and when he again stood erect, he had concealed his prize within his cap, and pressed it tightly down upon his moppy pate.

Duprez called to him to follow them, and as the door closed after the worthy captain and his newfound friend, the boy trudged after them towards the bivouac, keeping Duprez in sight, but carefully maintaining a respectful, if not a grateful, distance.



## CHAPTER VII.

## A SUIT OF HEARTS.

IF never before during the campaign, it was now evident in Alsace that war was imminent. The dread reality of taxation and conscription was no longer a doubt. It pressed upon them with an iron heel, and for months the region lying in the northern departments of France had paid heavy tribute to the grand army of Napoleon.

As Spain was not yet a bone of contention, or an eligible field for conquest, the eagles of the French were being hurried across the frontier, and were swaying over the Prussian borders, from the fortified towns. Every Canton in the mountain district of the Vosges was alive with the bustle and preparations for the war; and the tramp of men, the clash of arms, and the rumbling of artillery wagons, were loudly echoing amid the Cantons of the Bernese Alps.

Discriminating in favor of none, the edict of conscription had been promulgated, and the grand army was relentlessly stretching out its mailed and

scarred hands for reinforcements, and the aid and material must be forthcoming, at whatever sacrifice or cost.

To the people of the Canton there was a grim and almost ghastly mockery in the cry of "*Vive L'Empereur*," as it rang down the line of men, who had entered the Canton on their recruiting service under the leadership of Captain Maurice Fusil. The cry did ring down the line notwithstanding the apathy of the peasants, for there were veterans who came with the soldiers, whose scars were honorable. Grey-bearded and scarred men, whose beards were like masks upon their faces, serving to hide the seams and furrows upon cheeks and chin.

To the women it was a gala day. A holiday, because it was disloyal not to have it so, despite the fact that the cottage lights had burned late, and there were tears shed and heart-sore kisses given, before the dawning of the new day began the ordeal of the war's conscription.

Wood-cutters paused at the "Traveler's Rest," laid down their axes, and their bundles of cord and wedges, to see the drawing. Girls who were merry the day before, whose cheeks flushed with excitement, and whose dark eyes glistened with anticipation as Captain Fusil and Lieutenant Valmeau halted their men before the inn, were sad and quiet, awaiting the issue of the conscription which should determine the fate of those whom

they held dear. The keen reality of prolonged war had broken upon them, and Alsace wore a different look, withal.

At the cottage of Julie Lascour, there were sad hearts with the rest. In the call for men, Pierre Niede must stand his chance; and Madame Lascour was far too loyal to show her great grief at the prospect of parting from him. She was poor. Too poor to purchase his release, and too far advanced in life to think that he could leave her, and return in safety when the war should be closed, and the remaining soldiers be returned to their cheerless firesides. But to Marie, the secret of her marriage, which she dared not divulge, pressed like a heavy weight upon her heart. There was a great and awful trial to her in the drawing, and she talked long and earnestly with Pierre, seeking to gain his consent to disclose their true relation towards each other.

"For shame, Marie!" said he, as he walked out into the sunlight, "these tears are unworthy the brave heart of a hunter's wife!"

He was loading his carabine as he spoke, and as he slung it over his shoulder, he kissed her fondly, and glanced down the road, where knots of villagers were gathering.

"There, darling, just one kiss, and I will take just one more shot at the chamois, before the drawing. Besides, I see one who is no friend of yours, or mine, coming to make an early morning call."

He sprang from her as he spoke, and she stood watching him as he passed away towards the mountain. When she lost sight of him, she turned, and Jean Duprez, with all the mock civility of which he was capable, bade her good morning, as he came towards the doorway of her mother's cottage.

He smiled upon her in his leering, self-complacent manner, and passed into the house, where Madame Lascour was awaiting him. Marie, who perhaps saw an omen of evil in his coming on such a day as the present, went away towards the goat-shed, glad to escape the double infliction of his attentions and his presence.

"Good morning, Julie," said Duprez, lifting his hat and extending his hand as he advanced towards the widow. "A fine day for the drawing."

"Good morning, Jean," was her laconic reply, "and a fine day for the drawing, if you call it so."

The ex-steward saw at a glance that he was not altogether a welcome visitor. He had taken the precaution to pave the way for his conversation by an allusion to the conscription, and he had received a sullen answer.

"He turned towards the window in silence, and watched Marie driving the goats down to the pasture; then, as if in compliment to the mother, he half-murmured to himself:

"A pretty daughter, Julie, and a haughty one. She is quite like you—when you were younger—and trips among the daisies like a queen."

"She is all the world to me, at all events, Duprez," replied the widow with a deep-drawn sigh, "if she is only a peasant's child."

"She is a light-hearted child, Julie; she doesn't stop to think that she may lose a lover, before the sun goes down to-day."

"Perhaps. Yes, she *is* light-hearted, and well she may be. She has more friends in Alsace than you have, and more love for her home and her widowed mother, than you, who would make us both miserable."

She spoke in quick and steady tones, and looked keenly at Duprez. He smiled at her earnestness, and threw his hat and cane carelessly upon the table, then, extending his hand to her again, he said:

"Not quite so hard as that, Julie. You know we are old friends, and, once upon a time, were something more."

Madame Lascour took the proffered hand, and her own trembled as she did so. "But that was long ago, and should be forgotten. I am a widow now, and your tenant, Jean Duprez. What do you want of me to-day?"

"That which you can give me, if you choose."

"And what is that? Your rent is not yet due, and if it were, I could not pay it now."

"That does not trouble me. I want your pretty daughter, Marie. We were speaking yesterday, of her, and you have by this time considered the proposition that I made you?"

"It needed no consideration, Jean. Your own eyes must tell you that my Marie is no bride for you. Do not you see that she flies from the house whenever you enter it?—she does not love you."

"Perhaps not, when you forbid her doing so. Pshaw, Julie! the girl will learn to love me, and I can offer you both a home, better than any in Alsace."

"We do not wish it, Jean Duprez," replied the widow, with great warmth. "We are happy here, and all your demands for rent have, until now, been promptly met. Your persecution of my child is unmanly. It is useless—it would break her heart and Pierre's, and I cannot force her to this marriage."

She stopped and looked down towards the village. The sound of far off drums was borne upon the air, and as the rumbling became more distinct, the steady tattoo of the roll-call caused her to neglect her work, as she saw Marie coming slowly back from the meadow.

"Many hearts and better ones than his may be broken soon, Julie Lascour. That roll-call is a summons which your handsome foundling must soon answer. He may soon turn out to be a conscript, and then—I may not be compelled to *buy* your daughter."

Marie, who had reached the door, approached her mother and placed her hand lovingly upon her shoulder. There were pent-up tears forcing their

way into her eyes, but she contrived to hide them from Duprez, who stood with his face half-averted, watching her emotion.

"Lovers, just now, are great uncertainties, Marie," he said. "The grand conscription is an impartial suitor, and there may be wives after it for merely asking. We were speaking, your good mother and I—"

A look of reproof from the widow, silenced him. The heart-strings of the girl were at their fullest tension, and the imploring glance from Julie Lascour carried a volume of pity in its interpretation.

"You will see the drawing, Madame Julie?" at length he asked. "If so, may I walk down with you, towards the inn?"

"We will see the drawing, Jean, and be ready soon," was all the answer that she made him, as she began her preparations for going out.

It was hard for Marie to hide her agony from Duprez, and he was, for once in his life, considerate enough to spare her any further infliction of his ill-timed remarks, by waiting for her in the shade of the trees before the door.

Perhaps he saw in her agitation some thoughts of him—lovers, be they even unwelcome ones are shadowy in the mid-day sun, sometimes—and so, in silence, and with lingering steps, the three took the narrow pathway leading towards the meeting-ground, where the men were gathering for the conscription.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A WHITE RIBBON, AND A CONSCRIPT.

THE soldiers were already marching and counter-marching in the space before the inn, while the men who were to stand their chances in the drawing were being summoned at the sound of the drum-beat.

Conspicuous in the crowd of lookers on was Franz; who, for the time, escaped from Duprez's surveillance, and taking all possible advantage of his short respite, was moving about with a stick at his shoulder, and a knot of gay streamers tied to the end of it, fluttering like pennants in the breeze.

Gaspard and Lisette were there also, standing just outside the hollow square formed by the soldiers. They had locked the doors of their grim old house, and had betaken themselves to the roadside, for a holiday.

Lisette started, for a moment, but only for a moment, as she saw Duprez approaching in company with Julie Lascour and her daughter, and nudged Gaspard, to attract his attention to the unusual sight.

"It should storm to-day, Lisette," growled Gaspard, as the ex-steward brushed past them. "He has been making love in earnest. Marie Lascour is with him."

"Little good will it do him, I can tell you," replied Lisette, with a suggestive shrug of her low bent shoulders. "She has a lover better suited to her tastes than Jean Duprez."

"Who do you mean, the handsome lieutenant who is coming to her? See."

Duprez had by this time shaken hands with Captain Fusil, and had, in his excess of politeness, presented Madame Lascour and Marie to the recruiting officer and his lieutenant. It suited his purpose, just then, to be friendly with his old sweetheart, and Gaspard had witnessed his unusual civility.

"No," replied Lisette, "I mean the best hunter in the Canton, Pierre Niede. Do you see him anywhere?"

Gaspard ran his eye down the line of soldiers, and then eagerly scanned the group of young men who were gathering around the drummers.

"He is not there," at length he said. "He is one of the conscripts named, I know. But Duprez must have purchased his release—"

"Not unless a heavy price was paid him for it, perhaps the girl, who knows, Gaspard?"

There was a dash of venom as she spoke, and Gaspard grumbled out an answer. But it was lost

in the loud beat of the drum, as the men were ordered to form in ranks in single file, and Lieutenant Valmeau stepped forward with the list in his hand to call the roll of those who must stand the ordeal of the drawing.

Slowly the calling of the names progressed. The soldiers were formed in a semi-circle, and as each man answered to his name and stood in line, the women crowded close upon Fusil, who stood beside Duprez, with Marie and Madame Julie on his left, and Franz, standing partly behind them, peering out upon the line of soldiers.

"There are two men missing, captain," said Valmeau, handing the list to Fusil. "Jacque La Rue, and Pierre Niede. Do you know them, sir?"

The inquiry was addressed to Duprez, who looked down the line as if in search of the delinquents, and was about to reply, when one of the conscripts stepped forward a pace or two from the line, and making an awkward salutation to the officer, answered in his stead.

"Jacque La Rue is dying, captain. If you don't want to draft a corpse, there's no use calling him. The poor fellow's arm was crushed two days ago, and scanty fare and poor nursing will finish him to-day."

The man stepped back into his place, and his story was found to be correct. Jacque La Rue

had been injured while at work and was then almost dying from the lack of proper care.

"But you've one man missing, who is *not* dying, captain," said Duprez. "Pierre Niede—I saw him this morning, only, and he is not here."

There was a whispered conversation between Fusil, his lieutenant, and Duprez. Marie and Madame Julie watched them, feverish with anxiety. Duprez, after a moment's hesitation, pointed towards their cottage, and four of the soldiers were called from the ranks.

The preparations made were quick and silent. A sergeant was detailed to search the cottage for the missing man; and as in cold, deliberate tones the order was given to march, Fusil turned kindly towards the widow.

"My duty compels me, Madame," he said, as if in extenuation of his performance of that duty. "Your pardon, Mademoiselle, but he must take his chances with the rest. There are other lovers here, and yours must not be favored."

The words seemed cold and heartless to Marie, and she would have fallen, had not Fusil supported her, as she stood between him and her mother, gazing towards the cottage with a steady look, her lips fixed, and bloodless as those of a corpse.

The men moved onward in their steady, swinging tramp, the sergeant in advance. They were just turning towards the house, when the figure of a man coming up from the meadows was discerned,

his hands upraised towards them and motioning them to halt.

"It is Pierre, mother—see!" the girl said, in feeble tones. "He is not a coward!"

She stood bravely erect as she spoke, and as the sound of Pierre's voice rang loudly from the roadside, she saw the men halt, then turn, and Pierre came up to where the conscript line was formed, wanting only his presence to complete the number.

His face was flushed with excitement, and his fingers clasped the handle of his carabine with a grip of iron. Across his shoulder was slung a brace of rabbits and a pheasant, the result of his morning's work. He threw them upon the ground, almost at Marie's feet, and laid his gun across them. Then, with a glance at the widow and Duprez, he took his station at the end of the line, and all was ready, as soon as the sergeant had made his report to Valmeau and the men had resumed their places.

While the silence of fear had spread itself over the entire assemblage, excepting the soldiers who took part in it and the invalid veterans to whom the scene was one of no novelty, the faces of the men wore an expression of stern resolution, and the eyes of the women filled with tears. Least anxious of all the spectators was the idiot boy, Franz, who was too much occupied with the gilt eagle on the color-staff and the bullion fringe hang-

ing soiled and tattered from the guide-color, to notice the general silence.

"See this—it's solid gold!" said the lad to Jean Duprez, as he held up the fringe and called loudly to attract his master's attention. "See, Marie—it's pretty enough to trim your jacket with!"

With a quick jerk at his coat sleeve, the boy was thrust aside, and he stood back of Duprez, as a bunch of blue and white ribbons was handed to Fusil. Then, after a few whispered words from Duprez, at which the boy seemed pleased, he ran back of the line of soldiers, and walked up and down, then halted, standing close by Pierre, and crowding next him in the line. He was again thrust aside by the sergeant, this time at the point of the bayonet; he glanced almost savagely, at the soldier, as he felt the sharp prick of the steel, and passing the sleeve of his well-worn blouse across his eyes, went away crying, and was lost in the crowd of boys and women.

The blue and white ribbons were spread out upon a table, counted by Valmeau, and placed inside a common wooden box, in the lid of which there was an opening just large enough to admit a hand.

"All present now, lieutenant?" asked the captain, as he closed the box.

"All present, except Jacque La Rue."

"He's dead by this time!" interrupted the conscript who had told the story of his injured friend;

he would have spoken again, had not the sharp command of "silence, conscript!" called him to a sense of duty.

Now sounded the long roll of the drum, low at first, then sharp and rattling.

One by one, as Fusil, in turn, passed it to each, the men placed their right hands within the box, felt around inside it for a moment, and drew forth a ribbon.

Valmeau slowly and distinctly called each name, as the ribbons were drawn forth from the box, and in varied accents, each man answered:

"*Tirer!*"

Some looked at the ribbons as they took them, and smiled in expectation; and some held their hands down by their sides, standing with eyes directly front and lips compressed, not caring to see the color of their ribbon, till they should have learned their fate.

The silence of the villagers was solemn and foreboding. Men who were not eligible looked upon the long line of peasants and on the file of soldiers, with earnest eyes, and some of these eyes were moist with tears. Mother and sister seemed to hush their very breathing, as the work went on. Some, as they saw their friends or favorites draw ribbons, looked on with countenances as cold and immovable as though of chiseled stone, while ever and anon a woman would bury her face in her hands and sob aloud, as she heard a name called,



and saw a hand drawn from the box, holding in the clenched fingers a blue or a white ribbon—the emblem to her of a life of weary watching, or of hard labor in the Canton—a struggle to do the double work, the work which must be done to earn the daily bread.

Marie could look no more upon the men or soldiers. She turned sadly away, and as she stood by her mother's side, with the widow's arm lovingly pressed around her, the sobs which the roll of the drum drowned, were felt only on her mother's breast.

And so the work progressed, till all had drawn and the box was opened. It was held bottom upwards to show that none had been "neglected" in the drawing, and Fusil counted the hands which, holding each a ribbon, were held upward.

"Show your colors, conscripts!"

Each hand held a ribbon, and each man held his breath in silence and expectation.

"Sergeant, forward, three paces front!"

The line of soldiers which had been formed back of the conscripts, advanced until the word "Halt!" had been given by Fusil in a clear, ringing tone. Then, as the men stood still, the color sergeant took his station at one end of the long line, Lieutenant Valmeau at the extreme right, and beside each man who held a ribbon, there stood a soldier in the soiled and well-worn uniform of the grand army.

At a signal from Fusil, the line was closed, and then, with the same cold tone of command, casting his eyes down the rank, he pronounced in slow and measured tones, the words:

"White ribbons—one pace—front!"

Those bearing white ribbons—just one half the number of the men in line—stepped forward, and a shriek of despair came swelling up from the crowd of eager women.

"The white ones go with me. The blue, remain at home in Alsace! Sergeant, face front! March!"

The work of the day was done, and with a cry of joy, Marie sprang forward, with her hands extended towards Pierre. He was in the rear rank, and held in his upraised hand a piece of blue ribbon.

"Free, mother, Pierre is free! he shall not leave us!"

As she spoke in tones of gladness, even through her tears, Duprez, who had been watching her, stooped at Pierre's feet, and picked up a piece of white ribbon which had been taken from the belt which bound his hunting jacket around him. Duprez said nothing. He merely picked the ribbon up and handed it to Fusil.

There was a glance of hatred in the eyes of the captain as he took the little piece of fluttering silk from Duprez's hand. He knew full well the use to which the crafty ex-steward had applied the ribbon that he had given him the night before, and



he dared not betray his agitation. He was in Duprez's power, and the choice between exposure of his own cupidity, or the disgrace of Pierre Niege, was a matter of scarcely a moment's deliberation.

Quick as the words could be spoken, the command to halt was given. Niege was summoned to the front, and the white ribbon extended towards the astonished Pierre.

"What does this mean, Niege?" inquired Fusil. "Monsieur Duprez is willing to make oath that you had a white ribbon concealed about you. This white one he saw tucked loosely in your belt."

His words were strange to Pierre, but they were stranger to the crafty ex-steward. The captain had suddenly devised a plan to place the burden of the proof upon Duprez.

"You see, captain, he was drawn for service. I will take the oath, if you require it," he answered, glancing at the line of conscripts as if to ask their applause at his zeal in bringing Pierre to an account for the trick he had imposed upon them.

All eyes were turned upon them, and there were low murmurs as he had expected, among the men, and loud calls for a second drawing—an experiment, by the way, which Fusil knew too well he must not try, especially as he had the option of it in his own hands.

"I have never seen that ribbon before, captain," said Niege. "Monsieur Duprez knows that I am

no coward. Give me another trial, if you will, I will stand the test."

The voice in which the young man spoke was clear and steady, and the men were silent, awaiting Fusil's answer.

"Well spoken, man, and you shall have it! Sergeant, the box and ribbons!"

The ribbons were again counted and placed in the box, which was closed by Valmeau and handed to Fusil.

As he took the box from the lieutenant, and extended it towards Niege, he turned to Marie:

"Your lover may not be altogether lost," he said; "he has another chance. Now, conscript, draw!"

With his face averted, Pierre put his hand within the box. It was a moment of fearful anxiety to Marie and Madame Julie, and it was a moment of chagrin and expectation to Duprez; his experiment had not succeeded yet, and he felt that the chances of the stake that he had played for, were hanging wavering in the balance.

There was a single roll of the drum, and as Pierre answered in a low tone, "*Tirer, Capitaine!*" he stood before the anxious crowd, holding in his right hand a piece of white ribbon.

A quick cry of anguish from Marie was the first sound that fell upon the ears of the new-made conscript. He would have caught her in his arms, but he realized at once that it was useless to attempt

it, for the crossed bayonets of two soldiers intercepted his progress; and, unable to render any assistance, he was forced to see her sink, fainting, to the ground.

There were few words spoken. The strict laws of the French conscription allowed no delay. Once drawn for service, there was little time given for the last adieux. An hour only of preparation, and they would be marching from the Canton towards the camp.

Marie was raised up tenderly by Fusil, and Duprez approached the fallen girl as though he would have held her in his arms. As he did so, she raised herself, and dashing aside the willing hands that would have assisted her, she clung to Fusil imploringly.

"Stay, captain, stay! Pierre cannot, must not go from us! He is our only hope!"

"My orders are strict, Ma'amselle, and he has been drawn for service!"

The captain would have put her away from him and have turned again towards his men, who had, under the quick order of Valmeau prepared to march, when the girl sprang away from him and stood beside her lover.

"He cannot, *must* not go! He is *my husband!*"

Without a word to Marie, Fusil turned towards the widow.

"Have you the proofs, Madame, of this?"

But the woman was silent, and looked up into

his face in mute astonishment. Her daughter's words were a shock to her, and she stood silent and wondering before the officer, looking at Marie to solve the mystery.

"Yes, mother, Pierre is mine!" the girl said, as the young hunter held her firmly to his breast, "by all the rites of our most holy church. I have the proof from Father Michel."

Wild with excitement, and certain of saving her lover, she left them and ran towards the cottage. It was but a short way off and they could see her enter the open doorway. In a moment she appeared again, and hastening to Fusil, placed a paper in his hand.

"'Tis there, captain," she sobbed. "The marriage scrip from good, kind Father Michel!"

It was a happy moment for Fusil. He had felt the duty of the soldier giving way to the generous impulses of the man, and he saw that Duprez had been foiled in his scheme at last. He had found a loop-hole of escape from the dilemma in which his breach of faith had placed him. He glanced knowingly, if not patronizingly, at Duprez, as he unrolled the paper and looked for the contents which should save Pierre to Marie, and rob France of an efficient soldier.

Then, with a sigh of regret, he raised Marie from the ground, and as Gaspard crowded near to him, motioned to Valmeau, and handed the paper to Duprez for examination.

"This is no marriage scrip, Mademoiselle. Your Pierre must go with me."

"No, no, captain—he cannot go! 'Twas given me months ago when we were married by Father Michel, at the convent chapel!"

She snatched the paper from Duprez, and held it out to him imploringly.

"The paper is a blank, Mademoiselle Lascour," he answered, as he put her away from him—"none knew of such a marriage, and the priest is—"

"Dead!"

The words came with a dull, sepulchral sound from the lips of old Lisette, who had found her way through the crowd, and with Madame Lascour was supporting the stricken girl, who had no proof of marriage. Pierre would have broken away from the soldiers, but Fusil had foreseen the trouble that such an action would have caused, and had given the word of command to Valmeau.

The roll of the drum again drowned the sobs of the women; and as Duprez, in his obsequious manner bent over Marie, his eyes met Madame Lascour's fastened upon him with a look of intense hatred.

But she was too sorrow-stricken even to interpose when he laid his hand upon Marie's shoulder, and placed her sinking head upon his arm.

Lisette, who stood near the girl, brushed him away with a quick movement which was almost a

blow, and supported the insensible girl in her own strong arms.

"Stand off, Duprez, Marie Lascour is not yet in your arms!" she shouted. "*I will see to her!*"

The scene was a wild one, and fraught with agony to those whose hearts were not yet steeled and callous to the awful interest of the drawing, and its consequences to the people of the Canton.

And yet Fusil, who, while he was at heart a man of tender feelings, was in discipline a thorough soldier, gave the command to march, in a tone betraying neither sympathy nor hope for those bereaved.

There was a moment only for leave-taking, and then, with a roll of the drum, the colors were unfurled, and the faces of the conscripts and the soldiers were turned towards the distant mountain road.

Erect in his place Pierre stood, with a face which he struggled to make impassive. There was an expression of calm resignation in his tightly compressed lips, and the kiss which he imprinted on the widow's cheek was a lingering one.

"It is better so, my mother," he answered, as she pointed to Marie. "She will not see me go away from her."

He took from his breast a small gold chain, pieced with a few links of silver, and from which hung a small silver cross, and handed it to the widow.

"This will remind her of me, and I will send her kisses on the little cross."

He pressed the emblem to his lips, once, twice, and then a third time and placed it in the widow's hand.

She passed it to Lisette, and with a glance at the new-made conscript which had more of womanly feeling and compassion in it than one would have supposed the old house-keeper capable, she clasped the chain around the neck of the prostrate girl, and turned her head away, just as the men and soldiers took up their line of march.

The steady tramp of the veterans was heard in contrast with the uneasy, broken step of the conscripts, and Franz, again equipped with the stick, which he carried at his shoulder as though it were a gun, trudged along behind them, watching the bright ribbons fluttering in the sunlight, with far more mimic pride than did the color-bearer see the eagles borne before him.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SLIMY TRAIL OF A SERPENT.

As it serves our purpose best to follow, in a general way, the course of our story with reference to the general characters with which we have to deal, it may be well to dwell for a moment ere we proceed, upon events in the Canton Alsace, following the conscription.

It was a heavy blow to the simple folk in the little mountain village, this call for men; and the loss to them of the dear ones who had been compelled to follow the roll of the drum and the fluttering of the pennants as Fusil and his soldiers marched away towards the frontier, was keenly felt.

Secure in his own immunity from service, Duprez had reason to congratulate himself upon the success of his plan, which had, for a time, seemed so doubtful.

The work of the conscription had been fairly done. The grand army had laid its stern hands upon its quota of soldiers, and the ex-steward was

left in easy possession of his secret, for such it was, and none knew of it but the erring captain, Maurice Fusil.

And, so far as Fusil was concerned, Duprez felt that he was safe. Men are prone to the consideration of their own interests, and he knew that the transaction which commenced with the old port wine and the pheasant so nicely served by Jeannette and ending in his sale or gift of the white ribbon to Jean Duprez, would be a dangerous disclosure for him to make.

Duprez, most clearly, held the vantage on his own side, and both he and the captain knew exactly their relative positions in the matter.

The people of the Canton, too, had their own griefs to think about, which concerned them more deeply than the troubles of Madame Lascour and Marie. Both were favorites in the Canton, and the kind-hearted peasants would have rendered them all assistance in their power, and had already given a fair portion of their sympathy; but the phantoms of grief and impending poverty were knocking, unbidden, at many of the cottage doors. The weight of sorrow fell heavily enough on all, and almost as soon as the conscripts had departed, they relapsed into their wonted steady-going ways, leaving the widow to the solitude and cares of her saddened household.

And yet, not all of Duprez's secret had gone to the war hidden in the guilty conscience of Captain

Maurice Fusil. The agency of the boy, Franz, in transferring the white ribbon to the belt of Pierre's hunting blouse, was an innocent one, at best. The work which he had to do for Jean Duprez, was always done quietly, secretly, and without a question as to the motive, and in this case the boy's ignorance was doubly valuable to his master.

The lad knew well the penalty of any disobedience, and Duprez knew well the consequence of relaxing from the rigor of his control over the simple-minded changeling. He governed the boy by blows and menaces, and Franz found, to his own sorrow, that the complicity of which he was in the least degree suspected, had deprived him of the generous favors which the villagers were wont to bestow upon him.

But the theft of the marriage scrip was his own secret. Questioned upon all matters but this one, he answered the queries put to him in his usual laughing, rambling manner, and went no farther. Even Jean Duprez was ignorant of the agency which had helped him to the knowledge of the secret marriage with Pierre Niede.

Neither his threats of punishment, nor the actual infliction of his blows could wring from the boy an explanation of how he had become possessed of the paper, or what, if he knew, had become of it. If he had hidden it, he had probably forgotten where, it held so slight a place in his treacherous memory, and as the rumor of the double dealing on the day

of the drawing grew cold by repetition, the villagers settled down to their own sorrows, and Madame Lascour was alone in her affliction and her sometimes want.

Here, then, Jean Duprez found his golden opportunity. He paid an almost daily visit to the widow, avoided at first, by Marie, till she wearied of his pertinacity, and learned to suffer the infliction of his presence as best she might.

Perhaps some remembrance of his old love for Julie Marchaud caused him to act kindly, and more than once since Pierre had been taken away, he sent her presents, and aided her in her affliction, taking chances, in his own way, from time to time to press his suit for Marie's hand.

News from the army was more eagerly looked for in Alsace than before the conscription. Every courier who came from the front was besieged for news, and the words which came back from the men who had been torn away from them, were freighted with gloomy accounts of the campaign.

And with Marie it was a weary watching for good news from Pierre. For a time, all that she learned was by an occasional mention of his name and his whereabouts in the scraps of letters which others received.

At last there came a letter—a few words only, after their long watching. He had been ill, and for weeks had been lying in the rough hospital barracks, till he had been dragged away with the

wounded, and assigned to a regiment which was to see immediate service at the front.

Duprez himself carried the letter to the widow, and again urged his suit for Marie. At first, the only inducement he offered was a comfortable home for both. In this he failed. Marie, in the full faith of her love for Pierre, watched for his return, and asserted her marriage, till it became a talk among the people, and they took sides with her.

Each day, as the dreadful silence became more like the certainty of her husband's death, she watched and waited for his letters, which always failed to come.

At last there seemed a change in those about her. There were significant looks among the women, and some strange remarks among the men, till one day, at the village green, she was accused of a dishonest ruse to clear her lover from the conscription.

Duprez asserted that she had no proof of the marriage; there were no records of it in the convent chapel, and Father Michel, who alone could prove it, had, soon after performing the ceremony, fallen in the snow, and was found stiff and frozen by the convent dogs.

As the war progressed, there was work enough for those still left in Alsace. Almost daily there were detachments of new men who were hurried to the front, and there were workshops erected by

the army officers, for the making of supplies for the soldiers. The work of cutting wood soon ceased, the men were busy at the forges and the making of coats and cartridges supplied the women with work.

And yet, in all the bustle of these preparations, they stood aloof from Marie. The story of her conscript lover went from neighbor to neighbor, and it fell in murmured accents even upon her own ears, from the lips of her companions. Some busy brain had whispered of dishonor, some of her old companions looked askance, and she felt that she was regarded by all the new comers, which the war had brought into Alsace, as one who had some secret from the world.

She had taken her place among the women in their daily labor, and her pretty face, and lithe, elastic form and step, brought her many a compliment from the officers who were appointed to superintend the work.

At last the worst came to her, and she was forced to seek, in her self-imprisonment within the sacred walls of her mother's cottage, protection from the insults offered her, by those who lent a willing ear to the stories put in circulation of her presumed *liaison* with her foster-brother.

And so, amid all his professions of friendship, Jean Duprez was busy at his story-telling, and soon he changed his tactics with Madame Lascour. The little assistance which she had received from

him was suddenly withdrawn, and his visits to the cottage, which had been growing less frequent for some time, now ceased altogether, and his remorseless agent called upon her for the payment of the rent due to Jean Duprez.

It was a hard blow for the widow. She had had no word from Pierre, no letters had been received from him, and Jean Duprez had told them in the village that Pierre Niede had died from sickness and exposure in the frontier camp.

Pouring his insidious rumors day by day into the ears of those about him, he sought to shake the widow's confidence in the story of Marie's marriage, till at last they met.

No one knew what passed between them, except that they quarrelled; the cottage was given up to some of the officers of the invalid corps, and the widow and her daughter, without a home or shelter, were dependents on the hospitality of others, earning a little only by their hard work, and Marie, weighed down by her great doubts and sorrows, and almost an invalid, became a burden to herself and to those around her.

Almost as a forlorn hope, she waited and watched for each new arrival from the army, to gain some news of Pierre.

Thrown in contact with the officers who came into Alsace, she made her inquiries with all the caution that she could command, and yet with the certainty that the story of her marriage was



doubted by the very men of whom she sought her information.

At last, the blow came to her direct. The seed of calumny which Duprez had sown so carefully took root, and it was boldly asserted that her story was a falsehood, and a ruse to exempt Pierre Niede from the conscription. There were harsh words, too, about her mother, whom she loved so fondly. The almost forgotten story of her residence at the castle was again revived, her sudden marriage with Jacque Lascour, the mysterious discovery of Pierre Niede upon the roadside, the secret of her mother's attempted flight from the castle some years before, all these had Duprez set afloat, and Marie felt and knew that her presence in the Canton was a tax upon the little store which they had saved. She was a dependent, and saw no refuge but the hated marriage with Duprez, which now her mother urged her to accept.

It was a hard alternative to her, this marriage or starvation. Duprez had spread his net, and he pressed his advantage with all the skill which he could command. He even brought the news of Pierre's death direct from the army, news which crushed the only remaining hope to which Marie had clung even in her deepest sorrow. Among the conscripts who had left the Canton, but one had as yet returned. A poor, worthless fellow, whom Duprez had once saved from starvation by giving

him the work of clearing away the ruins of the castle. He had been sick and wounded, and the been discharged from service, coming back to Alsace a maimed and useless man, a mere relic of the war. He told wonderful tales of the army, of hard fare, and of the battles through which he had passed, and brought with him a scrap of paper on which a comrade had written down for him had dying words and message from Pierre Niede.

With an eager step, Duprez carried the message to the widow, and begged her to break the sad news to her daughter. It was a hard blow for her, he said, but a far more severe one to Marie, and he was sorry for her.

"I have been too hard with you and with your daughter, Julie," were his friendly words, as he read the message from the paper. "You have no one left to hope for now, and I will fill his place with both."

Driven almost to desperation, Madame Lascour buried her face in her hands, and sank down at his feet. The worst had come at last, and she thought, for the time, that Duprez had lost the hard hatred of his lifetime towards her, and would aid her in her misery.

"Yes, hard enough, Jean," she sobbed. "And we are low enough indeed!"

"Not so, Julie, there is a chance, I will make Marie my wife."

"And the rumor that you have set afloat, the



scandal you have raised about us, so false, of both, and yet so hard, so very hard to battle against? and then this final blow! it is too much to bear!"

As the widow struggled with her grief, she seemed almost imploring towards Duprez. For a moment, it seemed to her that all the misery of her life had been centred in the news which he had brought her, and yet, in her thoughtfulness for Marie, she seemed to waver at the decision which Duprez asked her to give.

"Do not tell her, Jean," at length she said. "Poor girl, she cannot bear it now, her heart would break. Let us wait awhile till she is stronger."

He raised her from her crouching position as she spoke, and they were alone, and silent for a time. Then, with a crafty offer of even a delay in the marriage, he asked her to promise that she would not oppose it, still urging the necessity, and still promising a contradiction of the rumors.

## CHAPTER X.

### A COUNCIL OF EXPEDIENCY.

THE two friends, the inseparable ex-servants of the late Marquis De Briennes, were good-humored on the early Spring afternoon of which we write. Early Spring-time it was, so far as the cycle of the year was concerned, but more like Winter in the chilling, icy air which came sweeping down the chimney from the mountain gorge, blowing the sparks about upon the hearth-stone.

Dinner, such as it was in Duprez's household, had already been finished, and Gaspard and Duprez were taking it easily and comfortably, with fresh-lighted pipes, each within easy range of the steady, even heat of the blazing wood fire, looking out upon the frozen roadway.

There were two faces close to the narrow, sand-specked panes, and two pipes gave forth uneven wreaths of fine blue smoke, as Duprez sat watching Gaspard, while Gaspard was lazily returning the compliment by watching Master Jean Duprez.

A heavily laden army wagon drawn by six

horses was passing their cottage door; the tired animals were dragging their weary limbs over the frosty ground, with an occasional start forward at a trot, as the sharp-cutting lash of the heavy whips was snapped about their ears or over their steaming flanks. A dozen or more soldiers lagged behind and at the sides of the wagon, as convoy to the contents, but they seemed to feel but little anxiety concerning the safety of the load of cartridges, which they were carrying to the nearest army depot on the frontier posts.

Not altogether interested in the shouts of the drivers, or the plunging of the tired horses—for the road was upon a heavy rising grade, and was very stony—Duprez watched, with half an eye, the movements of old Lisette, as she put the living-room in order.

He had something to say to Gaspard, it seemed, and perhaps Gaspard had something to say to him; for they were both nervously anxious at the long continued presence of Lisette, as she bustled about the room, while Franz crouched, half asleep, on the wooden bench in the chimney corner.

"Are you nearly through, Lisette?" Duprez inquired. "Be quick, for I have work to do, and want this room to do it in."

There was just the least perceptible hurry in Lisette's movements, no more, as she heard Duprez's command; but she made no reply to him.

After a moment, she roused the drowsy lad from

his fireside day-dreams, and tossed a basket to him, while she tied a hood upon her head and wrapped her cloak about her shoulders.

She knew Duprez's anger at her delay, and she knew also that the boy would be an intruder upon his master's work, and so, the two went out upon the chilly road together.

"They're gone at last, Gaspard, and now, for work," said Duprez, with a sigh of relief.

The master of the house moved lazily away from the window, and trundled out from the corner of the room a small table, upon which was placed a short, iron-bound box. He moved the table towards the light, because the box was fastened to it, screwed down and bolted, for it was the treasure-chest of the ex-steward, to which he only had the keys.

Duprez was used to the business in hand, and so was Gaspard, for they had done the same work many times before. Gaspard was confidential clerk, at times.

It was near rent-day with the landlord of more than half the village; the box contained his title deeds and leases, and his rent-roll was to be prepared; for Jean Duprez was a shrewd and exacting proprietor, and his leases were made at a rental which, paid monthly by his tenants, always kept him in current funds.

He told over the list with care, and Gaspard sorted out the papers, noting the arrears of each

tenant, and the stock on hand, till they came to the cottage wherein Madame Julie Lascour and her pretty daughter had taken refuge.

"Never mind that one, Gaspard, I can afford to lose the income from that miserable house—at least, until the tenants change."

Gaspard looked up at him with a blank gaze of surprise, as he threw the paper aside, and then, in a tone of easy indifference, he asked:

"Why so? They are already far behind, and it can be rented to the commissary at a better rate than they are paying."

"Well, I can afford to lose it. You see, Gaspard, I have a lien upon at least *one* of the inmates, as security."

But Gaspard did not see, and so he asked Duprez the reason of his leniency.

"Women are not chattels yet, Duprez," he said, with an inquisitive smile, "and they are not confiscated in default of rent, unless there has been some new law to make it so."

"You're as stupid as an ass, to-day, Gaspard," Duprez returned, in compliment to his companion's inquiry. "Marriage, my man, marriage. That is *my* foreclosure."

"*You*, married—and the bride?" Gaspard saw that Duprez preferred to tell his own story, and he humored him by giving him the only cue he needed to begin the telling of it.

"Marie Lascour."

Gaspard feigned surprise at the announcement.

"And she consents, she has given up her conscript husband?"

"Given up or not, Gaspard, Marie Lascour is to be my wife, and that, without delay. What do you think of it?"

"Think of it, Jean Duprez? why this," replied Gaspard, with sudden warmth, walking towards the window and looking out. "That your plan has been a devilish good one, and your hand well played, that's all."

"My plan, as you call it, Gaspard Jarome, is one with which you, at least, have had nothing to do."

"You're welcome to all the honor of it, then, without my envy, Jean Duprez. But you have not yet seen the end of the game which you are playing, take my word for that."

"And who is to meddle with it, pray? Not you, my man!"

There was a cool, deliberate threat in Duprez's words; he gathered up the papers, locking them securely in his strong box upon the table, and then turned his attention solely towards Gaspard.

"This affair is mine, I tell you, and there is the end of it, until the girl is Madame Marie Duprez, and then—"

"And then," interrupted Gaspard, with a look of just as cool indifference as Duprez's had been a

burnished threat, "you will find no easy reckoning, I take it."

"I settle accounts with no one. I own half the village, and all are in fear of, or dependent upon me. What matters it whether the girl consents willingly or not? she will be none the sweeter for it, and I can afford to wait her pleasure so far as love is concerned, or force her to it, if it comes to that."

"It would be well for you if that was all the trouble; you forget that Pierre Niede—"

"Tut, tut, man! You are as foolish as an old maid in your fears, and as puny as a girl in your conjectures. The fellow is far away by this time, and they have no idea where he is. They believe the story of his death as I have told it to them, and the scrap which I took to Julie, with his dying words upon it, did the business. She took the story with an easy conscience and a heavy sigh. As for the girl, she has no proof of marriage with her conscript lover, and the whispers of the women have been loud and long about her *liaison*."

"Yes, you have spread your net with care this time, Duprez, but counted your game without the very best of reckoning. You seem to have forgotten old Lisette."

With his clenched fist, Duprez struck the table, throwing the heavy tumblers which stood upon it down upon the wide-tiled hearth. It was an incautious movement, and an unwonted one for him,

he who was generally as calm and collected in danger as in an ordinary conversation, and Gaspard's cold, grey eye lighted up with a peculiar brilliancy as he saw that the shaft he had sent at random had struck home so nicely.

"Lisette?" replied Duprez, quickly.

"Yes, Duprez, Lisette! she once loved you, my man, and the spurned love of such a woman may breed evil in her, if a rival crosses her path. Take my word for it, she means mischief."

Perhaps not quite so finished in the execution of his plans, Gaspard was as crafty as Duprez. He saw in the present mood of his companion a chance to work his own revenge. He felt, for a moment, that he was courting trouble; yet the keen, deep, unfailing hatred that he felt for the woman, Lisette, and the unpleasant remembrances of the struggle he had had with her, were fresh in his inconveniently retentive memory.

"Well, she knows nothing. You and I share our secrets with no one; and as to this marriage with Marie Lascour, my plans as you say, have been well laid, and now at last she will be mine."

"And when do you propose this marriage? is it not sudden? Does Julie consent to it?"

"Julie? she dare not refuse; I would crush her and drive her daughter from the Canton, with the story of her conscript lover branded on her forehead in calumny too deep to be effaced. Mark me well, Gaspard, I mean it!"

"Then you had better be quick about it. What do you settle on her as the price of marriage?"

"This."

Duprez tossed a paper across the table. It was the deed of a portion of the confiscated estate, which carried with it the rents and issues of a score of cottages.

"You pay a good price it seems, for your pretty, black-eyed luxuries! Are these the free estates, or are they the lands which are disputed in the title?"

Gaspard knew enough of Duprez's affairs to feel certain that he would make no gift such as the deeds conveyed, unless there was some trickery in the conveyance.

"Better than that, Gaspard, she shall have the title from the Marquis De Briennes; the rightful heirs are gone, and the property reverts to the empire, in the death of the twin boys."

"But was there not a release of the confiscation edict somewhere in the old man's papers?"

"Yes, but the fire in the wing of the old castle reduces that pretty piece of seals and parchment to a heap of ashes. Once mine, the property can soon be reclaimed, and as for Marie, when she becomes my wife, her conscript husband may return if he sees fit, and we will dispute possession of the woman and the lands as best we may."

These two men were too much interested in this double plot to give much attention to events pass-

ing without, and they had not noticed the eyes of the old housekeeper, peering in at them through the window, as she stopped before entering the cottage door.

"To-night, then, Gaspard, we will complete the work," continued Duprez, pacing nervously up and down the room. "I will have the contract drawn, and you shall witness it."

A look from his companion silenced him. Gaspard had seen the shadow across the window, and as Lisette came slowly in upon them, two pipes had been relighted, and two men were engaged in smoking.

## CHAPTER XI.

FOILED.

MADAME Julie Lascour was waiting for visitors. She was alone in her cheerless living room, sitting in the light of the fire only, watching for Jean Duprez, counting the hours till the time should come when the hard terms of the ex-steward should be enforced, and the contract made that bound Marie to wed her mother's former lover, the man who was now her wary and designing persecutor.

The stern hand of necessity had been placed upon her fortunes, and the worst had come to her, but not the worst to the child, who, crouched upon her lonely bed, was sobbing in the chilly chamber above.

Madame Lascour had broken the news to Marie, and, desperate at first in her arguments against the hated marriage, Marie had finally consented to the sacrifice. There was, to her, but one alternative; and, were it not for her lingering hopes of Pierre's return, death, which alone could save her, would have been gladly sought.

By the civil laws of France, the child was little more than a chattel in the parent's hands or will. The contract for the marriage which Duprez had urged, would bind the daughter, and the pressure brought against Madame Lascour was alike desperate in its conception and unyielding in its enforcement.

"Oh, Pierre, my Pierre," Marie sobbed, as she sank down upon the floor, and gazed out into the darkness, from her chamber window. "Will you never come to save me from this man?"

The low moaning of the wind was all her answer, and she sobbed aloud in her agony.

"There was a quick knock upon the cottage door, and a shuffling of feet upon the narrow steps below her. Her unwelcome suitor was punctual, and she heard the door creak upon its hinges, and then shut, heard, it seemed to her, in the sound of the closing door, the knell of all her happiness.

The plotters were at work, and her poor, weak-minded mother would not fail to prove an easy victim to their plans and promises.

It seemed to Marie that the fearful work could be prevented, yet she could stir neither hand nor limb, nor raise even her feeble voice to prevent the consummation of the crime.

As she listened, there came up from between the cracks in the bare floor of her little room, the mellow light of the candles which had been lighted in the room beneath her, and she crouched down

upon the floor to listen, just where the light came shining through.

She could hear Duprez as he pressed his claim for her, and told again the story brought from the battle fields, of Pierre's untimely death; and then, she heard her mother sobbing in her grief.

"A little while only, Jean, I beg you. If there be no other chance, Marie shall be your wife; but give me a few weeks longer, Pierre may not be dead, he may come back to claim my child."

"And if he does, what proof have either of them of a legal marriage? You never consented to it, and by the laws of France, if you oppose it, no secret marriage can be held binding. I tell you, Julie, that the boy is dead. Gaspard heard the story as I did, and the proof I gave you—"

Well up in the part assigned to him, Gaspard took up the story with a narrowness of detail which even Duprez failed to give him credit for; each item of the history was rehearsed, even to the lingering death of the conscript in the German fortress, and his dying message to Marie.

And so in her chilly room, the girl heard the rustling of the parchment, and the contract was handed to Madame Lascour to sign.

She could listen no longer. Anything, it seemed to her, any fate or any sacrifice, were better than this union with Duprez, and she leaned her head upon the window and closed her eyes in fear and trembling.

As she pressed her face upon the cold glass, it seemed to give her some relief, and then, as she stood in silence, shivering at times, she looked down upon the road, a few feet below her, and tried to pierce the darkness with her earnest gaze.

She thought, once, that she could see shadowy forms upon the ground beneath her. But they went away again, and she pressed her forehead down upon her hands, and raised the sash, that the cold air might blow in upon her heated face and cool her throbbing temples.

She could detect no sound from those at work below, and yet, as she listened, she fancied she heard low whispers somewhere in the room, and she turned, in very fear that they had come to force her to the signing of the hated contract which should break her oath to Pierre Neige, and barter her soul's peace for what was little more than a respite from Duprez's severity.

But no one was there, and all that she could see was the streak of yellow light upon the wall, reflected through the crevices in the well-worn floor.

As she leaned out upon the window-sill, something fell across her face, and seemed to wind itself about her neck.

She started with a muffled cry, and placed her hand upon it. It was a rope, thrown towards the window by some one below, and looking down she

could now see the shadow of a light, willowy form moving in the darkness.

She caught the rope in her hands and held it fast. As she did so, she could see it move, and then, in the dim light which shone out upon the road from the partly opened window of the room below, she saw the lithe form of Franz peering in upon the scene, his body close to the side of the house, and holding the rope in his attenuated fingers.

He paused but a moment, and then she felt the rope pulled gently and heard some one calling to her from below.

"Marie—Marie—Marie Lascour!" The boy gave a low, peculiar whistle, so low that it was lost in the sound of the wind sweeping around the corner of the house, and so she listened, but dared not reply.

Then, there was a sudden thud upon the window-sill, and a grating sound as of some sharp instrument gnawing its way into the decaying wood-work, and as she watched and listened, there was a rubbing against the house, followed by the appearance of the idiot's moppy head, just above the window-sill.

"Marie Lascour! Marie! It's only me—I'm Franz! Come here!"

She grasped the boy by the shoulders and helped him up, till he sat in the open window, with one

leg dangling without, as he drew the rope up after him, and climbed within the room.

"I want you, Marie, and you must come with me."

"Want me? for what? I will not go."

She spoke in a low whisper, and the boy answered her in the same tone, as he commenced tying the rope into knots a few inches apart.

"There, I'll make it bear you safely," he said, as he dropped the knotted end upon the ground. "I climbed up by it, but it mightn't hold you without this."

As he spoke, he fastened the sharp hook of an Alpine hunting staff upon the window-sill, driving the keen pointed spear far down into the wood. To this he attached the end of the rope, and pulling it through until the knots were close to the window, he dropped the end upon the ground, and waited for Marie to go.

"They want you, Marie, but you cannot go with them. Master Jean don't love me much, and I don't love him, and so I'm going to steal you away from him, and from Madame Julie, too. See, Marie, it is easy to get down, I could almost jump it, in the daytime!"

He pointed out into the darkness as he spoke, and tried to force her through the window. But she would not consent to go, and questioned him in whispers why he came, and what he meant to do.



But the boy was silent, annoyed, it seemed, at her reluctance, and only motioned that she must go with him.

There was a sound of loud and angry voices coming up through the cracks in the floor, and she saw from the streaks of light that there were figures moving rapidly below them, in the room where her mother sat with Jean Duprez.

And now it seemed to her in her fear and agony, that she had found a loophole of escape. There was no time for question or delay, nor could she gain from Franz any explanation of the motive which had sent him on his errand, nor what he wanted her to do, except to leave the cottage.

"The rope is safe, Marie, and strong enough for two of us. Come, I will help you."

Instinctively she allowed the boy to wind his sinewy arms about her, and blindly she followed his instructions. The knots he had made in the rope would help her in the descent, and she knew that it was but a few feet to the ground; the hunting staff was firmly fastened to the narrow sill, and the rope was wound about the iron.

"Quick, quick; I hear them coming. Do be quick!"

The lad left her side a second, crouched down upon the floor, and listened; then, still more anxiously, he helped her through the window, and passed the ropes over her shoulders and about her waist.

"Now, Marie, follow me, and keep good hold upon the knots! I'll take the smooth side for myself. Hold tight, and I will catch you if you fall."

The tone in which the lad spoke reassured her, and she allowed him to go first through the window, and then, as he clung to the rope with one hand, she swung down from the knotted side and hung below him upon their frail ladder.

Hand over hand she descended, the knots placed at their convenient distances, easing her descent.

As she neared the ground, she felt herself grasped by a cold, clammy hand, and a face was pressed close to her ear.

She would have screamed with fright, but a strong arm held her, and the voice of old Lisette speaking close to her face, told her she had nothing to fear.

"Quietly, child, for your life, and mine," the woman whispered; "why, you are shivering!"

She threw about the girl's shoulders her own heavy cloak, and kissed the trembling fugitive.

"Trust me, my child, trust me, I say, but as you value life, be silent."

She helped Franz lightly down, and together, they pulled the rope down from the hooked end of the Alpine staff, jerking the iron loose from the sill of the window just above them.

They were close to the house now, and could see the shadows of those within the room; Duprez sat

at the table, and Madame Lascour was signing the marriage contract.

Then, with his face turned towards them, taking the pen in his clumsy fingers, they saw the signature of Gaspard Jarome placed upon the contract, as a witness, and a sealed packet was handed to the widow.

"Good God," the girl murmured, "my poor, poor mother, has it come to this?"

She leaned tremblingly upon Lisette's arm; the hand which the woman placed upon her own was cold and hard, yet it gave a gentle and loving pressure as Marie looked up into Lisette's face.

In the light from the window she could see the stern features of the woman who supported her; they were wreathed in a smile as deep and intriguing as those of Jean Duprez, who sat within, holding the parchment up to the flickering flame of the candle, to dry the ink upon the several signatures.

For a moment Lisette looked in upon them, then suddenly, with almost a man's strength, she caught the frightened girl in her arms, and forced her back against the house.

Gaspard was coming towards the window, light in hand. He held the candle against the pane, then, putting it back of him, he peered without.

"They have heard us, Marie, and our lives indeed depend upon this night's work. Come, Franz, the staff!"

Lisette snatched the stout stick from the boy's hand, and placing the pointed and barbed end upon the ground, gave it to Marie.

"Quick, girl, your best pace now, for they are coming!"

She guided Marie down the dark and stony road, looking back now and then, towards the cottage. For a time they could see the lights moving hither and thither, and then suddenly all was dark. After a moment lights appeared in the vacant chamber which Marie had so lately quitted, and the fugitives could hear the voices of the two men in hurried converse, as they discovered its emptiness. Soon one of them appeared at the open window with a light, and as he waved it to and fro above his head, the hard features of Gaspard Jarome looked almost ghostly in the flickering light of the half-burned taper.

"Crouch low, Marie, way down, my girl, close to the stone edge of the broken wall. They shall not take you to him while I live!"

There was a scream, one long and agonizing scream, heard from the cottage, and then a heavy fall upon the floor.

"My mother, my poor, poor mother! I cannot leave her so, Lisette, I must go back!"

Marie turned sharply towards the edge of the road, and broke away from Lisette, just as the rays from a masked lantern held by some one in the window, fell full upon the side of the cottage.

But the hard hand of the woman held her again, close down to the ground.

Slowly the light moved along the base of the low wall, and slowly, yet surely, a dark figure traveled in advance of it, then, with a sudden change in its course, the light swept farther out into the road, and the sharp, ringing report of a pistol shot broke upon the still night air, while the smoke from the discharged weapon wreathed back into the open window.

"Too late this time, my crafty lord. You reckoned without your host, to-day! Come, child; for the sake of your dead husband, come with me!"

Lisette threw her arms about Marie, who seemed too horror stricken to move on with her. The girl stood motionless as a statue, pointing towards the open window, with her eyes fixed upon the face which shone beside the light, with a satanic lustre in the nervous eyes.

But Lisette forced her to move onward, feeling her way over the rough roadway with the staff, and in a low tone calling to Franz to follow her, as she reached her hand out to assist him.

But he did not answer; there was a faint moan only, then a heavy groan, as she sank down behind a mound of broken stones which had stopped the course of one of the Winter streams, and turned it towards the valley below them, just as the rays of light came streaming from the open door of Madame Lascour's dwelling, and almost reached them.

## CHAPTER XII.

PRIVATE PIERRE NIEGE.

THE grand army of Napoleon was lying crippled and unnerved, in the narrow compass of the Prussian territory, between the borders of the Baltic and the slow waters of the lazy Vistula.

There had been hard and determined fighting. Napoleon would acknowledge no defeat, and yet he had felt in their severest infliction the memorable events which were crowded into the gloomy 8th of February, 1807.

At the dawn of day, bugles had sounded for action along the lines of the French encampment, and the Emperor had chosen to renew the struggle of the day before.

And so even in a snow storm he threw his mettled columns upon the lances of the intrepid Cossacks, and hazarded his army's safety upon his chosen field of Preuss-Eylau.

Davoust, pressing forward with all the fiery, and sometimes ill-timed impetuosity which made him a favorite with the Emperor, had been driven back

upon the main body by the fragment of the Prussian guards, who had fought so bravely against his serried lines at Jena.

Ney, scenting the air of battle from his stand upon the rugged highway to Königsberg, came trooping down to his rescue, but without avail, and Napoleon, having at last found an equal, had left a dozen or more of his saucy French eagles in the hands of the Russian general Benningsen, and had acknowledged this conflict to be at least a drawn battle, if not a temporary and disastrous check.

Worn out and weakened from the loss of munitions of war, robbed in a closely contested fight of more than fourteen hours' duration, of twenty-four thousand and picked soldiers, while struggling with desperate recklessness, to drive the allied masses back from their position, clinging to his destiny, and casting his gauntlet into the very face of fate, far into the night, the man who seemed to hold the destinies of France in the palm of his hand, was lying at bay with the rear of his army towards the fortified towns upon the Baltic, and keeping the banks of the Vistula well in view as a place of safety for his shattered forces.

There had been hot work for the new regiments, and Captain Maurice Fusil had, perhaps unwillingly, been somewhat relieved from the tiresome duty of the recruiting service in the fire and smoke of battle at the front.

"A rough night for outpost duty, this, lieutenant-

ant!" exclaimed the captain, with a shiver, as he came rolling in from behind the line of shelter tents, and warmed his hands by the blaze of the bivouac fire, "what news?"

There was a narrow circle around the ruddy blaze, and as the light from the crackling flames cast its reflection on the faces of the men, there were tired and haggard countenances bent in silence upon the phantom-pictures forming themselves upon the changing mass of crimson coals.

There was no answer from Valmeau, and the ominous silence of the subalterns presaged some gloomy import to any intelligence that might have reached them.

"What news, you are asking, captain?" said the color sergeant, rising from the fire and making a place for Fusil, "bad news enough."

"How so? another sortie?"

"No, my captain, worse than that,—retreat. They say the Prussians will accept no terms, and the long-coated Russians like this fighting in the snow, so we are to turn our backs upon them and begin ice-cutting on the Vistula."

"Francois is right, captain," said Valmeau, as he roused himself, "already the orders are out for the retreat, and the Emperor has been through all the lines to-day."

While they were talking, the low roll of the drum sounded on the frosty air. Again and again it broke forth, and then settled down into the low

rumble of the steady roll, as it swept, like the reverberations of a distant storm, from regiment to regiment, and away off in the distance towards the extreme left of the encampment.

"That means work, lieutenant," said Fusil, as he drew his cloak about his shoulders, and passed into his tent, "it means an early march to-morrow."

He had scarcely reached the welcome shelter of the marquee, when the steady, swinging gallop of a horse was heard, and a mounted orderly dashed up to the fire, and hailed the group of expectant soldiers.

"Captain Fusil," he said, as he dismounted, and held his reeking beast by the bridle, "this from the general, and I wait the answer." As he spoke he took a sealed packet from his belt.

The sound of the horse's hoofs had recalled Fusil to the fire, and stooping down close to the blaze, he read the contents of the dispatch.

"In one hour, tell the general," was all the answer that he made, as he ran his eye over the order, folded it up, and placed it in his bosom.

The orderly sprang to his saddle and galloped away. There were curious looks among the men, but Fusil paid them no attention; he nodded to Valmeau, and together, they went inside the tent, and lighted candles.

"The Emperor is cautious," said Fusil, closing the entrance to the marquee, "and in one hour I am to be at head-quarters. There is some secret

service to be done, and I am to name two men from my company to perform it. We begin retreat by daylight, and one regiment is to hold the camp while the right of the line is being wheeled towards the front. Our backs will be turned upon the Baltic before to-morrow's sunset, and whatever the Emperor may intend hereafter, at present, Valmeau, it means retreat. Hark! there is the call, and I must answer it, and hurry back again!"

There was a sharp rattle of the drum for the moment, then it died away. The quick orders were given, and, one by one, the lazy regiments began their preparations to break camp. Even in the night, the army was alive in its preparations for an early march, for Napoleon's movements were always secret, and imperatively quick.

It was nothing new to the veterans; the panorama of their army life had many changes, and as they repacked their well-worn knapsacks and began the preparations for their long tramp from the arena of the hard-fought battle, they merely mused upon the events of the closing scenes of the campaign and put their confidence in the great man who had, for the first time, found his equal, and confessed defeat by his movements, if not in the heart which he turned towards his army and his generals.

As Fusil threaded his way towards the division head-quarters, among the men who were working like bees in the light of the camp fires, he won-

dered what the mission could be, for which some daring spirit was desired, and as he returned the salutation of the soldier on guard before the general's tent, he felt that it was rather more than an empty honor to be allowed to name the man.

The interview was a short one. Among the mass of papers, maps, and diagrams strewn upon the small camp table before him, Marshal Davoust held in his hand a message from the Emperor, which he laid aside as the orderly announced the coming of the officer to whom his peremptory order had been sent.

"Captain Fusil?" he asked, as he turned towards his visitor.

"The same, marshal, and at your service. You desired me to come alone, and I have done so."

"Enough. We are retreating towards the river; a feint, it may be, but that matters not. The Emperor has been misinformed, and the towns in our rear are strongly fortified. Where was your regiment recruited?"

"Mostly in the Canton Alsace, marshal, though there are few of my new men left."

"In Alsace? Then you have some stout-hearted fellows with you, captain," replied Davoust, unheeding Fusil's remark. "They are a handy set, and if reports be true, your conscript levy there brought you some good and daring soldiers."

"The proof is in the record of the regiment at

Preuss-Eylau," returned Fusil, with warmth. "Perhaps the marshal may remember it?"

"Your men destroyed the bridge between us and the Russian advance guard, I think, upon the second taking of the town?"

"My company had the honor and the loss of that exploit."

"Therefore, I mean that you shall send me a true and daring man to go to Dantzic. He must be a man whom you know well, captain, and one who is no coward. Have you an officer whom you can spare? Your colonel suggests Lieutenant Valmeau, and I have sent for him."

Fusil started, as the marshal mentioned his lieutenant's name. It seemed so strange to him that, above all others, Valmeau should have been named for secret service. He was no favorite with their colonel, and the errand on which he would be sent was one of danger and responsibility. Still, he could at least await his coming, and learn the nature of the work in hand, since no choice of men had been allowed to him.

The particulars of the plan were soon made known. They were simply the detailing of an officer from Fusil's regiment to go to Dantzic and gain information for the Emperor, nothing more; and the soldier who should undertake the mission would be allowed to choose his own means, and his own companion.

While they were talking, and in the midst of

the orders which Davoust was giving, almost with magic speed, so quickly was his busy mind suggesting and issuing commands to the officers about him, Valmeau was announced.

A smile of satisfaction passed over his face, as he saw Fusil, and his salutation was a cold one. He had long envied Fusil the captaincy, but had concealed his envy from the men, and now he saw promotion looming up, perhaps an epaulette with deeper fringe upon it than the one which glistened from beneath the heavy cloak which Fusil wore wrapped about his shoulders.

"You are detailed, lieutenant, to go to Dantzic. There are your orders, sealed, and you must set out by daylight. You may take but one man with you; name him, and I will send the order that he may be detailed for the service."

"The color sergeant, Francois Bertrand," suggested Fusil. "You know him well, lieutenant, and he is good at a disguise. Besides, he knows the country all along the Baltic, so he says."

"None better for the purpose, then, I think," replied Davoust. "What say you, lieutenant, shall I detail Bertrand to go with you?"

"I name another man, marshal, if the choice be mine."

"So reads the order, and on this especial service, no one can choose your comrade but yourself."

Fusil's ready tact and love of discipline enabled

him to conceal his mortification at the rebuff he had received, but the soldier felt keenly the position in which he stood before the stern-browed marshal.

Throughout the whole campaign, from the time that he had been placed in active service with his conscript company, he had stood well with his colonel, and in the circumstances connected with the mission of the spy to Dantzic, he saw almost a direct insult to his dignity.

The latent suspicion which he had sometimes had, of Valmeau's feelings towards him, was now confirmed, but he felt that he must accept the present issue, so he gracefully retired from the table, leaving Valmeau and Davoust to make their choice without his interference or suggestion.

Still he apprehended some secret purpose in Valmeau's refusal to accept Bertrand, and the captain felt uneasy at the conduct of his lieutenant. He had never fully trusted him; they had no confidence in each other, at least they had not been firm friends since the conscription in the Canton Alsace, for they had quarrelled on account of Pierre, and had differed widely in their credence of the story of Marie's relation towards the conscript. So Fusil awaited the decision in respectful silence.

With a look at his captain which betrayed some subtle object in the choice, which, taking advantage of the circumstances, he had insisted upon his right to make, Valmeau advanced to the table,

and wrote a name upon a slip of paper, which he handed to Davoust.

With a keen sense of discipline and honor, the marshal saw at once that there was some disagreement between the men before him. The suggestion of the color sergeant's name made by Fusil, apparently with sole reference to his fitness for the mission, had met with so sudden and peremptory a refusal at the hands of the lieutenant, that the reason for his non-compliance with the captain's wishes became a mystery.

"You desire this man for reasons of your own, important to yourself alone, and you can trust him fully?" asked Davoust, still hesitating before he filled the name in the order he had written.

"I want no other man than the one I have named, marshal, if I am to undertake the journey as a spy to Dantzic."

"And by the orders you are entitled to the choice. You have it, and the name to be inserted in the order then, is—" he held the paper to the light, as though he had been careless in reading it, but the action was meant more particularly for Fusil, who had been watching him.

Then, as he threw the slip of paper down again, he read from the order which he had filled out, in his clear, cold, ringing tones, and with a searching look at the captain and his lieutenant, the name of the man selected:

"Private Pierre Niede."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### ON THE ROAD TO DANTZIC.

A MOTLEY horde of soldiers, stragglers, and peasants were crowding the post-road just beyond the town of Preuss-Eylau, which, like a mantle, had been ripped and torn from edge to edge by the ruthless blade of war.

The least decisive and one of the hardest fought battles of Napoleon's campaign in Poland had been waged in the town and just without its limits, and the ground was strewn with the debris of the great struggle.

Twice the beleaguered town had fallen from the allied forces, and the tattered banner of Davoust's division, followed by the silken flags of the Emperor's own escort, had waved up and down its cluttered streets as they pressed the Russians back, and forced them over the bridges spanning the narrow stream upon the northern borders of the village.

And then, thundering down upon the devoted town, over the bridges, over the ice upon the



river, and struggling up the rugged shore, came the Cossack lancers of Platoff's division, driving the French from their position, and throwing fire brands into the open doors of the houses.

The game which Napoleon had been playing, the great stake which he had hazarded in his campaign, both seemed to be lost, and as the snow of the scarcely broken Winter fell upon Preuss-Eylau, it fell upon the two armies lying on their arms, panting for breath after the awful carnage of the conflict. Napoleon held possession of the town, and that was all; he confessed this to be a drawn battle, and he had paid a very heavy price for being master of just one half the situation.

Night after night, as the fortnight following the battle wore on, there had been unbroken silence in the open space lying between the two armies, and from either side, the one encamped almost in a semi-circle, and the other in a long, unbroken line, there gleamed the light of the thousand camp fires shooting their sparks upward among the falling snow-flakes, which covered the dead and shrouded the dying in their soft and downy vestures.

The fiercest struggle of the day had been at the bridge which commanded the northern entrance to the town. Here it was that the flying squadron of Platoff came thrusting itself upon the bayonets of Davoust's division, and whirling their chargers into the murderous fire pounced upon them; here too, their heavy axes like playthings in their brawny

arms, the Alsace regiment had hewn down the bridge, and bent low upon the ground as Davoust's soldiers fired above their heads, and scanned the faces of the Russians in the flash from their own guns.

Such had been the chance of war and such the disaster to Napoleon, that he had, in this his direst emergency, proposed terms of peace to Frederick William, such terms as Napoleon had the nerve to offer, even in the period of his own distress,—a separate peace, which should destroy his alliance with the Russian emperor.

Quartered at Konigsburg, when Benningsen was sending forth his well-mounted Cossacks, foraging the country without even molestation from the French, the King of Prussia declined the proffered terms of peace, and was massing his strength for a renewal of the battle.

At this juncture, on the nineteenth of February, Napoleon turned his back upon the Baltic, and pressed forward to the banks of the Vistula, leaving Dantzic and other strongly fortified towns, holding out in stern defence upon his rear.

And so it came, that, in the early morning of the twentieth of the month, the Prussian generals and the Russian staff were watching through their glasses the retreating French, and the people were rebuilding the bridge leading into Preuss-Eylau which Fusil and his men had cut away two weeks before.

The strong arms of the peasants were swinging

their axes, the soldiers were carrying planks and working at the bridge, while the women and children who had been fugitives from their now ruined homes, were watching them.

The veterans who had held Davoust in check, and stood so gallantly his murderous fire, saw the retreating army passing out and away from the town, with no regret, for the loss had been fearful, and fifty thousand men, full half the number, French, had been the price of the contest in the narrow compass of their contracted lines about the town.

As the work of rebuilding the bridge progressed, and the peasants and soldiers crossed the river on the narrow ice-gorge which had formed above it, the last of the retreating army wound down the roadway, their rear covered by a strong detachment of Ney's veterans, and the Prussians gathered about the ruined town.

As they did so, the smoke came whirling into their faces from a fire which had broken out in a building near the centre of the town, and they rushed in a confused mass to tear it down, fearing lest the French, in their retreat, should have determined to leave a record of fire behind them.

But men were at work before them, and working with a will. Armed with an axe, which he swung with heavy blows, and each time with effect, a man in the coarse garments of a Polish laborer, stood upon the roof, and was cutting his way down

to the fire, calling to them in words of mingled French and German patois to mount to his side and help him.

He worked well, and kept his place upon the slanting, slippery roof, like one used to climbing and holding fast, and swung his axe with steady and determined blows, each time cutting closer towards the fire, till the smoke burst forth into his very face, and he staggered back upon the chimney.

There were willing hands below him, and in a few moments half a dozen peasants and some soldiers had reached the daring man, and they were passing water to the workers, and cutting away down towards the fire.

He seemed directing them by his motions, as he stood in the smoke which rose about him, and in obedience to his commands, they broke into the house and crowded into the smoky rooms and up the narrow stairway towards one of the chambers, which the fire had not yet reached, to find a man in the uniform of a Prussian soldier lying crouched upon the floor.

He had struggled towards the window, which was his only means of escape, for they had battered down the door of the room to reach him, and as they bore him down the stairs and out into the clear, cold air, he pointed towards the hospital where the wounded French and some few prisoners were left, and where the smoke was beginning to rise in narrow circles.

He seemed to know well where to lead them, for he went directly to the fire, it seemed, just where the flames were breaking out from one of the lower windows.

It was soon extinguished, and they ransacked the building only to find a dozen or more wounded soldiers, the remains of a half eaten meal spread upon a table, and a few bottles of sour wine lying in confusion upon the floor.

The strange soldier seemed at home among the peasants; he had been a prisoner, he said, accused of being a spy in the French camp, and had been confined in the room in which they found him, awaiting his speedy trial and still more speedy execution at the hands of Marshal Davoust, when the order had been issued to retreat, and prisoners and wounded had been left to their fate, while the fires kindled by the revengeful enemy had broken out in Preuss-Eylau.

His comrade, a peasant from the Konigsberg district, had been confined with him, but had forced his way from his prison room, cutting his way with his axe, and so they had found him fighting fire, as they came back into the town, while the enemy whom they had almost conquered was making forced and rapid marches toward the river.

He knew the plans of the French, he said, and he and his companion told them all about the struggle at the bridge, and where the headquarters of the marshal had been taken, and how the Cos-

sacks met the fire poured in upon them, and he had an outline of the whole campaign even down to the day on which, as they had heard, the couriers had been sent to Konigsberg with Napoleon's offering of peace to Frederick.

"You have escaped by some great miracle, comrade," said a brawny, brown-faced Prussian, as they stood in the crowded street and watched the soldiers of Benningsen flying past them into the town. "Were you long a prisoner?"

"A few days only—I was taken as a spy."

An officer dismounted and joined the group, and the story of the man's escape was told to him. Then he was questioned further upon the events which had transpired, and satisfied the colonel that he had some information valuable to the allied generals.

"Come with me, my man, and bring your peasant comrade with you; you may be able to tell us what we want to know."

The words of the officer were few, but they were uttered in a meaning tone, and he eyed the strange man closely, as they forced their way among the soldiers, and crossed the bridge again, taking the narrow road which led towards the Russian lines.

Two of the Prussian soldiers whom the officer called from the ranks of the passing regiment, fell in with them, and so, the strangers marched along with bayonets on either side of them. Valmeau

and Pierre Niede were being taken into the presence of the allied generals.

Their plan had, so far, carried them in safety. Little did the unsuspecting soldiers think that the man whom they had found lying seemingly unconscious by the open window, had himself fired the building, and that the man whose strong arms swung the axe upon the burning roof, was his accomplice.

The story they had told was one Davoust had taught them, and it took a cool brain and steady hand, now that they were on the way, to reach the object of their secret service.

After a long and fatiguing march far into the afternoon, Valmeau found himself still accompanied by the soldiers, and as yet without any means of satisfactory communication with Pierre Niede.

They had scarcely rested an hour on their route, and they were very like prisoners, being conveyed to head-quarters under a careful guard, while their position was fast becoming dangerous in the extreme.

The officer who accompanied them was a cool, determined, and careful man. He watched the two men with unceasing vigilance, and more than once in their route, Valmeau saw his quick eye scanning every feature of their faces in his quiet, sullen manner.

His questions were few, but he kept close by the side of the French lieutenant, and left Niede to the

companionship of the sergeant and the soldiers, until they halted at a dilapidated inn by the side of the road leading towards the river, beyond which lay the Russian right.

"Wait for me here," he said. "I will come or send for you."

And for the first time the lieutenant and Pierre were left alone.

The plan of procedure given in sealed orders from the hands of Marshal Davoust was then rehearsed. The story of their ill-treatment at the hands of the French was told over carefully, and the maps and plans prepared by Davoust were examined; they contained an outline of the French forces, and a rude diagram of their position, all of which had been made strictly correct as they had been developed in the battles of the 7th and 8th, and in the events which followed those fearfully disastrous days. The trick which Valmeau had planned, his rescue from the burning building, and the work which Pierre had done, would help them in the confirmation of their story, and give a pretty coloring of probability to the characters which they had assumed.

Valmeau and Pierre Niede had been watching the lazy soldiers as they sat near them in the small, dark, dreary-looking room of the wayside inn, and as the guard was summoned, and they were commanded to follow the sergeant, Valmeau placed his papers carefully in his breast, and in silence, if

not in doubt as to the result, the two men awaited the examination.

Platoff, the Cossack leader, who had won a fame which should travel down into the pages of the history of the memorable fight at Preuss-Eylau, had taken his position near the ruined hostelry.

In a shattered farm-house that had been robbed of all its furniture, and its lower rooms converted into a stable for his jaded horses, the chief of the Cossack lancers held council with his staff.

They were resting after the hard work they had done, and the tall form of the intrepid Platoff was stretched at full length on a mattress spread on the floor of one of the upper chambers. A great wood fire filled the open chimney, and a dozen of his officers were smoking and drinking in the room around him.

Into this curious crowd of men, an officer ushered our two adventurers, and led them before the general.

As the men were brought before him, Platoff raised himself upon his elbow, laid his pipe upon the bench beside him, and quaffed the glass of liquor which stood at his elbow. His left hand was bound in lint and strips of flannel; it bore the mark of a personal encounter, a sabre cut given by a cuirassier whom he had cut down at the bridge, cleaving him from shoulder to waist, though not until the soldier had made a thrust which Platoff parried and caught upon his hand and arm, but

which had nevertheless inflicted a painful if not a dangerous wound.

"You escaped from Preuss-Eylau, you say, my man," was his first question, and it was addressed to Valmeau; "You wear the uniform of the Prussian guards, I see,—are you a soldier or a straggler?" He eyed intently as he spoke the faded uniform that Valmeau wore.

"Your entrance into the town saved me my life, general," was Valmeau's cool reply. "I should have been shot as a spy in a few hours; but they did not get my papers. They are here."

Valmeau saw in a single glance at the Cossack's countenance that he must gain his point quickly, or not at all, so he looked the soldier in the face, and then glanced around him, somewhat nervously, upon the officers.

Platoff called one of the youngest of them, a bright-eyed favorite of his, to his side, and motioned him to take the papers, directing him to make an examination of their contents.

"The man is right, general, he must have been a spy, and a good one, too. Here are plans of the whole campaign, and an outline of the forces they employed against us. Let him explain them to you. They may be useful."

Valmeau embraced the opportunity without waiting for a second bidding. One by one he named the strategic and salient points of the French position as they were pointed out upon the rough

map, and he gave his account in careful terms, of how he had, assisted only by Niede, evaded the vigilance of the French outposts and reached the bridge leading towards the Prussian lines, when they were betrayed by a peasant woman whom they had offended.

His capture, the examination before Davoust, the condemnation to be shot, the severity of the treatment which they had received by the men of Fusil's regiment in whose care they had been placed, the sudden retreat of the French, the disposition of the stores which the retreating soldiers had concealed, or had already prepared to destroy, their plan of firing the town, and burning up their sick and wounded prisoners, all this was rehearsed in a careful way, and the well-told story found credence in the minds of the Cossack officers.

And then they questioned Pierre Niede.

He had been a conscript, so he said, and had been wounded early in the fight of the 7th, being left for dead as the French were driven from the town, after its first capture. His story agreed well with the one told by Valmeau; he said he had made friends with his comrade just before their capture, and was preparing to desert with him, when they were taken, tried, and sentenced to be shot, from which alone the sudden retreat of the French forces and the firing of the town had saved them.

The story of Napoleon's object in his abandon-

ment of the Polish campaign, and his forced retreat upon the Vistula, were all told over, and found favor in Platoff's easy mind. He could tell them all the plans of the campaign, the deserter-conscript said, and he knew every officer who had managed the retreat; he spoke loudly of the weakness of the French, and their great losses in the fight which had checked Napoleon's march to the shores of the Baltic.

Then the two men were brought together, and each questioned as to their presence with the French, the one as a spy, the other as a deserter from his conscript regiment.

At last there was a silence—a long and painful one to Niede and Valmeau—and their papers were taken from them. Their persons were searched in the presence of the officers, and an old wound which Pierre had once received while hunting in the Vosges, and which, luckily for him, the rough usage of the war had caused to be inflamed and painful, served to make his story probable, at least.

A second examination at the hands of one of the staff officers, elicited no information, although one of the Prussian generals seemed to doubt the story told by Pierre Niede, and called the officers aside, and then with Platoff, held an earnest conversation, in whispered tones, which neither Valmeau nor his comrade could overhear.

"We have no right to let these fellows go, and

yet their information may be true," at length the wounded general answered. "Let them be sent at once to Dantzic."

## CHAPTER XIV.

## A FAMILY JAR.

THERE was trouble in Master Jean Duprez's bachelor household.

The excitement in and around the village which the disappearance of Marie Lascour had occasioned, and the part he took in it, had been a source of great annoyance to him.

He had no reason to suspect the complicity of those about him, for he had found his household all at home as usual when he returned from the widow's, on the night of Marie's flight.

Lisette was waiting for him, nodding, by the fire. He told her of the girl's escape, and what he knew of it, and Lisette gave many ideas of where she might have gone, so Lisette, very clearly, knew nothing of it.

For Franz, neither Duprez nor his morose companion cared to inquire as they entered the house. A small, dark, kitchen closet, which the generosity of his master had appropriated to his use for a bed-chamber, was his usual retreat,



and there, suffering from the bruises of his fall, the lad was lying upon his pallet of straw, watching and listening for the return of the men from whom he had escaped an hour before.

The random shot from Duprez's pistol had done him no harm. His feet were entangled in the rope which he was carrying, and he stumbled and fell just as the shot was fired, thus escaping a wound from the bullet, and he was at home before Lisette.

And so, Duprez saw nothing unusual when he reached his cottage, and vented his spleen upon the woman only; and soon she crept away to bed, leaving Gaspard and Duprez alone to ruminate upon the failure of their plan, or to quarrel, as it pleased them best.

Lisette had, for her part, little to fear from betrayal by the boy. He did her bidding always and without question. She seemed to love him, and was kind to him, and her kindness even Jean Duprez dared not forbid; and so, she and Franz became silent partners in the household, just as Gaspard and Duprez were partners on the other side.

More than a week had elapsed since Marie Lascour's flight, and yet no tidings of her had reached either Madame Lascour or the neighbors. The secret of her whereabouts had been closely kept, and no one who, in the interest of her persecutor, had made inquiries about her, could learn the place of her concealment.

Duprez was the possessor of a marriage contract, to which one signature was wanting, and he would willingly have paid a high price to have found the hand to make the document complete.

In this emergency, even his serene rascality, aided by Gaspard's unscrupulous cunning, was of no avail, and his rage was not appeased when news was brought to him that Marie was not in the Canton.

The intelligence which capped the climax of his disappointment, came direct from the village inn; there was a drunken soldier who had seen her only a day or two before, and he brought with him a letter, written upon a scrap of paper, addressed to Madame Julie. Gaston, the inn-keeper, had received it, and sent it to Duprez, before it reached the widow.

And so the first news they received of the missing girl came from herself; and they learned that she had gone off as *vivandiere* to a passing regiment, and was wending her way to the front in search of Pierre Niede.

The trouble in Master Jean Duprez's household was not without reason, and Gaspard was in no gentle mood to receive the censure of the steward in matters for which he was in no way responsible.

On one occasion there had been a passage at arms between them; Duprez was sullen and fault-finding, and Gaspard had just returned from the



village with a confirmation of the news, and had seen the soldier, now sobered from his wine-drinking of the night before, on his way to Madame Julie to tell her the story.

Gaspard had little to hope for from Duprez, and he found himself the object of more than one remark, not very complimentary or to his credit, from those who regretted their ill-treatment of Marie now that she was gone, and did not hesitate to speak boldly of both Jean Duprez and the other members of his household.

"Well, you're back, and come to tell me that the girl is out of my reach for the present, I suppose," was the cool greeting he received as he tossed his stick aside, and entered the room in which Duprez sat smoking.

"I come to tell you nothing. If you want news, go seek it for yourself."

"You are ill-tempered this morning, my man," returned Duprez, "and such looks won't answer here, at least not with me."

"Neither sour looks nor sweet looks, Jean Duprez, are at your bidding. I'm tired of you and of your growling."

"And where's the remedy? I am master here, I think, and mean to remain master while you live with me," replied Duprez, sternly, and with a look at Gaspard which the latter did not hesitate to return with a fierce, glaring expression in his eye, his hands clutching nervously, meanwhile, as if he

were desirous to reach Duprez, and deal out vengeance for the insults he had suffered; he answered calmly, nevertheless.

"Yes, you are master here. You play your cards with care, Duprez, and your hand is a good one. I suppose that I must bide my time, and wait."

"For what? If biding your time means enmity to me, why, wait, in welcome. But come, speak out; I hate this growling discontent, it don't suit me."

"I will speak out, then, Duprez, and you shall hear me!"

Gaspard closed the door leading to the room in which Lisette was working, and drew a stool towards Duprez as he continued:

"Twenty years ago, there was a compact made between us, to dispose of the twin boys, the heirs to the estate of the Marquis De Briennes—"

"Well, what of it?" interrupted Duprez, turning sharply upon him. "The brats are both dead long ago, and I have possession of what there was left of the property. I agreed to give you a certain sum for your assistance and discretion. Have I not paid it all, and more?"

"Yes, so far as the money is concerned. But I am tired of living here. People hate you in the village, and they hate me, and this last affair of yours is a piece of rascality not in the original contract, and no affair of mine."

"Rascality, Gaspard! Why not say it in some plainer word if you can do so? How does it interfere with you? As far as I can see, I am the only sufferer from its failure."

"You suffer in the loss of the girl, I, quite as much in the enmity of all around us. We are hardly safe in Alsace. The soldiers have taken up the story and they threaten me. Poor Franz seems to be the only one of us all who receives a decent word or look."

"Why, one would think the fool was some ill-omened brat of yours, you take such interest in him! He is mine, and so are you, Gaspard. You dare not leave me, and as for him, I'll teach him better than to prattle lies about me at the village inn!"

Duprez rose from his chair, and took up the ready cane which lay beside him, going towards the kitchen, where he hoped to find the boy.

"Not now, Duprez, not now, my man!" interposed Gaspard, laying his hand upon the master's arm. "The boy has done nothing to deserve it, and you shall not beat him."

Duprez felt that he had aroused a dangerous element in Gaspard's character, and so he stopped and threw the cane away.

"Well, if you are his champion, Gaspard; but where is the boy?"

"In the vault, where you placed him yesterday. Your cruelty to him and your persecution of Marie Lascour—"

Duprez was getting more than angry. He turned his back upon Gaspard, and paced up and down the narrow room, his face livid with rage.

"Persecutions, eh, Gaspard?" he muttered. "You are growing too moral in your old age to live long in this wicked world! If they were attentions to the lady, they were of little good, if persecutions, thoroughly unsuccessful!"

The sarcastic humor evinced by Jean Duprez was of service to him. The easy manner in which the remark was delivered, for a moment disarmed Gaspard, even in his determined hostility.

"That's very true, Jean Duprez," his comrade quietly remarked. "She has gone off to the wars in search of her conscript husband, and you are here alone with a marriage contract for her substitute."

"True enough there, Gaspard. I wish now that I had not sent off this snow-drift foundling. Conscript *husband*, did you say? why, man, she has no proof of it! The scrip was burned among the papers which I tossed into the fire myself—"

"You are *sure* of that?"

"Sure as I am of anything. I had it in my pocket, and burned them all together. What if she finds the man? it will not alter the story that I have told about her, and which every one believes."

"You will have a rival, then, depend upon it. There's Valmeau, the gay lieutenant in Fusil's regiment. He had his eyes upon her, and that fellow's dangerous. I tell you, Jean Duprez, that

man looks as though he had a noble's blood in him, and all a noble's passions."

"Perhaps—" replied Duprez, with gravity. "These gay young officers cannot be trusted in the company of pretty women! Where is that boy? Go call him here."

"I told you where he was—crouching in the vault for fear of you, I suppose. It would be a blessing, Duprez, if your ill-treatment killed the lad, and released him from your mastership."

The words were poorly suited to the humor of the ex-steward. He had policy enough to conceal his vexation, however, and contented himself with a cautious answer.

"You are speaking boldly, Gaspard Jarome; you forget that we are partners in a common crime, and that if our guilt were known, there would be scarcely a day of life left to either of us."

He went out as he finished the sentence, and Gaspard was left alone to watch and listen, fearing that Duprez had gone to search for the lad, to vent on him the spleen he dared not visit on himself.

Lisette, who had been listening behind the half-closed door of her own room, came out and watched with him.

"God help the poor boy, if he has not crept away!" she whispered, and together they stood beside the stairway leading to the vault which Duprez so often made his prison-house.

They were not disappointed. There were sounds

of moans and cries from below, and Duprez dragged the supplicating idiot from the cellar, and pushed him before him into the room above.

The poor lad was indeed a piteous spectacle; his feet were bare and blue with cold and dampness, and clinging to his hair and clothes were fragments of the dirty straw, into which he had crept for warmth. He had been weeping bitterly, and the marks of tears were seen upon his sallow, careworn cheeks, and as he came into the warm room, he shivered with cold, and instinctively crept towards the fire; then, seeing Gaspard, he clung to him for protection, standing between him and Lisette, appealing alternately to each for assistance, by looks, if not by words.

His mute entreaty was hard to withstand, and Duprez saw at a glance that a conflict in his household was inevitable.

"Oh, Master Jean, don't beat me, please! I'll stay close by Lisette, if you will let me. Please let me stay with her!"

The boy clung to the woman's dress as he spoke, and they stood, with Duprez at bay, Franz shrinking close to Lisette for protection, while Gaspard looked on in silence.

Either Gaspard's manner, Lisette's attitude of protection, or the lad's appeal, perhaps all three, angered Duprez beyond all endurance.

He brushed the woman aside, caught Franz by

the arm, and dragging him away from her, raised his heavy cane to strike him.

Before it fell, however, Gaspard placed himself beneath the stick and caught the blow upon his arm. He sprang upon Duprez, and by a sudden, dexterous movement, wrenched the cane from his grasp, and sent it whirling across the room. His hand was placed upon Duprez's throat, and with a muttered oath, he pressed him back against the wall, holding him with an unrelenting grasp.

It was a strange scene. Lisette had apprehended a conflict of some kind, but she had not looked for such an encounter, and she stood mute and immovable with astonishment at Gaspard's unexpected action; the poor, abused, half-witted Franz, in a transport of joy at his deliverance, fell at Gaspard's feet, and clasping his knees sobbed out his thanks; while Gaspard, beside himself with anger, filled with pity for the ill-used lad, and remembering the insults which had been heaped upon him through years of servitude, looked his hated oppressor full in the face with murder gleaming in his eyes.

With a howl of rage, Duprez shook off Gaspard's heavy hand, and stood before him choking with wrath, his fists clenched and his cold, grey eyes almost starting from their sockets.

"Oh, Master Gaspard, *please*, Master Gaspard, *don't* let him beat me, it hurts me so, to-day!" pleaded the lad, as, after a moment Duprez turned

from Gaspard and again attempted to reach him.

Gaspard motioned Lisette to take the boy away, and again confronted Duprez.

"Keep off, Jean Duprez!" he said, in a steady, determined tone. "You have done enough already—"

"And you," retorted the master, his face a ghastly white, "you have nothing else to do than to be champion for an idiot thief—"

He would have completed the sentence, had not Lisette stopped him. She brushed past him, leading Franz, and pushed the boy through the door, and out into the road.

"Thief or no thief, Jean Duprez, he shall stay here no longer. Go, Franz, go—any shelter will be better than to stay here!"

She threw his tattered coat to him, and his well-worn cap, and motioned him away. But the lad stopped and looked wistfully back into the room a moment, then darted past them towards the chimney.

A stick with a knot of ribbons tied to its end, lay upon the bench in the corner, and he caught it quickly, and then darted through the door again, standing before them on the dusty road.

"You needn't wait for me, Master Jean! I'll go to be a soldier—good-bye, Master Jean! Good-bye, Gaspard! Good-bye, Lisette!"

He caught the woman round the neck and kissed her twice; he seemed to feel pain at parting from

her, for his lips quivered and tears ran down his dirty cheeks.

Then, starting in a half trot, he ran down towards the valley-road and was lost to sight.

Duprez would have followed him, had not Gaspard placed a heavy hand upon his shoulder.

"He is gone, and you shall not fetch him. It is better for us all that he should go," he said, as he obstructed Duprez's passage from the house.

"What would you do, Gaspard, are you crazy, man?" was all the answer.

"I would do nothing, Jean Duprez! But you are no longer master here—this little play of ours is ended!"

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE VIVANDIERE.

A FEW miles from the little village over which Jean Duprez claimed control by way of feudal right, and of which the soldiers had control by virtue of their military possession, on one of the narrow herd-paths which led towards the mountains, stood the remains of a dilapidated goat-shed. It had served many a weary peasant as a resting place, or had provided a shelter from the sudden rain-storm.

For a week or more Marie Lascour had been a voluntary prisoner in this place. It had served to give her shelter, and to conceal her from Duprez; but it had been a weary week, and at the close of what seemed to her an almost endless day, she sat upon a low stool by the door, looking down towards the valley, watching for her only visitor, and just then, her only friend, Lisette.

All day she had been watching and waiting for Duprez's housekeeper, and now, just as the sun was setting, she could see a woman coming slowly up

the road, toiling along at a very snail's pace, it seemed to the weary girl, followed by a grotesque form, carrying something like a bundle upon its head.

As the two figures came nearer, she saw that the woman was Lisette, and that the strange shape coming after her was Franz, carefully balancing a basket upon his head, endeavoring to preserve it in position by an occasional application of his hands.

"You are come at last, my only friend," she said, sadly, as the woman at length stood beside her, "and Franz is with you, I see; what have you in your basket, Franz?"

"I don't know what it is, Marie, but it is very heavy," answered the lad, easing his burden to the ground, and sitting down in the road beside it.

Lisette paid no attention to his remark or action. She took the eager, outstretched hand which Marie extended, and then sat down upon the stool to rest, the girl standing by her side and pushing the hood of her heavy cloak back from her shoulders. "You see that I am here, my child, and I have brought Franz with me. You were tired of waiting?"

"Yes, very, very tired. Here I have been all day watching for you, and I thought that you were never coming."

"But she *did* come, Marie, and she's brought

you lots of things, and I have carried them nearly all the way from Alsace."

"Thank you, Franz, though I don't know what it is that you have brought," the girl replied. "My mother, Lisette, my poor, poor mother—does she know where I am?"

"That she does not, nor does any one. It is my secret and yours, my child, and we must keep it. You must get away from here at once."

"Away from here, Lisette? but where? I cannot go; I cannot bear to leave my mother so. *Please* let me go back to Alsace first, to bid my poor mother adieu."

"Are you crazy, girl? do you think Duprez will again let you slip from his clutches? No, Marie, he is as cruel as the grave; he will *never* let you go. Pierre Niede is your husband, you say; well then, your choice lies between your husband and your mother; you must decide, Marie, and oh, be brave my girl; *I* can care for your mother, but your husband has only you." Lisette uttered these last words in a tone of encouragement, and as she spoke she laid her hand caressingly upon Marie's shoulder.

With a sob of agony the girl covered her face with her hands, and for a moment, made no reply; then raising her head, and showing a face as pale as death, but ennobled with the consciousness of a steady purpose, she said in a clear, ringing tone:

"You speak the truth, Lisette, and I see my duty

will lead me to my husband. He used to tell me, Lisette, that sometime he would try my love for him, and I vowed I would be true; but the trial comes from heaven and not from him. Oh, Pierre, Pierre, it was for life and death I promised you, and I will not falter! As God is my judge I will stand the test!"

As she spoke she raised her hands above her head as if in passionate appeal to a higher power to aid and assist her in her coming trials; then there came to her a sudden sense of loneliness, a dread of the long, wearisome journey which she was about to make, unprotected and alone, and leaning her head upon Lisette's shoulder, she wept aloud.

The woman threw one arm protectingly around her, and stroking back the damp hair which had fallen over her forehead, strove in her homely way, to comfort the desolate girl, but her own voice faltered as she spoke:

"Come, come, Marie, take courage! The hour before daybreak is the darkest hour of the night, my girl; your troubles will grow lighter soon. So far have not things worked together for the best? Your heart whispered that Pierre was living, though Duprez tried hard to make you think that he was dead. I shall not soon forget how crazy with joy you were when I told you I had heard him tell Gaspard the story was all a falsehood. You have a long way to go, I know,

but you will not have to go alone. I brought Franz with me to-day because I mean him to go with you. Duprez will kill the boy if he stays in Alsace, and though the lad is but half-witted, he knows more than people give him credit for, and will serve his friends faithfully. Come, Marie, come into the hut, and I will tell you of a plan I have made, and show you the disguise that you shall travel in."

She spoke in soothing tones, and by degrees Marie's sobs became less violent, and finally ceased; then lifting her head, and drying the tears from her eyes, she suffered Lisette to lead her into the hut, and even showed some manifestations of interest in the plan of which the woman spoke.

Closing the rude door, Lisette threw aside the long cloak—which until now she had worn about her—and disclosed a bundle, which, when unfastened, proved to contain the skirt, cap, and jacket of a *vivandiere*.

"I have been three days in getting these things together; see, Marie, they're quite pretty and will serve our purpose well. Put them on, and while you're dressing, I'll make some porridge for our supper; poor Franz is very hungry, and food will do you no harm."

So saying, she opened the basket Franz had brought, and took from it a loaf of bread, a jug of milk, a few thick slices of bread and meat, and lastly, a little bag containing meal. Then she



tossed an empty basin to Franz who was playing without, and bade him fill it with water from a spring which was near at hand.

With a flint and steel and a few dry fagots, she kindled a fire and heated the water which he brought; then throwing into it handful after handful of meal from the little bag, she stirred the mixture briskly with a stick.

"If Master Jean could see you now, he'd say you use too much of his good white meal," said Franz, watching her with interest. "May I have some of the porridge when it's done? it looks so hot and nice."

"Yes, all you want. Go call Marie."

There was no need of calling her, however, for as Lisette spoke, the girl emerged from behind the few rude boards which partitioned off a corner of the room. She was dressed in the uniform which Lisette had brought her, and came towards them carrying her cap in her hand.

With a cry of surprise Franz caught at it, and turned her round and round.

"Oh, Marie, what a pretty *vivandiere* you make! you want a canteen, though, with wine in it, and a pretty little sword to fasten by your side!" he said. "And am I going away with her, Lisette? and will she wear the pretty dress to travel in?"

"Yes, Franz, you are going with her, and you

must learn to love her quite as well as you say you love me."

"I *do* love you, Lisette, indeed I do! I sometimes think you ought to be my mother,—you are the only one who ever says a kind word to me, except poor Madame Julie, and she is—"

Lisette looked sharply at him, and placed her finger on her lips as a signal that he should be silent. Not, however, before Marie had seen the action.

"My mother is what, Lisette? Tell me—is she sick, or—or *dead*?" She sank sobbing upon the woman's shoulder, and as Lisette drew her close to her bosom she stooped and kissed her, while something very like a tear fell upon Marie's cheek.

"Your mother is not well, Marie, but will soon be better. Leave her to me, my child, and I will care for her. But you *must* go away from here to-morrow!"

With a shudder, the girl drew aside from her, and knelt down upon the ground with her hands upraised, and the few broken words she uttered, sounded like a prayer; then with one look at the woman who stood watching her—a look which carried in it a whole volume of her heart's misery—she turned towards the fire, and together they ate the scanty fare which Lisette had brought.

The history of every event since the night of her flight from her mother's cottage was told her, not excepting the quarrel between Gaspard and



Jean Duprez, ending in Franz's escape; then Lisette made known her plan.

She had learned from the soldiers at the inn, that it was but a day's march by easy walking to the nearest rendezvous, from whence there were regiments sent away every day to join the grand army.

By the aid of one of the wounded veterans, she had obtained the uniform of a *vivandiere*, and the same man had promised to meet her at the goatshed in the morning, and bring her news which way Marie must go, and how.

"You think that you can trust this man?" Marie inquired. "May he not betray us to Duprez?"

"No fear of that, Marie. He came back to Alsace wounded, and owes his life to me."

While they were speaking, there was a sound as of some one calling, and a loud "halloa!" came sweeping up from the valley road. They looked in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and saw a man standing upon one of the steep ledges of rock below, waving a staff in the air, and gazing towards them; when he perceived that he was recognized, he began to climb the foot-path which led towards them.

"He is coming now, my child! I do not understand it, I am afraid it means mischief."

She placed herself before Marie, and holding Franz close to her, bade him be silent while she watched the man who was coming towards them.

"Well, what news? Why are you here so soon?" she asked, before the new-comer had time to rest and regain his breath after toiling up the steep path. "What has happened?"

"You must get the girl away to-night. Duprez knows where she is hid, and will be after her at once."

"How do you know it? who has told him?"

"He heard it from soldiers at the village inn. They saw you bringing a basket, loaded, with you, yesterday, in this direction, and knew that you came back without it. One of them was drunk, and told Duprez. I heard them talking with Gaston, and Duprez has gone to look for you."

"Then let him look. But what can we do? The roads are steep and stony and you have no staff."

"Make one for the girl; I know the way well and do not need any."

He drew a long, sharp knife from his breast, and cut a stout sapling from the sturdy mountain undergrowth.

"You are not afraid, Marie Lascour, to travel in the darkness?" he asked, trimming the sapling to its base, and pointing the end of it by quick, deep cuts with the keen, bright blade of the hunting knife. "You can stand the journey, think you?"

"I will try it, sir," was all her answer; then

turning to Lisette, she threw her arms about the woman in a farewell embrace.

"You know the way, and can place a league between you and the village before sunrise;" said Lisette, appealing to the soldier who still stood cutting the sapling to its proper length. "Must she go to-night?"

"At once—come, I am ready. Is the boy to go?" was the impatient question, to which Lisette replied in a monosyllable: "yes."

Without more ado, the remains of the bread and cheese and meat were gathered up and put into the bag which had held the meal, and Lisette slung it upon the stick which the soldier had carried.

"This must be your load, Franz; see that you don't lose your breakfast. There is no time to waste, Marie, I must creep back to Alsace, and you must be far away from here by sunrise. You may trust Raoul, for he will take you safely to the rendezvous. No words, my child, take God's blessing with you, and save your best strength till to-morrow. Good-bye, Franz, you must try to make a soldier!"

She kissed Marie fondly, and then the boy, lingering with him for a moment, as she placed the stick upon his shoulder and slung the bundle over it.

"I will meet you, Raoul, at the inn, to-morrow night. If I am not there, keep an eye on Jean Duprez; you understand me?"

She waited a moment for the answer, gathering her cloak about her.

"I will be there; wait for me if I am delayed," he said, and so, without more leave-taking, the woman passed down the road towards the valley, leaving Marie leaning upon the shoulder of the strange friend whom she had found, and about to turn her face from Alsace, perhaps forever.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A BIVOUAC QUARREL.

OUR story now calls us to the banks of the Vistula, where the grand army of Napoleon lay, like a huge watch-dog, with his eyes warily fixed upon the fortified towns between his extended lines and the shores of the Baltic.

The month of May, 1807, found the Emperor with a portion of his army laying siege to Dantzic, holding his base of supplies upon the Vistula, and calling every regiment to his aid, from Switzerland and the Rhine country; it found him building up his shattered columns, closing up his broken ranks, and holding fast with a tenacity which was little less than desperation, to his lines of communication, stretching from the Baltic to the river. He was deceiving the Russian General Benningsen by his feint of relinquishing an invasive campaign, and holding Ney and his columns of reserves in instant readiness to cooperate with Davoust, when the fall of Dantzic should have been accomplished.

On the southern borders of Dantzic, shone the

watch-fires of the besieging forces that seemed in the distance like a semi-circle of lanterns. Hard by, the men were working busily on the parallels, while in his remote tent sat the master-spirit of the army, anxiously balancing the scale of chances.

The smoke from Captain Maurice Fusil's cigarette was curling in pretty little circles, as he lay upon his camp bed, beneath the shelter of his tent, with the moonlight shining full upon him. Just outside, stood his companion officer leaning upon the tent-ropes. This officer was Lieutenant Valmeau.

"Dantzic looks pretty in the moonlight, captain," said Valmeau, lazily, as he flung himself down upon a camp-stool and drew it back that he might lean upon the canvas.

"Does it?" was the cool reply from the lazy captain, as he lighted a fresh-rolled cigarette. "You ought to know, for you have been there."

"Yes, I have been there, and I can truthfully say that I like this shelter tent better than the ugly prison walls of their gloomy Prussian fortress."

"You didn't stay there long, however."

"Quite as long as I cared to stay, Fusil, I can assure you. It was a narrow chance I had of it; there was just a ghost of a chance of promotion for somebody; a promotion to a higher sphere of existence than this, Fusil," replied Valmeau. "A little more light, and a little less rain, that night,

and there would have been one officer less in Davoust's division, I am certain."

"That ghost of a promotion which your death would have rendered substance, then, remains a spirit, I am thinking. You gained nothing by the enterprise except a mention, without even so much as a recommendation for an epaulette with deeper fringe."

Fusil raised himself on his arm, then sprang to his feet, and with a steady yawn, pulled up a stool from the table and sat down with Valmeau.

Perhaps he admired the moonlight, perhaps he may have been watching the line of flickering camp-fires, perhaps the course of a signal light from behind the works of a distant town—but he was certainly watching his lieutenant as well, and waiting the result of his sarcastic remark.

In a moment the answer came.

"If I bide my time, Fusil, perhaps I may find a vacancy before long. A few more such fights as we had at the bridge at Preuss-Eylau, and there may be a captaincy vacant.

"Better aim for a coloneley, and be done with it. But tell me, Valmeau, how was it that you managed to leave Niede behind when you escaped from the Prussian lines that night; were you not together?"

"There was a chance for but one of us, and so I took it."

"Well, perhaps you're right, and yet I always

wondered why you took him with you," said Fusil.

"What did you want of him?"

"Precisely what I did with him, Fusil, and nothing more. I hated the fellow, and he is out of the way, I think, by this time. But it's no affair of yours, and it makes no difference now, with him I guess.

"Shame upon you for it, Valmeau; there's been an ugly suspicion in my mind for some time, that you had deserted him. You hate the man, you say—what for?"

"For the love of the pretty woman whom he left behind, when you took him off to the war as a conscript. What do you suspect? speak out—you've spoken in plain words before. What is it?"

"Foul play with Private Pierre Niede."

"Everything's fair in love, you know, Fusil. The pretty face and form of his Alsace sweetheart haunts me. I'll wager you a bottle that she haunts you, too!"

"Tut, tut, Valmeau, you're dreaming. I am sorry for the girl, that's all."

"And well you should be; you wronged the girl as you call her, far more deeply than I did the fellow who marched away with you."

"You are mistaken there, lieutenant! I gave the man another chance, after he had drawn for service."

"Your memory is treacherous, Fusil. We may as well be honest now towards each other. You

suspect me of foul play with Pierre Niede. So far, so good; I suspect *you* of foul play with Marie Lascour, by giving Jean Duprez a white ribbon."

Captain Maurice Fusil began suddenly to grow uneasy. His cigarette was out, and he lighted a fresh one merely for effect, it seemed, taking fire from Valmeau's pipe, and looking down at him in the moonlight, as he passed it back to him. There was just the least tremor in his hand as he handed the pipe to Valmeau, and the two men remained a second or two looking intently at each other, the one, lazily leaning against the side of the tent, and the other standing erect and manly, partly within the canvas shelter.

Valmeau had spoken decisively at least, though a more cautious man would probably have avoided quite so sudden an avowal of his presumed or actual knowledge.

"A white ribbon, eh?" drawled out Fusil, measuring his words, and puffing the smoke from his mouth in little rings, "what do you know about it?"

"A great deal more than you would care to have me tell, captain. I know that Pierre Niede never came into the army by fair means, and I fancy you know more about it than you would be willing to acknowledge.

"Do you pretend to speak from fancy?"

"I speak from both fact and fancy. You see, Fusil, we are even on the score of rascality towards

this fellow; you *took* him to the war and I have *disposed* of him at last, and not a day too soon!"

"Not a day too soon! What in the name of Heaven had he done? Why was your unsuccessful trip to Dantzic such a timely one?"

Under the last words which Fusil uttered, Valmeau smarted. His service had been but poorly done, and while he had succeeded in bringing back with him the outline plans and some few memoranda, he did not receive the promotion coveted, and Fusil had boldly told him that his desertion of Pierre Niede was at least suspected.

They were not, then, the very best of friends.

"Timely it was, Fusil, for both of us, perhaps, if we are rivals. I have news for you. Have you heard anything of Marie Lascour since you left Alsace?"

"Only by report. What news is there?"

"Better news than I had ever hoped for. She may soon be here."

"*Here*, Valmeau! Here with the grand army? Your love-fancies have betrayed you into dreaming, and like the princes of the fairy-tales, you hang your Houris on your eyelids! That won't do!"

"But I tell you, Captain Fusil, the girl has left the Canton. She is in the army, and knows the regiment that Niede is in; she is on her way to seek him here before the walls of Dantzic. But you see, she is too late."

Fusil placed his hand upon Valmeau's shoulder,

and spoke slowly as he bent down towards him.

"Better keep that story to yourself. Your plans about this girl are none too honest, Louis Valmeau, and I know them. You have betrayed the unsuspecting man that you might gain the love of his pretty wife. Hands off, I say!"

"Why? do you claim her?"

"No, but I honor her for her love for her conscript husband, and respect her for her very suffering. I tell you plainly, Valmeau, if Marie Lascour comes here, she shall be treated fairly, and you must be careful what you do."

"Then you believe this pretty little story of her marriage?"

"Of course I do. By some trickery, she lost the marriage-script, and like a brave woman she comes to follow the man she loves. I hope he may be safe, and if so, he shall meet the girl whom he left behind him."

"Well, as you think. I *don't* believe the story, and I envy him his pretty mistress. The man is gone as a mark for Russian bullets, before this time, and as one foundling is enough at a time, Marie may find a substitute."

"In whom, pray?"

"Louis Valmeau, lieutenant in Captain Maurice Fusil's company."

"Then you are a snow-storm foundling, too?" sarcastically returned Fusil. "You manufacture

incidents with a ready wit, it seems, Lieutenant Louis Valmeau."

"Why no—but I'll let you into my biography if you like. I am the foundling of a warmer place than wayside snow-drifts, but I know as little of my birth or parentage as Niedeck; he was a waif of the snow-storm, and I was the waif of a foundling hospital."

And the waif of the foundling hospital, as he called himself, looked marvellously handsome, sitting there in the cold, steady moonlight, the rays reflected on his gaudy uniform, and his upturned face. As he threw the ashes down before him, and looked up squarely into Fusil's face with an impudent air of self-satisfaction, he continued:

"Yes, of a hospital. Some one found me in the way, I suppose, and I was placed for safe-keeping in the box at the Convent St. Angelo, in the district of Toulouse. I suppose I ought to have died to have pleased that someone, but I didn't. I grew up, and found my education somewhere near the Spanish borders."

"And the name, 'Valmeau,' where does that come from?"

"It was the name of a Marseilles carpenter, in whose house I found a home under an apprenticeship from the convent priests. I have a package of musty papers somewhere for a pedigree, and that tells the whole story."

The avowal was a curious one to Fusil. His

interest in his own affairs was the heaviest, however. Valmeau was in possession of a dangerous secret, from whom, he knew not, but he felt that there was trouble brewing, and he thought he had seen the premonitory symptoms of a serious difficulty. There was something hidden too deep for his discernment in the story which Valmeau had humored himself by telling.

"You see, captain, I shall prove a substitute; at least Marie Lascour shall have an early chance to refuse me, and you shall not interfere!"

"Shall not, lieutenant? You have heard my words, and on the honor of a soldier, I will stand to them. Once and for all, I say, no trickery with Marie Niede."

"Lascour, captain," interrupted Valmeau. "I choose to use the maiden name."

"And I choose to say Marie Niede."

"Time enough to settle that when she is here."

"Yes, *when* she is here, Louis Valmeau. And that I will prevent."

Valmeau started to his feet and threw the camp-stool back from him. He was hot-blooded and hot-tempered, and the pretty face of the Alsatian peasant girl had haunted him ever since he had seen her on the day of the conscription in Alsace. This evening he had been indulging in fanciful dreams about her which were now dissipated by the prospect of Fusil's interference.

"My commission on it then, that you will not!"

One word to her of Pierre Niede, and there will be a vacant captaincy for me, Maurice Fusil! On the honor of a soldier, I will keep *my* word!"

"Then she *shall* know it. Your fancy of the ribbon story is a good invention, but a weak one. If Marie comes here, she shall meet with no insult at your hands, for I will stand between you."

"It is open war between us, then, Fusil? You would not dare to tell it! Enough of this! I want that woman, and I mean to have her; and as for Pierre Niede—"

Their conversation was interrupted by an alarm outside. A messenger from headquarters, with a dispatch from the colonel, which Fusil read, and handed to Valmeau, as the soldier who had brought it rode away, dashing his spurs deep into his horse's sides.

"An attack to-morrow on the Russian lines. Well, perhaps there may be no one left to make love to the pretty Marie," said Valmeau. "We are to have hot work before we capture Dantzic. Come, a contract with you, captain; will you pledge yourself to silence?"

"No; I have pledged myself to protect Marie Niede from you, and I will do it," silently replied Fusil. "I make no bargains with so great a coward."

Fusil spoke quickly, too quickly for his own good, and he saw the error. But Valmeau was cool, deliberate, and persistent.

"Hard words, my captain, and unbecoming in a soldier. You will not aid me? then I will aid myself. One word to Marie of her husband's death in Dantzic, and the story of the ribbon shall be told, even to the ears of the Emperor. You know the consequences!"

"Tell it then, and now. To-night, if it pleases you. It may as well be a drawn fight between us now before the worst arrives. Marie Niede, you say, had no proof of marriage. You have no proof of any story you may tell of me!"

"No proof, Fusil? Take care, my failure would be worse to me than any truth I might tell of you. There is no time to parley. A fair field for the girl's love is all I ask, and you must give it. I will produce my witness when I tell the story, never fear."

"A witness of your treachery to the man you have betrayed?"

"No; to the treachery, as a soldier, of my worthy captain. I know the story from its best narrator, and a man you counted on for silence—M. Jean Duprez, of Canton Alsace! Will you promise now?"

There was no reply. Fusil was silent, and Valmeau perplexed, for he had spoken the name merely at a venture; so their little quarrel ended for the night.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### A SINGLE RAY OF SUNSHINE.

MARCHING with the soldiers, pressing along towards the front, weary and footsore, Marie Lascour, *vivandiere*, had found life at the camp all but unendurable. Positions and commands were changed incessantly, but all her inquiries for Fusil's regiment had resulted in no news of Pierre, except that he had been in the fight at Preuss-Eylau, and had not since been heard of among the men.

A heavy column had rested one day at nightfall after a long march, and Marie was with them, waiting orders.

"Good news to-day, *vivandiere*," said the gruff old sergeant of her company, as he passed her; she stood by the line of wagons, gazing upon the moving mass of men and animals, with her pale, sad face turned towards the dusty road before them. "Good news to-day—hard fighting, but a victory! Dantzic is taken."

"Yes, sergeant, so I hear. But I fear there is no news for me. Have you heard anything?"



She had told her story to the grey-haired soldier, and he had helped her all that he could in seeking information from the front, and she always felt his presence a protection.

"Nothing, *vivandiere*, that lightens your sorrow. If your husband was with the men who captured Dantzic, he has had work enough to do. But tell me, have you had no letter from him?"

"Only two. And then they told me he was dead. Duprez told us the story, and he proved it by a man who came back from the army."

"So you think that he is really gone? You believe the story of this Jean Duprez?"

"Duprez's story I know to be false, but I have no knowledge of Pierre; to be sure I feel in my heart that he is yet alive. But *where*? This life is killing me, my friend, and I may never reach him. Hark! what is that?"

There was a rushing sound of horses feet as the bugles sounded, and amid a cloud of dust, a general and his staff came up, their gay uniforms flashing, and their mettled chargers throwing the dust and sand into the faces of the soldier and the *vivandiere*.

"There is no hope for me, I fear, sergeant, and I am weary, oh, so weary of this life! I am alone, even in the camp. I cannot bear this constant whispering around me, and the women give me no companionship. Excepting you and Franz, I am alone, forsaken, and with nothing to cheer me but a hope of that which may never come."

They were good friends, the old sergeant and the *vivandiere*. The soldier had seen much service, and he knew the story of the persecutions and troubles which drove her away from home and Alsace. The watching, waiting, and the marching which she had undergone, were, in a measure, lightened by the man's companionship; and she seemed to look to him for sympathy and help.

"It is a hard life for you, Marie," he said, as sitting down beside one of the wagons, he took a biscuit from his pouch, broke it, and gave her a part. "You are not like the rest, and so you find no friends among the women. This is no place for you, my child, no place for you."

The soldier told the truth. But for the hope to which she clung, she would have fled from her position long ago. She carried the canteen, and followed after the silken flags, but she was no fit companion for the *vivandieres* who were marching towards Napoleon. While they were careless of every trouble save a present one, she was a *vivandiere* in duty, not in spirit. She gave water to the tired and fainting soldier, and wine to the wounded, of which there were so many, but she moved among them as a shadow, with no general interest in the camp. When the circle around the camp-fires rang with the wit, the repartee, the *double entendre*, and the campaign song, she stood aloof from the free and careless crowd, and waited, watched, and

prayed for the end to come, that she might find her search successful, or know the worst.

Franz, too, was a burthen to her. He had followed her to the war because Lisette had sent him, and led an easy, roaming life about the camp. He seemed to love her with all his foolish ways, and followed her about quite like a servant, finding a few friends among the men, and doing the general camp work for the slight compensation of an extra ration, a chance to ride inside a wagon, or the privilege of creeping beneath the shelter-tent when the march of the day was over.

He was coming towards them now, with an armful of straw for which some teamster had sent him. He stopped as he saw Marie, and, thoughtless of the errand upon which he had been sent, threw down his load, and stretched himself out at full length upon it.

"There's a lot of wagons coming, Marie," he said, pointing down the road. "And there's lots of men lying on straw inside them; that's what we've all been waiting for."

"Wounded men from Dantzic, I suppose. There will be work for you now, Marie. Come, let's see these men; we may learn something about your husband," said the sergeant, rising.

A heavy sigh was the only answer, and together they went away towards the newly arrived train of wagons, leaving Franz lying on his bundle of straw looking after them.

There was indeed work for the *vivandieres*; the first of the wounded had reached the reserve division, and there were soft hands needed for the weary men who were so faint and exhausted from the rough jolting over uneven roads.

"On duty, *vivandiere*?"

She turned towards one of the staff officers who had dismounted, and was arranging the wagons for the day's halt. He was bending over a wounded comrade, and looked up at her as she saluted him, and awaited orders.

"Where is your company? Is this one of your sergeants?" he said, pointing to the veteran who stood near her.

"We are at the rear of the column, captain," replied the soldier. "Can I do anything?"

"Report to your captain that your *vivandiere* is ordered on hospital duty here. Follow me, and quickly, *vivandiere*!"

It was a sad sight which met her eyes, as they moved along between the wagons. Pale, wan, careworn faces looked out at her as she passed, and eyes which were dim with continued pain looked supplicatingly towards them, as *vivandiere* and officer stood in the passage-way between the line of wounded.

"You are a good nurse, *vivandiere*?" inquired the captain, turning to her as she waited his instructions—"you are used to the work of the hospitals?"

"I am not afraid to do my part, captain, whatever it may be. Where shall I commence? I am only waiting orders."

A couple of wagons guarded by mounted soldiers were coming around the turn of the road, and halted at the extremity of the line while one of the soldiers rode up to the officer in charge.

"There are four officers badly wounded, in our wagons, captain, what shall we do with them?"

"Stay where you are. I will attend to them. Come, *vivandiere!*"

The captain moved away towards the newly arrived wounded, followed by Marie, the soldiers standing aside and saluting as they passed.

Beneath the canvas covering, stretched upon camp-beds, were a dozen soldiers with several commissioned officers among them. They were faint from their long journey, and one of them, who lay upon his side, turned his face wearily upward as Marie approached.

"Wine or brandy, *vivandiere!*" he murmured, extending his pale hand towards her. "Easy, please, upon my side."

He uttered a suppressed groan, and turned partly over, then sank back upon the bed, gasping from the exertion.

The sufferer seemed greatly overcome; and assisted by the captain, Marie took the head of the wounded man in her lap, and brushed the hair

back from his throbbing temples, bathing his pale forehead with the liquor from her canteen.

"Can you drink this, captain?" she asked, filling the little cup chained to her waist, and putting it to his lips. "It is brandy, and will do you good. Please try, sir, a mouthful only, if no more!"

As she spoke, she held the liquor to his lips. He raised his hand slowly, clasping her soft fingers tenderly, in his eagerness to taste the brandy, and feebly swallowed a few mouthfuls.

"Your hand is soft, *vivandiere*, and oh, so gentle! You women are our angels when we're sick!" he said.

It was a pretty compliment, perhaps, but she did not heed it. She had too much upon her mind to heed the easy words of the wounded officer, who, true to the instinct of his gallantry, could say pretty things to pretty women, even while in pain.

She parted the heavy masses of hair upon his forehead, and passed her hand lightly over it; then with a sigh, she put the cup aside, and sat down beside the bed.

"You are sighing, *vivandiere*; for what, my pretty one?—your lover?"

"Perhaps a lover, captain, may be, a husband."

The wounded man, by a strong effort, raised himself upon his arm and looked at her with a steady, searching gaze. She shrank from the keen look of inquiry which he bent upon her, and turned her head aside.

"Your husband?" he repeated slowly. "Where is he, *vivandiere*—in the ranks of the grand army?"

"He *was*, captain, but now God only knows where he may be!"

She tried to conceal her agitation, and covered her eyes with her hand for a moment to conceal the tears which had started as she spoke. Then she resumed her former listless attitude, her hands folded upon each other, and her head bent low upon her breast.

"You do not know me, Marie?"

She started from her lethargy, and looked at him through her tears. The sudden mention of her name almost alarmed her.

"No," she answered slowly, "I do not know you, yet you have called me by a name I thought I left behind me when I fled from Alsace."

"*Fled* from Alsace, *vivandiere*?" Why did you leave it, pray?"

"Because they robbed me of my husband."

"His name, *vivandiere*—I may know the man."

"Private soldier, Pierre Niede."

The tone in which she spoke brought tears to the eyes of the wounded man, for it told of that "hope deferred" which "maketh the heart sick." She trembled as she spoke the name, and then in accents rendered unsteady by emotion, whispered: "You know him, captain?"

"Yes, Marie Lascour, I once knew Pierre Niede,

a stout, manly fellow, full of fire, and daring to a fault. He served with me. Look down at me, Marie—do you not recognize me? I am Captain Maurice Fusil!"

Starting with joy, she caught his hand and kissed it rapturously. Then covering her face with her hands, she sobbed aloud.

"And you have travelled all this way to seek him, Marie? Poor child, you are a brave and loving wife indeed!"

"Brave only in that love, captain. But tell me,—where is my husband—where is private Pierre Niede?"

"Marie, I do not know."

A sensation of faintness came over her, but with a strong effort she recovered herself, and sank upon her knees beside Fusil.

"You do not know?" she cried, in the peculiar, despairing tone of one who feels some awful news impending, and finds a sudden, deceptive strength in the desperation of the moment. "Tell me, captain, tell me all, the worst, if it must be. Great Heaven, aid me—is he dead?"

"Marie," said the captain with a world of pity in his tone, "your husband went to Dantzic and he has not been heard of since."

She gave him one look of utter despair, and her eyes remained, for a moment, fixed upon his face. Then, with a sharp, quick cry of agony, she clutched at the canvas of the shelter tent, and

hung, swaying from it, too and fro, breaking out in sobs.

There was a sudden rush towards her, and among the soldiers who came flocking to her side, a moppy head was thrust, and Franz sprang inside the tent.

"What has he done, Marie? Who was it—the soldier lying there?"

His eyes glared wildly, as he spoke, and he approached Fusil, raising his clenched fist as if to strike him.

He would have executed the threat which his action implied, if Fusil had not caught the eye of one of the guards, and quickly motioned him to his defense.

There was a struggle, lasting scarcely a moment, and the boy was dragged away, still fighting with his captors, and glancing angrily back at Fusil. Then, in their stout arms, the soldiers bore Marie Lascour away, with her hands outstretched imploringly, towards the wounded captain, just as she had held them out to him, when Pierre Niede had been hurried away from Alsace.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A RUSSIAN PRISONER.

WHILE the men wounded at the attack on Dantzic were being sent to the rear, Napoleon, flushed with the victory which he had achieved in the face of the beleaguered town, began his preparation for a renewal of the contest. He hoped to place himself in the field with an army which, augmented by all his reinforcements, would number not less than three hundred thousand men. It was a game of hazard he was playing. The Russian general, relying upon the assistance promised from England, had been pressing Ney, who sought a base of supply at Gustadt, and who found himself, a fortnight after the capture of the town, without a place where he could make a stand, which, from its defensive position, would ensure success. Sitting around the table, on which lights were brightly burning, and upon which lay scattered a roll of campaign maps, and what there was left of a rather extravagant camp-supper, were Davoust and his staff. The grim old marshal had, for once during the

pendancy of the campaign laid aside his brusqueness with his sword, and held a well-filled glass to the light which shone from the clustered candles, holding meanwhile free conversation with his officers.

The men all loved their chief, and their attachment grew, notwithstanding his impetuous, fiery nature, for beneath the weatherstained garb of the veteran, there beat a noble heart, true as steel towards those who were loyal to him, and loyal towards the cause, if not the exacting will, of Napoleon.

"Well, general, what next?" was the inquiry of Jules St. Cyr, a dashing cavalry colonel, as he filled his pipe from the pouch lying among the scattered dishes. "We have taken Dantzic, and the Russians are at work gathering their reinforcements. When are we to move, I wonder?"

"When it suits the pleasure of the Emperor, Colonel St. Cyr!" was the calm reply of the imperturbable marshal.

The wine had been drained to its dregs, and the rebuke, though a severe one, had vanished with the bubble from the champagne in the marshal's glass.

It was a lazy week in the campaign, this glorious week in May. The work of the camp-life was the dull routine of an overworked division, and Davoust was silent as the grave concerning his own plans or those of his commander. The officers around

him felt that their dinner was over, and one by one they dropped out and away from the tent, leaving the general alone.

All had gone except St. Cyr, and he had just taken up his sword and bade his chief good night, when the cold, callous tone of command from Davoust called him back to the table.

"The Russian prisoner, St. Cyr—are the preparations made for to-morrow?"

"All, general, except the approval of the warrant, and that is here, ready for your signature."

He took the paper from the camp desk which stood near the table, and passed it to the marshal, with a pen, holding the paper that Davoust might sign the order for the execution.

"He is under close guard, colonel?" asked the marshal, pausing, as he put pen to paper, and looking up thoughtfully into the face of the expectant officer.

"Under close guard, general. I picked the men myself."

"Let them bring the fellow here to me, at once."

To hear was to obey with those under the orders of Davoust, and with a salutation, the colonel withdrew upon his errand, leaving the marshal nervously pacing to and fro, awaiting the appearance of the prisoner.

A spy, at least a suspected one, had been captured by the outposts, and had been wounded in his attempt to escape. He was sullen and morose,

doggedly indifferent to his fate, it seemed, and after a short examination, he had been condemned by Davoust to be shot at sunrise.

For once, the stern-browed veteran had paused before the execution of the sentence, and he awaited the return of St. Cyr with ill-concealed impatience.

The steady tramp of soldiers soon sounded upon the hard ground without the tent. Then there were the muffled orders of the sergeant, and the men filed, singly, into the presence of the general, with the prisoner leaning upon the arm of one of the soldiers, halting before the table at which Davoust had seated himself, first motioning St. Cyr to take a vacant stool beside him.

The man was a stout-built, downcast looking fellow, who was evidently suffering from a wound in his leg, for through the tightly-bound bandages, bright drops of blood oozed at every movement.

"Give him a stool, sergeant!" said the general, "and one of you stand by him."

He motioned imperatively for the rest of the soldiers to withdraw, and as they vanished from his sight, he turned sharply to the prisoner:

"Your name?"

"My name is of little interest to any one, general. Let it die with me to-morrow." There was a tone of quiet resignation in the man's reply.

"Well, have it so. But tell me, to what service

did you belong. Were you with Benningsen's division?"

"Yes, with General Benningsen, at Preuss-Eylau."

"Then you have been in all the actions with the French, of late?"

"Yes, all of them."

The man bent his head low down upon his breast, hiding his face beneath the shock of frouzy auburn hair which, in unkempt masses fell over his brow. The long brown beard upon his cheek was tangled, and matted as if with blood from a sabre cut, not wholly healed.

"Then you must have known their plans. What were they?"

"Do not the French know the result, general? Is not that enough?"

He raised his eyes as he spoke, and looked calmly at the marshal. There was something strange, almost unearthly in the look with which he encountered the steady gaze of the French general, and both Davoust and St. Cyr saw it, and exchanged glances with each other.

"You have some secret, prisoner. What would you be willing to tell me, if your life could be made the price of it?"

"Nothing, nothing," he replied, sadly. "I have no other wish than to die to-morrow."

"Then it is a secret of your own—some sorrow? You seem a brave fellow, and it is hard to die as you must die to-morrow at daybreak."

"I shall hardly count the hours till sunrise, general. I have nothing to tell you, I have told you all."

"Stubborn, general, to the last," whispered St. Cyr.

A look from Davoust silenced any further words, and the general continued:

"You were long in Dantzic before the capture?"

"A few days only."

"You knew the plans of the French to take the place?"

"Knew of them, every one, and more."

"What more? Give me all the information which you have, and I will suspend the sentence."

"Not if it could save a thousand lives. I do not value life, general, I would welcome death to-night, if you could give it me. Your men have searched me—did they not find my papers?"

"Yes, but they were incomplete. You know more than you have told us, and you have sent your information to the enemy."

The prisoner staggered to his feet, and tore open the rough jacket that he wore and pointed to his breast, reaching to the table for a knife which lay upon the empty plate before him.

St. Cyr sprang to his feet, but the marshal reached forward and touched his arm, allowing the man to take the keen edged knife, and with it to cut the lining from his coat.

"You have there the rest, which your men could

not find. It is of no further use to me!" exclaimed the soldier, tossing at his feet a package of close-folded paper. "Now let me die at sunrise, and end a life that I am so glad to give away."

He sank back upon the stool, weak from his wound, and Davoust himself picked up the paper.

It was soiled and well-worn, and Davoust unfolded it and spread it out upon the table, while St. Cyr held down the candle to aid the general in his examination.

The face of the marshal turned to a deep crimson as he read it; then he motioned the sergeant to leave them alone, and without comment passed the paper to St. Cyr; while the colonel examined it, he again addressed the prisoner:

"Where did you get this paper? I know it well. It is a plan of action which I gave to an officer I sent to Dantzic. Man, you are worse than a spy; you have robbed the dead!"

"No, general. You gave these papers to one of your own officers. I know the man, Lieutenant Valmeau, an officer in Captain Fusil's company—the man you sent to Dantzic, and who returned."

"But his comrade, the private soldier whom he took with him. He died in Dantzic!"

"The lieutenant left him there to die, and perhaps the Russians deal with spies as you would deal with me. Those papers are not stolen."

"But you have kept them, and the man who gave them to you—"



"Was the man who left his comrade within the Russian lines, and found his own way out of Dantzic, reaching the camp in safety?"

"True; then you know the history of that service."

"Better than the general who sent the men away. But one came back to you, the other—"

"Well, the other!—what of him? We think he has been shot; is that not so?"

The man raised himself again, and staggered towards the table, pointing to the paper and leaning feebly upon the roll of maps lying at the general's hand. He looked steadily at the marshal before he spoke. Then, throwing upon the cloth a fragment of burned paper which he had taken from his coat, he passed his hand across his forehead, and swaying for a moment, fell, fainting to the floor.

St. Cyr raised him, and put a glass of liquor to his lips.

He pushed it aside, however, and with a hurried movement of his left hand, tore from his head the mass of shocky hair, disclosing beneath the disguise which he had used, the short, black hair of a man much younger than he had seemed.

"I did not steal those papers, general. They were given me by your lieutenant when we were at Dantzic. I am Private Pierre Niede!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### A DISCOVERY.

"You had no quarrel after all, you say?"

The inquiry was made by Gaston, landlord of the Traveler's Rest, and the person to whom it was made was Gaspard Jarome, his customer.

"I said the affair was none of yours. If Jean Duprez quarrels with me, he has a right to do so, and the affair is his and mine only," replied Gaspard, snappishly, stepping out from the doorway into the early morning sunlight.

Gaston saw that his guest was ill-humored, so he deemed it best to evade censure by a few words of apology.

"Curiosity, Gaspard, that's all. I have so often wondered why you left Duprez, you were such old friends, you know."

"Then credit me on my reckoning with all the curiosity is worth, and ask me no more questions."

He turned away from the landlord suddenly, and walked leisurely down the road, leaving Gaston standing in the doorway.

"A queer fellow," the inn-keeper said to himself, as Gaspard walked slowly away. "I wonder what the mischief is between them."

It is fair to say that many others in the village wondered quite as much as Gaston what the trouble was between Gaspard Jarome and Master Jean Duprez. For several weeks he had lived at the inn. The day following the disappearance of the idiot boy Franz, Gaspard came down to the inn and took lodgings. He brought nothing with him but a single chest made of rough wood and iron-bound, and the day after his induction into his new abode, Jean Duprez came to see him.

They were closeted in Gaspard's room until late in the evening. No one knew what passed between them during their protracted interview. When it was nearly midnight, they came down into the tap-room where some few soldiers were still sitting, drank a bottle of wine in company, and then went away together. Gaspard came back after a few moments, lighted his pipe, sat for an hour or more smoking, and that was all that any one knew about it.

He was by no means extravagant in his living, but he was prompt in his payments to Gaston, so the landlord humored his caprices, and whenever Jean Duprez came to the inn and chanced to meet Gaspard, he watched them.

But it was a useless task, this watching. He learned nothing; and though others in the village

watched them, it was always with the same result; the more they watched the more they wondered, and the more they wondered, the less they knew about the two men.

On the occasion alluded to at the opening of this chapter, Gaspard walked slowly from the village inn, and down the narrow road towards the valley. He looked carelessly around for a few moments, and then, out of Gaston's sight, sat down upon the stone fence by the roadside as if to wait for some one.

"Confound the woman!" he muttered, as the peasants began to pass along the road towards the mountains. "I wonder why she keeps me waiting."

He lighted his pipe as if for companionship, and then walked to and fro while smoking.

The woman to whom he alluded in his ejaculation was Lisette; and growing tired of monotonously pacing up and down, he lazily strolled along keeping his eyes fixed upon a dilapidated cottage which stood a little distance from the road. No one came to meet him, however, so he crossed the open space between the pathway and the cottage door, and knocked.

The little hooded window was opened cautiously, and the pale, tired face of old Lisette peered at him for a moment. She said nothing, but closed the window quickly and noiselessly and then unbarred the door.

Gaspard laid his pipe down upon the doorstep,

and stepped into the room; it was a poorly furnished apartment into which the door opened; a fire was burning upon the stone hearth, and a kettle simmered upon the hook which swung above the fire.

"How is she to-day? Better or worse?"

The woman put her finger to her lips, stepped carefully across the room, and closed the door leading to the adjoining chamber.

"She is sleeping now, but all night long she has been out of her mind. I dared not leave her."

Lisette brushed her hair back from her forehead and tucked it behind her ears, with that weary movement of the hands that speaks so plainly of the long, tiresome night-watch, and of the pale rays of early dawn stealing through closed shutters upon heavy eyelids that have known no rest. The fresh air of the early morning seemed to revive her, and she inhaled it eagerly for a moment; then seating herself upon the doorstep, she motioned to Gaspard that he should place himself beside her.

"There is no chance for the poor woman, Gaspard," she said, as the two sat down together. "She has been talking of Marie ever since midnight, till she talked herself to sleep. Has Duprez come back?"

"He has not been at the inn. But he will bring no news to her when he does return, Lisette, you may be sure of that."

The woman indulged in a yawn, and then nodded in reply.

She had been nursing Madame Julie Lascour for several days, and the woman whom she had spoken of as wandering in her mind was Marie's poor mother. Giving way at length beneath the weight of her great sorrow, the widow's life had for the last few hours hung trembling in the balance between life and dissolution. All the attention which Lisette could give her was of no avail. She knew that Marie was somewhere with the army, but she had no news of Pierre, and she mourned incessantly for her daughter and foster child. Even Duprez at the last seemed to have relented. He had permitted Lisette to nurse the sick woman, and he himself had started for the headquarters of the corps-commander in a distant Canton, ostensibly to learn something of Marie Lascour, and bring the tidings back to ease the mind of Madame Julie.

As the man and woman sat silent and watchful waiting for the invalid to wake, there was a hollow, ringing cough from the sick-chamber, and a faint voice was heard calling to Lisette.

"Come in and see her," she whispered to Gaspard as she rose to respond, and together they entered the room in which the suffering woman lay.

"You are back again?" she asked, "you have found my child? There are two of you now, and one of you must be Jean Duprez."

She attempted to raise herself as she spoke, but fell back exhausted on the pillow, so Lisette passed her arm beneath her and partly raised her, saying as she did so;

"It is Gaspard. Duprez has not come back."

"Not come—not come—my poor child, oh, my poor child!" exclaimed the widow; and then her head fell suddenly to one side, and she passed off again into her troubled sleep.

"She has been just so ever since midnight," said Lisette, "talking only of Marie. She cannot last much longer."

"Better that she should die than know the worst," replied Gaspard. "Poor woman, she has little left to live for!"

Lisette laid the sick woman gently back upon the pillows, and then placed her hand upon Gaspard's arm. She looked quietly and anxiously into his face, and then in a low tone, speaking slowly, she remarked:

"You know more of this, Gaspard Jarome, than you are telling me. What is it, man? speak out. The woman there will not hear you, and I ought to know, I think."

"Then Duprez has not told you of the rumors?"

"He has told me nothing. He only said that he would find Marie, and told Julie that he was going for that purpose."

Gaspard could not suppress a wicked smile. He saw a part of the lying plan of Duprez's own mak-

ing up, in his presumed errand in the widow's service.

"He will not find her, then. There is news that he has had two days or more, that Dantzie is taken, and that the name of Fusil, the captain who was here on the day of the conscription, is among the wounded."

"But Pierre Niede, is there any news of him?"

"One of the soldiers said he went away to Dantzie on some secret service, and did not come back. The man is dead long ago, Lisette; perhaps the story which Duprez whispered into Marie's ear may have had more truth in it than he imagined."

"God help the widow, then!" was all that Lisette said, and she stood by the bedside watching the sleeping woman, whose hands, pale and thin from her long sickness, lay upon the coverlid, the fingers clutching nervously.

Suddenly Lisette bent down to listen. She turned just a little pale, and motioned Gaspard to come nearer.

The dying woman was breathing heavily and with great labor, and her bosom rose and fell spasmodically, while her lips were very white, and cold beads of perspiration stood upon her forehead.

"It will soon be over," whispered Gaspard to her. "We had better try to rouse her from this sleep."

Obedient to the man's suggestion, Lisette raised the widow in her arms. For a moment her eyes

opened, and then closed again. Then, with a vacant stare, she looked at them.

"Pierre—Marie—my poor, poor child," was all she said, and pointed to the open door leading into the next room.

"Shall I close it, Julie?" asked Gaspard, noticing her movement.

She nodded a feeble acquiescence in reply to his question, and he stepped lightly across the room and closed the door.

"Duprez will come too late, Lisette, too late!" she said, taking the woman's hand and pressing it slowly to her lips. "But you are kind to me. You, too, Gaspard, you come to see me often."

They almost held their breaths to hear her words, for she was very weak, and spoke in broken accents. But the phrenzy of the long, weary night had passed away, her reason had resumed its sway, perhaps just before the end of all must come to her, and she would need but little help from either of the watchers.

"You must be hopeful, Julie; Marie will come back to you. No news is good news, you know, and Duprez may be here soon. He told you he would hurry back to-day," said Lisette, slowly.

"Yes—to-day—but it will be too late. I know that I am dying. I shall never see my child again!"

She was very weak, and they put a spoonful of the wine and brandy gruel which Lisette had

made, to her pale lips. She put it away, however, and pointed to a chest which stood in one corner of the narrow room, passing her hand to her neck and snatching asunder a silver chain which she had always worn.

There were a couple of consecrated charms upon it, and the key of the lock upon the chest.

"Quick, Lisette—the box—I want it."

She motioned feebly to Gaspard to open it, and Gaspard knelt beside the old chest, and turning the key in the lock, raised the lid.

It contained a few articles of clothing, and a common wooden box, which he handed to Lisette.

"I may not see my child, Lisette, but this is hers. Give it to her, and tell her it is all of Pierre that she may ever know."

She would have spoken again, but her words were feeble; and so they laid her back upon the pillow, and opened the box which had no lock upon it, but was fastened with a buckskin thong, tied over and around it.

There was a child's cloak folded up and carefully packed inside the box. It was old, and worn, and faded, but it was folded neatly in its place, and with it was a lock of light, sunny hair, tied with a ribbon, and wrapped inside a fragment of a handkerchief. These, and nothing more was what the box contained.

They took the cloak from the box and spread it out upon the bed, laying the lock of hair beside it.

Gaspard unfolded the flannel garment, looking at the widow, who seemed unconscious of their presence.

Suddenly he started, and his face grew almost as pale as the invalid's, and his hand shook nervously. He took the cloak up in his hands and looked at it, then held it towards the light.

"Lisette, Lisette, look here—you see that piece of work there in the corner; do you know it, woman?"

Julie was quiet, apparently asleep, and so Lisette left her, and with Gaspard, went towards the window.

There was a partly obliterated piece of silk embroidery upon the corner of the cloak, and that was all. She passed the flannel back to him.

"It is only a bit of woman's work," she said. "Part of a letter 'P' it seems—what of it?"

"Enough, Lisette, enough; that work and crest is old and worn, but it tells a story you and I should know. Ask Julie what it means?"

"Why ask the dying woman what she cannot tell? I don't see what it is that seems so strange to you. A letter only is all that I can see."

"Then look again," he said, putting the cloak back into her hands as they stood by the bedside of the sleeping widow, "you see nothing like a crest?"

"Why yes, there are the lines, and here in one

corner, part of a shield worked in the flannel with the finest silk."

"A crest indeed—the same that you and I have seen so often on the castle walls. The boy who had that cloak about him is one whom we thought dead. 'Twas Philippe De Briennes!"

Lisette would have answered him, but the door in the living-room was opened, and Duprez came in.

Lisette went to meet him, motioning Gaspard to conceal the box and cloak. He did so, folding the cloak within his coat, and putting the box away in the chest again, just as Duprez approached the bed.

The ex-steward did not notice his late comrade. He stood by the bedside, hat in hand, and bent over towards the pale face of the widow.

"Julie, Julie!" he whispered. "See, I am back again!"

But there was no answer, either by look or word. The poor woman had spoken truly; Duprez was too late, and with something almost respectful in his manner, far different from his bearing towards Madame Lascour in life, he turned away, leaving Lisette alone to watch the dead.

## CHAPTER XX.

## ALMOST A RIVAL.

THE illness of Captain Maurice Fusil had been long and tedious, and his convalescence tardy; he had had a faithful, patient nurse in Marie, but the long weeks of watching had worn upon her; her cheeks were brown from exposure to the noonday sun, but the lips were pale and trembling as she came into the French camp at Gustadt, where the captain reported for duty under Marshal Ney, who was waiting an attack with but a poor show of resistance, while Napoleon was, with all his cunning, endeavoring to draw the Russian general into action.

The remnant of his regiment had been recruited by French conscripts, and in the transfer from Davoust's division, Fusil found himself reporting for duty under a new commander, who enjoyed the confidence of the Emperor, and was holding the most exposed position upon the French line.

And so, in camp again with what remained of his company, Fusil and Valmeau were again companions. Their old enmity had not, as yet, worn

itself out, and for ten days Fusil had been on active service before there was any *résumé* of old relations between them.

But Marie Lascour was happy. After her long, weary search, and her tedious waiting, she had found her husband. No longer a conscript, he had become almost a veteran, though Valmeau, by his influence, had kept the chevrons from his coat sleeve, and he was doing duty simply as a private soldier. An officer's authority was the lieutenant's safeguard. Perhaps the transfer from Davoust's command had aided him. Whatever villainy might have been in the cowardly desertion of his comrade whom he had left within the confines of the Dantzic forts, the matter had grown cold, and Niede was waiting for his opportunity.

In their camp life, Valmeau watched Marie Lascour, watched her with his envious eye, and with that subtlety of purpose which had been the effect of his early education. And yet, all his advances had been met with the cold disdain of a woman who felt secure in her own integrity. She had many friends in the regiment, and many to whom she had told the relationship which existed between herself and Pierre.

Still, she was not wholly free from the scandal of the camp fire circle. None of the women liked her. She was of a different stamp from the majority of *vivandieres* who followed the grand army, bearing the canteen by their sides, and the pretty side-

arms dangling from their belts. Her intercourse with Pierre was hazardous, and the mistress of a private soldier, as they called her, held her love in secret, and indulged its longings only where, by stealth, she could seek or create an opportunity.

Valmeau possessed a dangerous secret in his knowledge of the marriage which she could not prove, and he often whispered love-words in her ears when she dared not repel his advances for fear of consequences to the man whom she so deeply, fondly loved.

Fusil was thoughtful and attentive; kind words came every day from him, but bitter consequences were the effect of those very words. To be an officer's favorite was fatal to her good name, and the name they gave her, "the captain's pet," was the subject of many a bivouac joke, and was bandied among the soldiers, sometimes loudly enough for her to hear.

She had given just one promise to Fusil. The story of her flight from Alsace must not be told, he said, and this secret she pledged herself to keep, and she kept it inviolate, although the promise was a dangerous one for her, and the knowledge of the transaction between Fusil and Jean Duprez—the giving of the white ribbon, which had sent Niede away among the conscripts—was Fusil's especial secret. Even half-witted Franz, who had shared so many secrets, knew nothing of it.

Matters stood thus, when at the close of one

afternoon, Fusil and Valmeau were standing near the outposts, looking over towards the Prussians. The old wound from which Fusil still suffered sometimes, made him gruff and testy to-day, and Valmeau was smarting under the conviction that Marie repulsed him, while he was by no means slow to lay the cause of it at his captain's door.

There were only the sentinals slowly pacing upon the outer guard-line, and Fusil commenced the conversation.

"Ignorance is easy to assume, Valmeau, whenever you find it the most convenient." He rolled an empty wine-keg towards him, and seated himself leisurely upon it. "I think you understand me."

"Yes, I do."

The lieutenant threw himself down upon the ground and leaned his head upon his arm, watching Fusil.

"I am glad you do, lieutenant. It would be well if you understood Marie Niede as readily."

"The matter seems to worry you, Fusil. And why? Do you love the girl?"

"Yes, if it pleases you, I love her; but not as you do, quite."

"Then you are paying a compliment to my fancy that I scarcely hoped for. The girl is pretty, very pretty, captain, and I don't blame you. Women like her are not often seen in camp, and I



for one have no wish to shut out the vision of a pretty woman."

"You're right there, Valmeau," replied Fusil. "Lazy campaigning is tedious, and affords a fine opportunity for the study of character; Marie has had a chance to study yours, I warrant, and your slanders against her have not bettered the reputation of yourself and mess."

"Slanders or truth, Fusil," exclaimed Valmeau, rising nervously, "she has meetings with this Pierre Niede when he is on guard. And what is more, Fusil, you know it."

"The girl claims him as her husband; she has followed him all the way from Alsace. As to these midnight meetings, we shall see. To-night when Niede is on duty, I will test your story."

Valmeau had gained his point. He had watched the lovers, and he knew that Marie met her husband when he went on guard. He saw that Fusil did not know it, or if he did, concealed his knowledge admirably; and the *ruse* of accusing him of the knowledge, had served merely as a cover to the assertion he had made against the *vivandiere*.

They would have continued their conversation, but the quick roll of the drum aroused them, and the hour for the evening drill cut short their interview.

The men were marching in upon the distant parade square, and Valmeau had work to do. The drill was short, and as Fusil took the command

and gave his orders, Marie and her sister *vivandiere* stood watching them.

"You are tired, *vivandiere* Marie?" Valmeau said, as the men broke ranks. "Some lover has been cross to you to-day, perhaps?"

"I have no lovers here, lieutenant," she replied. "The soldiers are my friends."

"Friends, little beauty, is that all?" He placed his hand familiarly upon her shoulder and clasped her around the waist. "Friends? Then one kiss of friendship will do no harm."

He bent over to kiss her as he spoke, but she sprang away from him, and threw into his face the contents of the cup into which she had been drawing wine from her canteen for Fusil.

There was a ringing laugh from the *vivandiere* who stood beside her, and a murmur among the men. The insult was a grave one, and Valmeau looked fiercely at her, as Fusil, seeing the anger of his lieutenant, stepped between them.

"Come come Marie, no quarrel! Lieutenant Valmeau was playful, that was all."

"Quarrel, captain, and with *him*? The man who seeks to wound a woman's honor, is unfit for notice,—unworthy of a quarrel!"

The words stung Valmeau, and he came towards her as she spoke, brushing Fusil aside. But she was ready. Dashing down the cup, she drew from her belt the short sword with which she was armed, and pressed the point against his breast.

All the hot blood of her nature was aroused. It was the first time since she had been in camp that anyone had dared to openly insult her, and she kept the bright blade towards Valmeau, till Fusil had wrenched the weapon from her hand.

"Another time then, captain! another time," she said. "He shall answer for what he has done this day, so surely as I live!"

Heedless of the remark, Valmeau retreated, and giving the word of command to the men, he marched away towards the tents, leaving Fusil and Marie alone together.

"You were wrong, Marie," he said, just as the tramp of the sentinel ceased, and the salute was given to the relief guard who was coming. "You may repent this folly when it is too late. That man is very dangerous to you!"

She would have answered him, but she saw that he was angry. Not at her, for he knew the provocation that she had had, but he saw trouble coming which even he might not be able to avert, and so, without a word, he walked away.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE WORK OF A PRUSSIAN SPY.

SCARCELY had the sound of Fusil's heavy footsteps died away, when Marie felt the strength fail that wounded pride had given her, and leaning against the tent-poles for support, she buried her face in her hands. She had stood thus scarcely a moment, before tears, a woman's tribute to her heart agony, had come; and thinking that she was alone, she wept unrestrainedly; but ere long there was a hasty step behind her, and Valmeau touched her on the arm.

"Your pardon, Marie," he said to her. "I was hasty—may I be forgiven?"

He offered his hand to her, and with a woman's ready forgiveness, she took it, standing silently before him, and looking up into his face as if to read his very thoughts, so calmly did she meet his earnest gaze.

It was growing dark, and as they stood together, a signal light flashed brightly in the sky, away off to the left, and then another.

"We shall soon have work to do," he whispered. "Those signal lights mean mischief, and our line is much exposed. We should not quarrel now, at all events."

"Not now, lieutenant?" she asked in trembling tones. "What do you mean—what danger threatens us?"

"The enemy has been too long quiet, and their sentry line is very close to ours."

"Then there *is* danger!"

She shuddered as she spoke, and looked back upon the sentinel who was still pacing near them, and then towards the distant outposts. Valmeau saw the look, and drew her farther from the soldier.

"Yes, Marie, and danger to your husband also. To-night, you know, he is on guard."

She started at his words. To her they meant more than she thought he realized. She knew that Pierre would be on duty, and she knew that she had pledged herself to meet him.

"And you expect to see him. Your love-trysts are unknown to any one but me."

"But you will not betray us?" She looked inexpressibly beautiful standing in the mellow light, her hand outstretched imploringly towards him; and as he looked at her the hot blood went tingling through his veins, and all the passion of his fiery nature was aroused.

"Perhaps—"

"Oh no, you will not be so cruel to me! You

know he is my husband, and you know how dear he is to me!"

"I know how dear you are to others, Marie, and I know how very dear you are to me." He would have taken her hand, but she withdrew it, and stood away from him, looking up at the signal-lights which were alternately flashing, and then dying out.

"But he is all the world to me, sir, and I cannot give my love to you. If I am dear to you, grant me one favor—keep my secret as you are a man, and I will worship you for the kindness."

She waited for his reply, but it did not come; and weak from suspense, she sank down at his feet trembling with fear.

He raised her tenderly. There was nothing in his action to cause offence this time. His every motion was kindness, and she almost felt as though she had made him a friend.

"You will not betray us, sir—one pledge—one word, sir—tell me that you will not let Pierre suffer for my loving him."

"Well, as you wish it. Let the keeping of this secret be an atonement for what I did to-night. But give me one reward. One kiss, Marie—only one—and then, I am your friend."

"A friend would never ask it, sir. We will be friends without it, and some time you will think better of me for not having given it."

She passed her hands about her neck, carelessly,

as she turned away from him, and as she did so, her fingers caught in the chain which held the little silver cross which Lisette had given her from Pierre, and it fell at her feet, lying between her and Valmeau.

She stooped to pick it up. But he was before her, and held the trinket in his hand.

"This, then, Marie, instead. You will give it to me?"

"Oh, no, not that! It was my husband's!"

She reached forward to take it from him, but he drew her towards him and held the cross away from her.

"Then I shall value it the more. This little cross shall be my talisman, and I will keep your secret. See, your husband may be coming now."

The tread of the sentinals grew more distinct, and the sergeant of the guard had already reached the tent. And so, he placed the chain and cross in his breast, and left her looking after him.

She knew the danger, now, that threatened her, and realized that she must not be seen. The sergeant had passed on, giving the countersign to the guard, and so she followed him, leaving the soldier pacing before the tent, while the signal lights were telling of the movements in the Russian camp.

But there was another witness to the scene whom neither of them had suspected. Following close behind the sergeant, crouching down behind the tent, hidden away amid the shadows of the

trees between them, a wary and a desperate enemy had concealed himself.

As Valmeau had told her, the sentry line of both armies had been close together. The short space between the outposts was covered by a growth of stunted shrubbery, and through this a Prussian spy had crept, and was lurking near the unsuspecting sentinal, having stolen his way into the tent-line.

As the soldier turned upon his round, the lithe form of the spy rose behind him. A second only he paused, and then, with the spring of a tiger, he caught him around the neck and bore him backward, to the ground. There was scarcely a struggle—the sentinal could utter no cry, for as he fell, the hard grasp of his antagonist was on his throat, and a thin cord, drawn tightly in a noose, was put about his neck.

It was the work of a moment only. The spy knew well the value of that moment's time. Pressing his knee upon the soldier's breast, he drew the cord tight. There was scarcely a sound, only one long sigh, and all was over.

The renegade whose daring had brought him to the French camp, knew that life and death were in the moments given him. He was a rough herdsman of the German forests, and he looked anxiously about, as the soldier lay stretched before him; and then began his work.

Tearing open the jacket which the fallen man wore, he raised him up, and stripped the uniform

away. Then, placing the body in the shadow of a tree beside the tent, he donned the clothing of which he had so quickly robbed the dead, and stood in his place, as guard.

And not too soon. The steps of the coming relief were heard, and a few moments after, the file of men to relieve the sentry, came towards him. Pierre Niede came with them. He saluted the supposed French soldier, and took his place on duty. There was the whisper of the countersign—the quick low order to march on, and as he stood before the line of tents which cast their pretty shadows just beyond his path, the Prussian spy went out and away with the weary guard who had been relieved.

Pierre Niede's step was no longer the uncertain tread of the conscript, but rather the free, determined stride consequent upon the severe drill of the French army. Steadily the heavy footfall sounded on the beaten path, till at last he paused and listened—then, hearing no one, he walked on again, and stopped, leaning against the tree, within a few feet of the body of the murdered soldier. There was a crackling sound upon the fallen leaves, as he stood there, and in a moment he resumed his place.

It was an officer who advanced, gave the countersign and passed. Valmeau, without noticing the man on guard, and shading his face from the twilight, saw that Niede was ready, and waited in con-

venient ambush, to prove the meeting with Marie.

He had not long to wait, as he lay upon the ground a short way off, hidden by the shadow of a pile of camp equipments. The anxiety of the sentinel became more apparent, and he stepped aside from his beaten track to listen and to watch. Then, cautiously, he uttered a long, low whistle, such as would have come from a night-bird started from its resting-place, nothing more.

There was a speedy answer to his signal. Just the faintest echo of the words of a mountain song, and Marie came towards him, picking her way carefully and lightly, looking back and wandering carelessly, it seemed.

She was moody and dejected, and the fear which she felt was poorly concealed from the man who waited for her. She wound her arms about his neck, and he held her close to him, bending down and imprinting on her waiting lips a long-drawn, earnest kiss, such only as is given to those who have the right to love, and when their love is chastened by the fear of its discovery.

"Why, Marie, child, you're strangely afraid to-night!" he said, passing his hand across her forehead and pushing the mass of dark hair back with his fingers. "Your cheek is cold and your hands are trembling."

"You do not know the risk that we are taking, Pierre," was her only answer.

"There is no risk to any one as brave and loving

as you are, Marie, and the pledge I gave you when I marched away from Alsace has kept your heart free and true to me, my little darling!"

The girl shuddered at the words the soldier whispered in her ear, and as she clung to him she felt that he must know of the only action for which she could deserve his censure.

Instinctively she passed her hand to her neck. The little trinket was not there, and Pierre noticed her incautious action.

"How is this, Marie—you have not lost the silver cross I gave you? It was my birthright—all I ever had that came to Madame Julie when she found me in the snow. Where is it?"

A stifled sob was her only answer. She turned away from him to hide the tears which were uprising, and met the cold, handsome face of Valmeau, now standing in the shadow, and looking calmly at the lovers.

For the first time in her life she felt deception necessary, and the blush of guilt spread itself over her face, as she stood trembling in her husband's arms.

"I have not worn the chain to-day," she faltered. "Only to-day I left it off."

"And why? Marie, there is some secret here, you are deceiving me."

Valmeau came forward as the soldier stood beside the weeping woman. Instinctively Pierre reached for his musket which leaned against the tree, but

the lieutenant stood between him and the weapon, and Niege drew back.

"The cross is here," he said. "You may take your love-pledge back again, Marie." He threw the chain upon the ground at her feet, and waited the result.

Speechless with fear, she stooped to seize it, but Pierre placed his foot upon it, grinding it down beneath his heel, and turned trembling with emotion to Marie.

"You gave the chain to him, Marie? Good God, and is my darling faithless to me, then!" he faltered, in a broken tone. "No, to your lover, since you choose between us!"

She had put her hands out towards him, but he drew away from her, and turned fiercely towards Valmeau. All the love he had for her, had in a single moment of the doubt which Valmeau's action had caused, turned to anger, and he sprang upon his rival, grasping him by the throat, and holding him firmly, while their faces paled, and the eyes of each as they met the glance of the other, were filled with hatred.

"We owe each other no love, lieutenant," he muttered between his tightly shut teeth. "At least I owe you none for leaving me in Dantzic!"

He pressed Valmeau down to the earth, and as he fell, Niege bent with his knee upon his breast, and regained his hold upon his throat.

Valmeau could only struggle—he tried to speak,

but the weight upon his breast was choking him, and he saw only the hard features of the enraged private soldier looking down at him with a gaze that had no mercy in it.

"Shame, Pierre Niede! he is an officer! You know not what you do!" exclaimed Marie, struggling to release Valmeau from the hold which Pierre had fastened on him.

"He was a spy with me once, and he proved himself a coward!" was all the answer that came hissing from the lips of the soldier who had been betrayed.

But the help she could not give him came unsought. Valmeau struggled fiercely and contrived to free one hand. There was a pistol, ready loaded, in his breast, and with a sudden movement, he held the weapon above him and discharged it.

There was a shot in answer, and before Niede could rise, Latouche and Baudalet, the guards on either side, came running to the prostrate officer.

"Seize him!" he cried. "Away with him—he has struck an officer!"

As they grasped his antagonist by the arms and dragged him off, Valmeau staggered to his feet and drew his sword. He made a quick thrust at the prisoner, and would have wounded him, had not Marie flung herself with all her force upon him, and grasped the weapon by the hilt.

"Spare him—spare him for my sake! He is all the world to me."

Valmeau stood silent; he pointed to the distant tents, and motioned the soldiers to take Niede away.

"For *your* sake, then, sweet one!" he whispered. "I will not kill him for his impudence."

She would have answered him; but with a sudden glare a rocket shot up into the heavens, then another, and there was a sharp rattle of musketry from the outposts, as the sparks died away above them.

There was no time for thanks from her, no moment left Valmeau for love-words. The work of the Prussian spy had been well done, and volley after volley sounded, as the guards were driven in upon the lines, and with them the soldiers who had taken Pierre Niede in custody.

The man was free again, and with a heavy blow he felled the lieutenant to the earth, and stood above him. He had regained his musket, and with the bayonet pressed towards the breast of the stunned and bleeding man, would have killed him as he lay.

"No, Pierre, you shall not kill him so! It would be murder," cried Marie, holding the barrel of the musket, and throwing herself upon the prostrate form of the senseless officer. "What would you do—bring ruin down upon us both?"

It was too late for Pierre Niede to answer her. The dark forms of half a hundred Prussian soldiers swarmed about them, and the bright steel of their

bayonets was flashing in the uncertain light. The daring spy had not tarried in his work. Once safe within the lines, his signal had been given; the answer came in the swarming soldiers who had driven in the guards. They had taken the camp by surprise, and found a ready leader in the man who had struck down the sentinal.

One form, lithe, sinewy, and bold, stood next to Pierre Niede, and another, answering to his hurried cry, had struck him from behind, while the Prussian spy had grappled with him.

Almost before the sound of the first volley had died away, the men had forced their passage towards the centre, and as the dusky forms of the French soldiers mingled with those of the enemy, the two men measured strength in their fierce encounter.

Stunned at first by the blow, Niede soon recovered himself and wound his strong arms about the man who stood before him; it was a close struggle for the mastery, and both were well matched.

For a moment the sound of their heavy breathing could be heard above the clatter of the arms around them, then there was the bright flash of steel, and Niede fell forward. A dagger-thrust from the Prussian had done its work, and as he fell, Marie caught him in her arms, while the spy laid hold of her and tried to drag her away from the fallen man.

"Quick here, Gavotte!" he shouted to his comrade. "The woman, man, the woman!"

He flung the senseless and bleeding form of Pierre Niede aside, and caught her by the throat. It was a cowardly thing to do, but he was desperate; and as he held her speechless, his comrade caught her by the arms, and she was lifted from the ground with a stout arm about her waist, and the hand of the second soldier pressed upon her throat.

"Which way, Falco?" asked the ruffian, as he tightened his hold, and she felt the awful sensation of his choking grip—"Quick, they are coming!"

"To the outposts, man! To the outposts. for your life—you know the rest."

She heard only the words which the hoarse voice of her husband's assailant hissed into the ear of the man who held her in his arms. All grew dark before her eyes, and she was borne away among the soldiers, who allowed the man to pass, and then closed in the fight behind her, as she was borne away.



## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE STORY OF A NECKLACE.

THE surprise and capture of a part of the French outposts was a matter of little consequence to the general result of the engagement which followed it.

The Russians were compelled to force a battle, and it was part of Napoleon's programme to draw Benningsen into an engagement. The calculations of success were, however, different from the sequel to the movement. Ney, already jaded and but poorly supplied, sustained a well-fought action at Gustadt, and retreated to Deppen, where he met the Emperor.

Close-ranked and steady the French found new courage in the presence of Napoleon, and for a day the contest seemed uncertain—then, as the night closed in upon the fearful carnage, the Russians withdrew towards Heilsberg, where they made a halt, and stood awaiting the coming of the French commanders.

Worn out and badly crippled as he was, Ney

concealed his losses, and allowing the Russians to continue their retreat across the river Aller, waited the further orders of Napoleon.

Fusil and his men had seen hard fighting; they had been in the thickest of the engagement, and as they looked out upon the church spires of the town of Friedland, they knew that Napoleon, enraged and surprised at the stubborn resistance he had met from the Russian general, would wait and endeavor to draw him into battle.

Fusil's company had been decimated in the actions of the past few days. There were many who could not answer to the roll-call, and many more of the men of his regiment were lying in the rude hospitals.

About the town of Friedland, and in the streets, the French army had been quartered, serving to decoy the Russian general who had taken stand upon the west bank of the river.

Across the stream, a short distance above the town, stretched a long and narrow wooden bridge. In full sight of the Russians, the French occupied the position, tempting Benningsen to send regiments over to chastise his wily and manœuvring enemy.

Fusil was leaning against the bridge, looking over upon the sullen river, as Valmeau approached. The jaunty lieutenant had been wounded; a sabre cut upon his left arm had temporarily deprived him of its use, and it hung in a sling and splints.

Maurice Fusil was looking towards the river, but his thoughts were more uncertain than the muddy ripples which floated away beneath him. The false action on his part which had taken Pierre Niede away from Alsace, and the loss of the pretty *vivandiere* who had followed him, were heavy burthens in his train of thought.

So much was he preoccupied that he scarcely heeded the approach of his lieutenant, on his first walk from the hospital, and he started as Valmeau touched him on the shoulder.

"Ah, Valmeau—out again! Glad of it—how is the wounded arm to-day?"

"Better; it will be all right in a day or two. Have you a light?"

Fusil had been smoking, and as Valmeau took a cigar from his pocket and extended his available hand for a light, he brushed away the ashes, and handed it over to him.

"Well, captain, how is the record of the past two days? We have been pretty well cut up, I learn."

"Yes—we have fifteen killed, ten wounded, and six missing from the company. Not a bad record, if losses count for glory."

"Not so bad as I thought. Niede, I believe, is killed."

"No—missing since the surprise."

"About the same, Maurice. Missing men seldom turn up—at least, they are of no use to any one when they *do*."

"That is not always true. But I wouldn't give much for the missing fellows, and I think Niede is dead."

"Well, captain, it is the fortune of war, you know. That surprise was sudden, and for a few moments there was infernally hot work, I tell you."

"Niede was on guard, I learn, just where they broke the line, and Marie was fighting over him. Now they are *both* missing."

Valmeau had gained some information from Fusil's remark. The captain was ignorant of some of the events attending the surprise, and evidently did not know of the quarrel that had occurred with Pierre Niede, and so Valmeau breathed freer, just a little, and changed his tone of conversation.

"Indeed! I had hoped she had been made a pretty widow."

"You're charitable! Most probably she *is* a widow. There's very little chance for Pierre Niede, for if a prisoner, he is wounded."

"Then it's as well, perhaps. It has saved you the trouble of shooting him as a deserter."

Fusil started at the words. Singularly enough, he had often thought of Pierre's desertion. He had been watching him for weeks, and since Marie had found him, he had expected to hear of his desertion and her escape from camp, and so Valmeau had given his thoughts a name, and his fears the outline of a certainty.

"Deserter or not, he is among the missing, and Marie, if she be not dead herself, is probably the widow you have so generously desired. She is out of your reach, Valmeau, at least."

A fresh light to his cigar finished the sentence for Fusil, and he watched Valmeau carefully as he puffed the smoke away from him, and scanned his handsome face through the light blue wreaths which circled around it.

"Perhaps, captain—and *only* perhaps. She may not be even missing. Have you searched for her?"

"She has not been seen since the night of the surprise. One of the men insists that she was carried away by the fellow who came in as a spy and got up the affair so very nicely."

"Happy Prussian!" exclaimed Valmeau. "The privilege of clasping that woman in your arms would be cheap at the price of a good sound drubbing afterward!"

"Would you have paid that price for it?" inquired Fusil, with just a little sarcasm.

Valmeau would have answered, but the sharp whizz of a bullet caused him to turn, and they were found to be a mark for the Russian sharpshooters who were practicing from across the river.

"There's too much danger here, Fusil," he said, quietly, moving away. "Those grey-coated fellows will fall into the trap before long—but I don't care to be the first victim of their steady aim!"

He was right. It was part of Napoleon's plan to draw them across the river by exposing a portion of his force to lead them on.

The two officers walked quietly away, while there were signs of a movement on the river's bank.

"There will be work soon, captain, and we may be needed," said Valmeau, as they struck into the crowded street of Friedland. "But, truth now—is Marie Lascour among the missing?"

"Yes—and she is beyond the reach of her would-be lieutenant lover, and has no need of my protection, probably."

"Then she has lost a champion; you seem to have been the protector of her good name, if not the custodian of her virtue."

"Champion to no woman, lieutenant! But I do not care to hear Marie Niede maligned when she is not present to resent it," was the quick reply.

"Glad to hear you say so, then, Maurice! she has drawn the visor over your eyes most grandly. I may know more of her than even *you* may think. Her moonlight trysts may not have been with Pierre Niede alone!"

"Then you insinuate—"

"Nothing, Maurice Fusil. The regiment has lost a pretty face, and I have lost a pretty mistress, that is all. I've nothing left of her but this, perhaps."

He placed his hand in his bosom, and with some difficulty drew from his vest the chain and trinket he had taken from her, and held it up between his fingers.

"Do you know it?"

"Why yes; it is Marie's necklace, and she seemed to value it. I have seen her wear it often."

"Yes? and wished you were the necklace, eh? This narrow circle of gold, and the silver cross, could tell us tales if they could speak. *Le fruit défendu* hidden just beneath them has been too well concealed from *you* to make the possession of the necklace valuable as a souvenir."

"Where did you get it—did she give it to you?" inquired Fusil, anxiously, as they walked along, taking the necklace from Valmeau.

He looked at it a moment, and then passed it back to him, waiting for the answer, as they brushed past the soldiers who were crowding the streets, and as the drum and bugle sounded clearly, telling of the movements which the French were making, and which, as Valmeau had said, meant work at hand.

"If she were here, perhaps she'd tell you. It might betray some secrets of your virgin conscript *vivandiere*. She gave it to me as a love-pledge, nothing more. My fancy, so she gave it me."

Fusil again took the trinket, looked at it carelessly, and then tossed it back to its new owner. He did not believe the story which Valmeau had

told him, but he could not disprove it; he hesitated, and then, in a moment, quickly said:

"I don't believe it, Louis. Some day, you may have a chance to prove it, though!"

"By whom?"

"By Marie, if she lives. Your word of honor, Valmeau, did she give you that?"

"My word of honor, yes. It is a pledge of secrecy from Marie to me."

Cautiously, he told the truth, and Fusil believed it.

There were quick movements among the troops, and the noise of steady firing came towards them from the bridge. There was no time to talk—already the shots were falling in the streets, and the French regiments were hurrying towards the river. And so they parted, each to go his way, but Fusil was thinking of Marie Niede and felt that she was not unlike the others.

Valmeau had clipped his angel's wings.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## THE IDIOT'S MISSION.

THERE were shots falling in the streets of Friedland, and there was work ahead for Captain Maurice Fusil; work for Valmeau also, wounded as he was, and scarcely free from the hot air of the officers' hospital.

Napoleon had displayed all the cunning of which he was a master. From the disastrous check which he had received at Preuss-Eylau, he had formed the base of his operations. Crippled by that defeat, in which Davoust's division of veterans had been so cruelly cut to pieces, he had thrown Ney forward; and Ney had sustained the brunt of the action at Gustadt, from which he had fallen back upon Deppen, making a desperate stand, and waiting the presence of the Emperor to put life and victory into his exhausted troops.

Benningsen was waiting for his reenforcements, which came merely in scattered regiments, and only the rapid coursing Aller divided the opposing forces.

In this position, the strategy of Napoleon told with its full force. He had thrown his army back of the town, and scattered the remnants of two divisions within the streets of Friedland and near the bridge upon the river's bank, deceiving the Russian commander by exhibiting what Benningsen believed to be nothing more than the rear guard of the French army.

For two days Napoleon had thus set his decoys, hoping to draw the enemy across the river, so that they might have the town and bridge upon their rear, while he was massing his heavy columns in the front, seeking to draw his adversary into battle, without the choice of position.

Just as the afternoon was waning, a small division of the Russian force had marched across the river. The firing commenced by their sharpshooters, as Valmeau and Fusil were standing on the bridge, had been succeeded by an advance across the narrow wooden structure which spanned the river just above the town.

The advance was so rapid and concerted that the French were, even in obedience to their orders, slow in falling back; and as the regiments came across and entered the town, there was a steady combat in the narrow streets.

The feint of Napoleon's movement was intended to draw the Russian forces from their position upon the west side of the river, and the policy which he adopted was alternate advance and re-

treat, till his object should have been accomplished.

Already there was heavy firing from the Russian advance, as Fusil crushed his way to head-quarters, followed by Valmeau. There had been a slight struggle only at the bridge, and the Muscovite soldiers were advancing into the town, while but a small portion of the French army offered any show of resistance to their entry.

As Fusil stood waiting his orders, and Napoleon, surrounded by his Imperial Guard, watched the progress of his plan, a well-worn regiment was forcing its way to the front.

Beside one of the color sergeants, armed with a dilapidated sword, which he was waving high above his head, strode Franz, almost at a dog-trot, to keep up with the soldiers. He was dressed in the tattered clothes of a camp-follower, with the cap of a German soldier crushed down above his eyes.

The boy seemed wild with the excitement of the moment, intent upon keeping up with the men, without any apparent object except to be with them and to do as they did.

There was a glance of recognition between him and Fusil, as he went past the house by which the captain stood. Franz had gone a few rods away, when he turned and came back to Fusil.

"I am going to the bridge," he said, taking Fusil's hand a moment in his dirty palm. "They're fighting down there by the river."

"You had better keep away. They don't want

you there," was the careless reply, as the captain watched the moving mass of infantry, and paid but little attention to the boy.

"But I *may* go, captain?" he inquired a second time. "If I get hurt, it makes no difference, now Marie is gone."

There was another heavy volley from the river, and the men halted as the order rang down the street, and far off were the grey caps of the Russian soldiers, driving the French before them.

Fusil paid no attention to the boy beside him. He dashed away past the men who were on the march, and left the lad standing in amazement, looking after him, jostled by the crowd of soldiers.

The order to halt had been sent by the Emperor himself, and throughout the narrow, intricate streets of the town the French retreated steadily and swiftly, leaving the place in possession of the Russian soldiers, while the remainder of Benningsen's force was sent across the river, and his advanced regiments stood awaiting orders, watching the retreating French, as Napoleon, close upon their rear, hurried them away from Friedland.

The snare which he had set for Benningsen had worked well, and in the dusk of the evening the Russian generals made their head-quarters in the market-place, and the French outposts were scattered upon the low hills and in the dense woods beyond the town.

Unable to escape, Franz found himself resting in

an open doorway, tired and exhausted from his fruitless tramping. He had escaped the bullets, and the new occupants of the place paid no attention to the boy who sat upon the wide, stone doorstep. The few residents left in the houses were making friends with the Russian soldiers, fearing a general pillage from their hands, and they were secreting their provisions and valuables from the inquisitive non-residents.

There was but little love for either the French or Russians among the people of the sturdy German town. Both were invaders, and it mattered very little which became conqueror.

In the hurry of their designed retreat, the French had left their wounded and some prisoners in the hands of the Russian soldiers, and in the streets where they had fought there were many lying dead and dying in the dust.

As Franz sat on the doorstep, a pleasant-faced German woman tapped him on the shoulder and spoke to him in German. He could not understand her, though he answered in poorly chosen words of the Alsace *patois*.

The woman made out what he said, and they became good friends. There was a quiet friendliness in the boy's manner which drew the woman's heart towards him, and she bade him follow her into the next street, where she entered a small, quaint looking house, closing the door after her.

She had taken to her care two wounded officers.

One of them was a young French captain who had been badly hurt, and his pale, boyish face looked sadly towards her, as she came to the mattress on which he had been laid. The other was a Russian colonel, less severely wounded, but suffering from loss of blood, and very weak.

There was a strange contrast between the men. One, with the clear features of a French soldier, lay dying, and could only whisper; the other was a bronzed Russian, whose grey hair hung in heavy masses about his head, and whose voice was silvery in its broken accents.

Humanity, rather than friendship, had actuated the woman when the men were brought into her humble house, and she was ministering to both as best she could from her scanty store.

"The captain will soon be dead," the Russian colonel whispered, as he beckoned her to his bedside. "I know his wound—it's very dangerous. Give him wine or brandy if you have it."

All the liquor that she had was soon brought, enough to fill the glass she handed to the young French captain. He was too weak to drink, and she raised him in her arms and put the liquor to his lips. A few swallows only, scarcely half a dozen mouthfuls, and he put the glass away, while there was a convulsive tremor in his frame, and he looked steadily up into the woman's face.

"*Merci pour l'amour de Dieu!*" he murmured; there was a sudden gasp, the hand which she held,

clasped her fingers tightly for a second, and then the story of his life was over.

"I knew it; it is always so," the Russian said, as she laid the form of the dead soldier back upon the mattress. "I need a surgeon, can you get one?"

"I can try;" was the laconic answer, as the woman stood waiting his instructions.

He snatched one of the soiled epaulettes from his shoulder, and gave it to her. It had the insignia of his rank and the number of his regiment upon it.

"To the first head-quarters, my good woman! Ask for a surgeon and give him that—tell him to come here quickly, and let the lad stay with me."

He was imperative in his words and manner. So she took the epaulette and went away, throwing a cloth over the upturned face of the dead captain, and bidding Franz, in broken French, to wait till her return and give the Russian soldier whatever he might need.

"I'd rather go with you. I'll get the doctor," said the idiot, as she left them.

But in a mild tone the colonel called him back and told him he had something else for him to do. He spoke quietly and kindly to him in good French, and Franz saw that he had nothing to fear.

The wound which he had received was in his leg and was not a serious one, though he had lost much blood before aid had come to him; the bandage

about his leg was rudely adjusted but had served to stop the flow.

"What are you doing here in Friedland, my lad? You were with the French?"

"Yes; I came here with the soldiers, but they left me when the other soldiers came across the bridge."

"You are a brave boy then," he said, "and you were not afraid?"

"No; if they killed me, it would be no matter, now Marie is gone."

"Marie? who is she? the woman who has gone away from here?"

"Oh no, I mean Marie Lascour, the *vivandiere* who came away from Alsace after Pierre Niede."

"And who is Pierre Niede?"

"One of Captain Fusil's soldiers. He was killed when they were surprised, and Marie too, for she did not come back."

The officer would have questioned Franz still further, but the woman soon returned, bringing with her a Prussian surgeon whom she had found a few streets distant, at work among the wounded.

He proceeded quietly to work, first examining the colonel's hurt, and then turning to the bed whereon the captain lay.

"No service needed there, my friend, the man is dead," said the Russian, with an impatient gesture.

"How bad am I?"

"Your hurt is not serious. The bullet has passed



through, but it has left no ugly wound behind it. I will bind the leg up more carefully, and to-morrow it can be attended to."

He was short in his replies and quick in his work, for he had much to do. A few moments served to fix the wounded limb, and he went away, without a glance at the dead captain, leaving Franz and the kind-hearted woman with the Russian colonel.

"You can travel, lad?" he asked, after the lapse of a few moments. "You will go over the river for me, if I pay you for it?"

The boy's eyes glistened as he heard the words. The idea of being paid for any service except by blows and curses, was a new sensation in his daily life.

"Oh yes—I'll go for nothing if you want me to, and if I know the way. What must I do?"

"Carry a message to a soldier, that is all, and you can do it easily. There is a gold piece for you, and now pay attention."

He took a purse from his breast and handed Franz a gold coin. The boy took it wonderingly, and held it up to the light to see it shine, then put it away beneath his jacket, and turned to listen.

"You must go quickly, and come back to me. Away over towards the woods where the river bends and the water dashes over the rocks, there is a little house close down by the shore. There is only one, and you can see it when you get beyond the turn. There you will find two soldiers. Tell

them that you saw their colonel here, and that he is wounded. One of them is a small, dark man, with a cut across his forehead, so;"—he motioned with his hand, describing the wound the soldier had received—"Tell him not to lose what I have left with him, and if in danger take it to the old stone tower."

"He mustn't lose what you have left with him, and take it to the old stone tower if there's any danger."

The boy repeated the words a second time, and then, with the slowly spoken sentence, "I won't forget it, and I'll find the soldiers!" he left the house.

"Has the boy gone?" the colonel asked, turning abruptly towards the woman who had heard him give the orders.

"Yes, and he is on the road towards the bridge already."

"Good. I think he understood the message. Are there many soldiers in the streets? Do you see any of our men near this house?"

She looked out from the doorway as he bade her, and beckoned a soldier to come in. He was a tall, sturdy Russian private, who obeyed her motions, and who, as he came into the house and saw the colonel, brought his musket to its place, and stood presenting arms.

There was a few words between them, and a whispered conversation, which the woman could

not understand. The colonel took a book and pencil from his pocket, and wrote a few words upon the fly-leaf of the memorandum sheets. The words were these:

*"I have sent an idiot boy to Falco. He may be dangerous."*

He whispered the name of a Prussian officer to the soldier, and gave him the message. The man saluted him again, and without a word, only with a look which told that he knew well the errand upon which the wounded man had sent him, went away from the house and left the woman wondering what the soldier went to do.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE REMNANT OF A SECRET.

WE may turn back in our story's progress, to Alsace, and visit Jean Duprez's cottage. The ex-steward is absent, and Gaspard Jarome seems to have embraced the opportunity for a conference with Lisette; for we find him busily engaged in conversation with the old housekeeper, in Jean Duprez's most private room.

Upon the table lie the contents of the strong box in which Duprez kept most of his papers, and in which lay hidden such of his life's secrets as might be considered safe under the guardianship of lock and key.

There were old, musty parchments on which the ink had turned a rusty grey, and on some of which the wax of the seals had lost its color and clung to the faded ribbons only by the closest care in handling; title deeds and abstracts of more than half of the mountain village; rent rolls upon which the names of old tenants had been erased and superseded by new names, marking the death or

dispossession of the original renters. All these had Gaspard turned over, and several sealed packets which Lisette insisted he should open, and which Gaspard with better judgment, insisted should be left untouched.

"No, they are not here," he said slowly, as one by one he put the papers back into the box. "They may be in the packets, but those we dare not open."

Lisette was carefully locking the box again. The previous night while Duprez was fast asleep, she had stolen to his bedside and had secured the duplicate key of his strong box; so to-day, certain of an uninterrupted hour,—for Duprez was at the village—Gaspard and Lisette had been making the best of the time and opportunity, in searching for the will of the late Marquis De Briennes.

"Perhaps he has destroyed it;" ventured the woman, as the key was turned in the lock and the table rolled back to its place beside the wall.

"No," replied Gaspard; "Jean Duprez is too fond of old papers to let that relic be destroyed. He has hidden it somewhere, and we must find it. It may be at the castle."

"In the old well?"

"Either there or in the vault beneath the ruins of the burned wing. You say you saw it once after the old marquis died, and after Duprez came back from the Spanish town?"

"Yes—I saw him have it in his hands; he was

studying the name upon it; it was when he made the second will in which the balance of the estate was bequeathed to him. You remember that?"

"Full well, Lisette. Our names are on that will as witnesses, and it is the damning evidence of crime against me."

"But that was not all your crime, Gaspard, you forget that Louis De Briennes—"

"Yes, yes, I know,—but God knows I did not murder him. I placed him where he must have been found in a few hours by the convent sisters, and I spoke the truth when I told Duprez I had disposed of him."

"And the other boy—Phillippe—you feel certain that the cloak belonged to him?" inquired Lisette, anxiously.

"It could have belonged to no one else. The initial is the same, and the white silk crest is not entirely gone. That boy was Phillippe De Briennes. You should know more of it than I do."

"You are at fault there, Gaspard, with all your cunning. I know that Duprez took the boy away himself, and that he was never seen afterwards. I always supposed that he was buried in the old well, along with the papers which Duprez put there before he filled it up."

Lisette and Gaspard were telling secrets; secrets which Duprez little supposed that either would betray. The events of the past few months had made them common friends, and the discovery of

the cloak which had been so long in the possession of Madame Lascour, had caused them to seek a solution of a mystery.

But this one secret was known only to Duprez, if known to any one, and they had been searching for the proof.

Gaspard's story had been plainly told. He had made a compact with Jean Duprez to dispose of the heirs to the estate. The terms of the compact were simple, and bound the plotters to secrecy for their own safety. Duprez's, the plan was, and none but him knew the course to be pursued. Suffice it to say that the boys were spirited away, that Gaspard had gone from Alsace with Louis, had travelled by night towards southern France, and had placed his burthen in the box of a foundling hospital, throwing in after it a packet containing his name and history, which he himself had written, and of the contents of which Duprez was commendably ignorant.

As to the other boy, Duprez took charge of him. A few days after the departure of Gaspard with his half of the iniquity, the boy was missing from the castle—lost, somewhere, so Lisette was told, and some of the papers belonging to the old marquis were thrown into an unused well, which Duprez had filled with stone a few hours afterward.

Two of the three partners in the affair had now formed a separate firm, it seemed; Gaspard had disclosed to Lisette his disposition of the child he

had had in charge, and together, they had stumbled upon a clue, which, if followed, might lead to a detection of Duprez's disposal of the other boy.

"Well, we must hunt for it," said Gaspard, musing. "I will meet you to-night at the old castle, and we will begin the work. You can get away?"

"Yes, if not till midnight—he may not come home—you know he is uncertain."

They were standing in the doorway, and as Lisette spoke, Gaspard glanced carelessly down the road, and then stepped back into the room.

"He is coming—to-night, then, if you can; I will be there to meet you. He must not see me now."

Duprez was indeed coming, walking slowly up towards the cottage. Lisette went outside as if to look for Duprez, while Gaspard, used to every nook and corner of the house, drew up the trap in the kitchen floor, and went below into the cellar where there was a door through which he could escape when Duprez was in the house; and so, as the master came in from his dusty tramp and flung down his hat and cane, his late companion crept out from among the dust and cobwebs, and took his way towards the village inn.

Glancing carelessly from the half-closed window, Lisette saw him walk away; then she turned towards Duprez and asked what news he brought.

For a little while the master of the house sat in

silence, and Lisette meantime looked anxiously out upon the road, where she could just see the retreating form of Gaspard Jarome, as he walked briskly away towards the village.

"What news do you bring of the boy, Jean?"

The inquiry came in a quiet, earnest tone; Gaspard was well away from the house, and Lisette had no need for further delay or prevarication.

"Nothing; except that he is off to the war, tagging at the skirts of Marie Lascour, and wandering about the camp as a vagabond. I wish they'd shoot the brat."

"Then I *don't*, Jean Duprez! He may be a curse to both of us, but he is your son, and mine, and the blood in his veins is sacred to me, if not to you."

For a few moments Duprez made no reply. Lisette was sullen, and he had no desire to provoke her to anger. She had recalled an unpleasant episode in his life, and he was quite willing not to prolong the conversation.

The cool reply which he had given her, had wrung from the woman words which she seldom, if ever, uttered. For years she had kept the secret of the lad's parentage. It was the only evidence of her early shame, and Franz was to her a living reminder of the love which she had once borne for Jean Duprez. Even Gaspard Jarome knew nothing of this, and the story of the lad's appearance at the castle was one which he believed, as well as others to whom it had been told.

And so, when she thought of the lad who had gone away with Marie, and from whom she watched for the slightest tidings, the woman's heart gained the vantage, and she sat down in the chimney-corner and buried her face in her wrinkled hands, swaying her body to and fro, and sobbing in her grief.

"Never mind, Lisette; he may come back again!" He approached her quite kindly as he spoke, and laid his hand upon her shoulder. She merely looked up at him, and rising, put his hand aside with indifference.

"You won't be pleasant, then?" he said; "well, have your way, Lisette, and I will have my own. Is supper ready?"

"Yes—will you have it?"

"I have been walking quite enough to-day to make me hungry."

And so, in silence, the two sat down to supper, Duprez, longing for nightfall to enjoy his own amusement in summing up the rents due him, and Lisette, longing for her meeting with Gaspard.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## A TRIP OF EXPLORATION.

It was nearly midnight; and in the stillness of the solemn shadows Gaspard Jarome sat, leaning against one of the broken arches at the ruins of the Castle De Briennes. It was lonely, yet he was not entirely comfortless, for whatever satisfaction there was to be derived from the cloud of smoke which went up from the bowl of his short clay pipe, it was the particular province of Gaspard Jarome to enjoy.

The walk from the village was long and tedious, and he had had a heavy load to carry; he had brought with him a short iron bar, a pair of grappling irons such as the wood cutters used, several lengths of stout rope, and a basket. There had been more than time enough for rest, however, for Lisette had kept him waiting more than two hours, and he was not particularly good-humored at the delay.

She came at last, and tired and breathless from

her walk, sat down upon the broken stones at his feet, and waited for him to speak.

"Well, you're here at last, Lisette; you're very late; what kept you?"

"Jean Duprez, as you might know, without asking. He returned from the village in one of his ill-humored moods, and I could not get away till he had gone into his room and locked the door; he is turning over his old musty papers."

"Hm! We've had the first toss of the parchments, Lisette, and if Jean Duprez knows no more than we do, after he has overhauled them, he'll have his work for nothing; that's all I have to say!"

"The will was not in the box at all events, and remains to be found; we have work to do; there's no time for talking."

"Then help me and I'll do it!"

Together they followed along the broken wall, and then descended into the mass of ruin behind it, startling a number of night-birds from their hiding places. The still, bright moonlight gave a wierd look to the stones and stunted bushes which had overgrown the ruins of the burned wing. Close by, the solid walls of the main building, scorched by the fire, stood out in bold relief against the moonlit sky, their blackened outlines looking not unlike gigantic spectres towering threateningly above the workers.

The spot to which they had bent their steps

was well known to both of them; a long residence at the castle had made them familiar with the interior of the building, and as after the fire much of the debris had been cleared away by the laborers, the round surface stones of the unused well were easily distinguished.

"Here we are, Lisette; and now, what are the chances for discovery?"

Jarome paused a moment, and leaned upon the iron bar, looking down into the pile of stones which lay beneath him. He evidently did not fancy the task which he had undertaken, and as he struck a light for a new pipe full of tobacco, he looked at his companion with a quizzical air.

"That old well holds secrets, Gaspard, which are of great value to you and me. Come, I will help you. We must get through this work to-night, or not at all!"

There was determination in her tone and manner, and Gaspard knew well enough that Lisette's nature was already tainted by the ill-humor of the ex-steward's disposition, so he sprang down into the well, and began removing the loose stones which had been thrown into it, handing them up to Lisette, who rolled them away from the edge of the well into the ravine beyond it.

The time for conversation between the workers was limited; as the loose stones were removed, and Gaspard went deeper down into the well, his pipe went out, and he stopped a moment to hide it

in his blouse, while Lisette leaning over the side of the opening, called down to him. The rope and basket had by this time been brought into requisition; Gaspard was beginning to strike the sand and gravel of the bottom of the well, and the stones which Lisette hauled up in the basket were much smaller than those thrown out at first, and they were damp and partly covered with the clay in which they had been so long imbedded.

Whatever the old well might contain that would aid this man and woman in unravelling the mystery which so overwhelmingly occupied their thoughts, it would soon be brought to light; and at each basketful which Lisette drew up, she called down encouragingly to Gaspard, who replied with a grunt of satisfaction.

It was tedious labor at the best, and Gaspard was perhaps no better natured than he should have been. When men work for some well-defined purpose, and when they can see signs of success—be they ever so faint—there is an incentive to labor; but Gaspard had undertaken the work of exploration more at Lisette's instance than because of his own belief in the ultimate success of the undertaking, and therefore he was but an unwilling worker. The half contented growl which he had given Lisette in answer to her words of encouragement, was soon followed by an exclamation of dissatisfaction, and this in turn, by an oath; and then the man sat down upon the pile of slimy

stones which still remained at the bottom of the well, and launched his maledictions upon the woman who stood above, for the fruitless work which she had induced him to undertake.

"A little more patience, Gaspard, you have reached the bottom, and the box must be hidden somewhere in the well. I know that Duprez had some good reason for filling up this well; the box with the papers *must* be there!"

She leaned over the opening and looked down at him. As the man raised his eyes and saw the cool, determined face above him with an expression of the most intense anxiety written upon its lineaments, the woman's eyes rested upon the coarse features of Gaspard Jarome wearing an expression of disgust and nothing more.

"A little more patience, Gaspard;" she said again, "I am sure you will find the box." She spoke in a quiet, entreating tone, but there was the semblance of despair in the appeal which she addressed to him. She had hitherto assisted him in his work with a seemingly stolid indifference, disposing of the baskets of stones and earth, and maintaining almost a silence, till the ill-temper of her companion had manifested itself in the oath he had spoken, and had caused her to dread lest he should give up the work almost at the very moment of its completion.

Gaspard made no reply to her, but turned as if to work again; then, stooping low, he stopped

suddenly, and called to her that there was nothing there.

"It *must* be there! I *know* that Duprez must have put the papers and the box in this old well; it was his only safety!"

Lisette saw that Gaspard remained obdurate, and that she must do the work herself. The stout rope would bear her weight, and in a few words she told him that she would come down to him.

With nervous hands she fastened the end of the rope to the edge of the old well, and with the basket filled with stones lying at the bottom, she swung herself over the curb, and began the descent. The rough sides, with their jagged, uneven edges, gave her a foothold, and with a little assistance from Gaspard, she was soon beside him.

There was desperation in her work, her hands trembled nervously, and her breathing was short and quick. Gaspard, in a sullen, unwilling manner, helped her toss the stones aside, as he pressed the iron bar down into the sand and drew it up again, wet and sticky from the oozy clay, but without striking anything which seemed like the box they sought.

"There is one chance left, Gaspard," she said, in a low, uncertain whisper, "it may be somewhere here."

She had explored the narrow limits of the well with the exception of one place. A large, flat



stone lay embedded in the clay, and it took the united efforts of both the workers to raise it. It had sunk deeper into the sand than the rest, and from beneath, as they raised it, a short, slimy snake rolled lazily out, and crawled beneath the smaller stones, causing only a momentary shrinking and an involuntary shudder as it flashed in the uncertain moonlight.

"You take the bar while I hold up the stone!" said Gaspard. "Quick now, woman, for it's heavy!"

Her hands shook with agitation as she grasped the cold iron, and pressed it down into the firmly bedded earth. It resisted her efforts to drive it down, and at a second trial crashed through some slight impediment.

"'Tis here, Gaspard—I have it now, *at last!*"

They moved the stone away, and with the iron bar, working with all his speed, Gaspard threw away the sand and loose gravel, and uncovered a rusty iron box, not large, but shallow, from which the top had been partly broken when the iron was driven down upon it.

There was not a word spoken by the expectant treasure-seekers. The secret of a life-time was hidden in that iron box—there was a chance now of escape for them both from the thralldom in which Jean Duprez had held them for so long.

Still in silence, Gaspard knelt down, and raised the box from its bed. It was an heir-loom of the

former owners of the castle; the private papers of the late marquis, the life-records of his follies or his misdeeds were wont to be kept in it, and Lisette had often seen it quickly opened, and as quickly closed sometimes, when intrusive eyes were bent upon the master; Gaspard and Lisette smiled knowingly, as they saw it lying on the stones between them.

"You were right, Lisette," said the man at last, as he extended his dirty hand to her.

An old habit—one in which he seldom indulged now—had come to his aid when he saw that the woman had been wiser than he. He was doing her the simple justice of acknowledgment, nothing more, and as Lisette took Gaspard's hand in hers, she felt that an apology for his ill-humor had been promptly made.

"It's early morning now, Lisette, and we must be quick, sunlight will soon be upon us," suggested Gaspard, looking upward, and preparing the rope for their ascent. "We must get back before Duprez is stirring!"

She climbed up from the well, and he followed her, after placing the iron box within the basket, and securely fastening the knots which held the rope around it; he was soon above, and together, they drew the basket up.

To open the box was short work. It had been so long buried in the damp sand and ooze of the well-bottom that the hinges had rusted away, and

though the lock held one side, a few blows from the iron in Gaspard's hands laid bare the contents.

The roll of papers and parchments which the hands of either the dead Marquis De Briennes or the more crafty hands of his trusted steward, had placed in the box were wet and musty and covered with blue mould, but they were precious to Lisette and to the man who had assisted in finding them.

It would have been a study for an artist, the rapid change of expression upon the faces of the two anxious workers as they took the papers from the box, and bending down to them, unfolded scrap after scrap, and roll after roll, with nervous fingers; they found no will.

"It was made, I know," said Gaspard, "and the false one which we signed as witnesses, which gave Jean Duprez the charge of the estate, was made from a copy of the one which gave the riches to their proper owners. What is that?"

There was a brown packet in the box which Lisette had taken in her hands. It was sealed with the crest of the marquis, and this seal Lisette was about to break.

"Stop, woman, stop! are you crazy?" exclaimed Gaspard, snatching the packet from her.

"Crazy, Gaspard Jarome? No more than you are—what is it?"

Her reply was somewhat startling to Gaspard; it was a quick rebuff to his strange question. A crazy woman would not have shown such deliberate

forethought in planning, and her tart rejoinder brought this fact to mind.

"Not crazy, Lisette, but we must not break that seal. It may be useful."

He was opening the packet as he spoke to her. It had no superscription; if it ever had, the dampness in the box had effectually served to obliterate it; it was easily broken open.

It contained only a sheet of yellow paper, with a few words traced in a nervous hand, in large, indistinct characters—and as Gaspard read them to Lisette, they furnished the key to a mystery which they had not expected.

"TO THOSE AFTER MY DEATH: *I fear from Jean Duprez, my Spanish wife loves the castle better than its lord, and I am very sick.*"

"Strange, very strange, Gaspard; and there is no name to it," said Lisette, taking the paper in her hands, turning it over, and then passing it back to Gaspard, without another word of comment.

They had nearly reached the bottom of the box; but one paper remained; it was wrapped in a fragment of soiled silk, and tied loosely with a silken cord, from which the color had long since faded.

The document which they had so long sought was found at last. The cunning of Jean Duprez, which had lead him to seek protection from the

discovery of his rascality by hiding the treasure-box of the marquis, had for once been at fault. He should have added lock-picking to his list of accomplishments. But the haste with which he had been compelled to act, had given little or no time for caution. The sudden death of the marquis had brought to the castle all the inquisitive relations of the marquise, and Jean Duprez had been compelled to work quickly.

And so, Gaspard and Lisette had found their treasure in the rusty iron box. The will of the old marquis, in which the boys were mentioned—Phillippe and Louis—and in which the disposition of his estate was clearly devised, was in their possession.

The document was old and written out when legal formulæ were not observed, in a cramped, nervous hand, the writing of Jean Duprez, to whose advantage this one fact had been turned in the making of the second will, to which he had forged the signature, and to which as witnesses he had impressed the witnesses to the original.

"There are the names, both yours and mine, Lisette;" said Gaspard, pointing to the straggling lines which they had written years before. "Now we will go home."

"Not home, Gaspard—we have still further work to do;—we will visit Jean Duprez."

And so, placing the papers inside his blouse, and knotting the rope about him as a girdle, Gaspard

threw back the empty iron box, and refilled the well with stones and debris, and then the two friends walked away together.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## WHAT A MESSAGE MEANT.

WE left the boy Franz, leaving the house in Friedland with a message of which he did not know the meaning. The wounded Russian officer had given him a piece of gold. To receive pay for work, and in gold, too, was altogether a new sensation to Franz; he had never but once before possessed so great a treasure. He had hidden away near Duprez's table on one occasion, while Duprez was telling over the money received from his tenants, and had stolen a gold coin from the pile which his master had counted; but it was hidden among his forgotten treasures, and the piece of money which the Russian officer had given him for carrying the message was a *largesse* far beyond even his dreams of expectation.

'Twas no easy matter to thread his way through the narrow streets, which, filled with soldiers, stragglers, and the population of the place, all agog with expectation and curiosity, rendered a passage to the bridge a work of time, and of some dexterity;

but he was lithe and agile, he knew the way, and, crushing along among the motley crowd, and walking faster when he reached an open space, he soon reached the bridge and began to cross.

The regiments which had been ordered into the town were filing along the road, and crowding on the bridge; so he had to work his way carefully against the tide of men and the crowd of horses, being compelled more than once, to creep along the railings upon the outer edge of the narrow, unsteady structure.

Once across, he climbed from the edge of the bridge to a narrow footpath which skirted the bank of the river, frequently repeating the curious message which the Russian had cautioned him not to forget; while in the distance, he could see, close down by the water, the hut to which he had been directed.

It was an ordinary *chalet*, built in the prevailing French style, and might have been, once, a boat-house attached to some villa residence. But adversity or the misfortunes of war had changed it into a lodging place for straggling soldiers, two of whom were sitting by the doorway, smoking; between them, upon a rude table constructed from a barrel, were a couple of bottles of German wine.

They paid little or no attention to the lad as he approached, until he stood before them, and with a quizzical look, scanned them both.

One, dressed in the dirty uniform of a Prussian

private, had thrown down his spike-topped helmet cap, and with a soiled kerchief bound about his head, was arguing some point of difference with his comrade, who wore the partial uniform of a French veteran; but he was a disgrace to the grand army—a renegade, and a deserter. The questions or answers of the first soldier were given in a mixture of low German and poor French, while the conversation of the deserter was carried on in well chosen words correctly accentuated.

"Are you called Falco?" was the lad's query, when a strict observation of the two men had convinced him that he had found the place and probably the men he searched for. "I want to see you, if you are."

The man turned quickly, and could not suppress a smile at the grotesque appearance of the boy, and then, pouring out another stoup of the wine, he answered:

"No—I am not called Falco, and you don't want to see me."

"Then *you* are Falco?"

The question was addressed to the other soldier, and would have been answered, had not a third party appeared in the doorway of the house, and emerging, joined the group.

He was a tall, commanding man, with a close-knit frame, a heavy, bristling beard, and a complexion which, from exposure to the sun and the weather, had grown from what might once have been

an olive brown into a reddish hue. Across his forehead, just above the eyes, was an ugly scar, the mark of a deep wound, and a some time narrow escape.

The boy suddenly bethinking himself of the description given him by the officer, brushed past the two soldiers and stood in the doorway by the new-comer.

"You are Falco?"

"Yes, I'm Falco, at least that is what they call me; what do you want of me?"

"I have a message for you from a soldier who is wounded; come here, and I'll tell it to you!"

He spoke in an authoritative manner, and a clear tone—so much so, that the two drinkers laughed at him. He did not heed their laughter, but pulling Falco inside the house, whispered in his ear the message which he had been told to give him.

The man manifested just the least perceptible surprise at the order, and asked a few questions of the lad regarding the wounded officer, who seemed to be well known to him—as indeed, he should have been.

The man who, by his daring entrance into the French encampment, had effected the surprise, had wounded Pierre Niede, and had carried off Marie, was the trusty servant-in-ordinary to the Russian officer on whose errand Franz had come. Falco was well paid for his services, and while the pay lasted, he was faithful to his employer—but faith-

ful only where his own best interest told him that maintaining allegiance to this employer was the proper thing to do—his service was profitable, dangerous as it sometimes was, but the renegade Frenchman who had risen from the indignity of a deserter, to the onerous position of a successful spy, did not stop at trifles.

His early education had been that of a mountaineer in Alsace, but the fortunes of a rough life aided by some slight indiscretions which were transgressions of the laws, had rendered a surveillance by the authorities inconvenient to his permanent residence in the neighborhood of his brigand-like exploits. The neighboring borders of the Prussian provinces were convenient, at the time, and just at the prime of his life, he had forsaken the cause of the French, and, from his knowledge of Alsace, became valuable, if not quite altogether trustworthy, to the allied forces.

To such a man as this Franz had been dispatched upon an errand which carried much of danger in its execution, and the spy wondered why his employer had selected so strange a messenger; wondered, in fact, till a soldier came riding up to them and handed him a scrap of paper—nothing more than a scrap from a note book—the same scrap of paper which we have already seen the wounded Russian officer give to a second messenger whom he had dispatched to Falco.

There was merely a sign of recognition passed

between the new comer and the renegade; a single glance at the idiot boy to show that he had already reached the scene of his new action, and the man was gone.

Franz stood for a few minutes looking wistfully as he rode away; he took the pathway towards the bridge, and he could not see why the soldier might not as well have taken him up behind him on his horse—but Falco had work on hand just then, and the two half-drunken men who sat at the doorway were to assist him.

"You come from Friedland, boy?" he asked, evasively attempting to conceal what he was about to do—"you don't go back to-night?"

The little sense that the lad possessed at his command judged things as they were—he took the present facts of a situation for his guide, and not the probabilities—and he saw that there was danger in the words the spy had spoken.

"Yes; back to-night to Friedland, M. Falco, and I'm going now."

He broke away from the men, and started down the pathway before they could clearly understand his purpose. But the quick order to pursue him given by Falco to the men, was too positive to be neglected. The soldiers staggered to their feet and after the boy, winding down the river's bank, while Franz increased his pace.

He was making good headway towards the bridge, and had almost reached it, his pursuers well

behind him, when the soldier who had brought the message was discovered, dismounted, and standing beside a clump of shrubbery.

"A ride, good soldier, if you please—you're going back to Friedland—won't you *please* to take me with you?"

But the man saw another duty to perform. He knew the purport of his errand, and caught the boy roughly around the waist. It was a struggle of iron strength against a tired, worn-out lad; he threw him up beside him on the saddle, and rode back to the *chalet* with his prisoner.

"To the stone tower with him, fellows, and see that he keeps silent. They shall both be put there—I will meet you with the woman!" said Falco, as the boy was brought to him.

Frightened as he was, Franz caught the last quick, low-whispered words— he saw a glimpse, even in his half-witted way, of untold mischief, and he submitted quietly to have his hands tied behind him, and to be taken as a prisoner, into the rude building.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### DUPREZ'S UNCERTAIN VISITOR.

It was sunrise when Gaspard and Lisette descended the stony road which led from the valley to the castle ruins. They were both weary, and Lisette had stopped several times to rest, but they were both good-natured. For a long time previous to this, there had been no real friendship between them, but the events of the past night had drawn them together with a common bond of interest, and all former ill-feeling had been smoothed away, and for a time, at least, forgotten. For years they had been under the uncertain mastership of Jean Duprez. Gaspard knew nothing of the secrets between Lisette and the ex-steward, but he remembered the compact which he himself had once made with Duprez, how well he had kept his part of it, and he knew how little Duprez hesitated at ridding himself of any obstacle which might obstruct the road which led to the accomplishment of his designs. The thralldom of fear and oppression which he held over nearly all in Alsace, had been a thralldom which Gaspard had shared, and



from which he had at no time attained more than a partial freedom.

Wood-cutters were stirring, even at this early morning hour; their hardy mountain labor compelled them to be up and away by daylight, but early nightfall brought them rest. The village inn was a carousing place for some, but since the army had departed over the frontier and had taken with it many of the best men of the village Jean Duprez was sure to be at home. The *auberge*, which a short time before he had frequented, he seldom visited now. He seemed to prefer to be left alone; and since he had pressed Madame Julie Lascour to poverty and death, and since his oppression had compelled the object of his fancy to flee her home, he had become more surly than before, and his moroseness had gained him solitude and freedom for his own thoughts; moreover, he was more masterful than ever in and around the home he called his own, which was scarcely a home to old Lisette.

The sight of a man coming down the mountain road and bearing an iron bar upon his shoulder, caused no surprise to those who met Gaspard; they only wondered what was the cause of his being upon the mountains, and whether he had begun to work for a livelihood; why Lisette should be abroad they neither knew nor cared. Her actions were always strange and unaccountable to everyone.

"You are going now to Jean Duprez?" Gaspard

inquired of the woman, as they came in sight of the cottage, about which no one seemed to be stirring.

"Why shouldn't I? He may not have missed me; but it doesn't matter if he has; we have begun this work together, Gaspard Jarome!"

She spoke quietly and determinedly; so quiet and so determined were her tones, that Gaspard accorded obedience to her wishes without a question. He had the papers they had discovered well concealed about him, and with them in his possession, he feared neither Duprez nor his anger, and it mattered little to him, he thought, whether Duprez had waked and discovered Lisette's absence, or whether he still slept in total ignorance of it.

It would not, however, have been Gaspard Jarome's choice to meet Duprez with the implements of his night's toil upon his shoulder; he thought to dispose of them before entering the cottage, but his scheme was frustrated, for as they approached the house Duprez appeared at one of the windows.

It was too late to retreat, and as Gaspard stood beside the woman, she placed her hand upon his arm, and there was an undisguised nervousness in the pressure which she gave him.

"He is there, you see—" she whispered, walking feebly—"my absence has been discovered."

"Well, what of it? Do you fear him so much, then?"

"No—no—no!" she retorted in a tone which,



by its very intensity, contradicted her words; "the end may as well come now as later."

She exerted herself to await calmly the coming issue, and the two walked on together; as they reached the cottage door, Duprez met them.

"You are up early this morning, and out, I see," was the only salutation which he gave to Lisette;—she had expected a torrent of abuse.

"Yes, very early," she replied. "I have been up in the mountains with Gaspard."

"Wood-cutting, or treasure-seeking? Chasing legends in the moonlight?"

"Not after shadows, Jean, at all events. I could not sleep—"

"And so you went out and away for company. Come in; you, too, Gaspard; when breakfast is prepared, there will be enough for all."

The natural craftiness which never failed him, had been busy since long before dawn; after overhauling his papers, he had called to Lisette, and had received no answer to his summons. A general search of the house had disclosed the woman's absence, and the anger occasioned at first by the discovery, had had time to give place to the craftiness of his character before her return.

There was mischief in the wind, he well knew, but he could not account for the reason of her absence, and so he kept his secret fears hidden beneath a calm exterior, and greeted her coolly when she made her appearance at the doorstep.

Gaspard was thrown off his guard by Duprez's consummate coolness; he had neither broken bread nor tasted wine in that house since Franz had left it on the day when he had held the master by the throat, and had measured strength with him; and so doubting whether or not it were best to enter, he stopped by the doorstep, and threw down the rope and bar which he was carrying.

"A truce to this enmity, Gaspard," said Duprez, his bronzed and bearded face assuming a still deeper hue as he saw the other's hesitation. "Come in to breakfast with me."

He extended his hand towards Gaspard, and, reluctantly, Gaspard took it; while Lisette, to conceal her agitation, threw fresh faggots on the fire, and busied herself with the breakfast.

Neither word nor look of intelligence passed between them, and Duprez and Gaspard sat down by the fire together.

The workmen were taking their noon-day rest when these two men separated; and when Gaspard parted from his host, they seemed to be good friends.

"My hand in earnest friendship, now, Gaspard," said the ex-steward, standing at the door and extending his hand as he spoke.

Without a word of answer, Gaspard took it, and then walked away.

"Doubtful—doubtful," muttered Duprez looking after him; "well, we shall see about it, we shall see!"

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE RENEGADE'S PRISONER.

THE eventful journey which Franz had undertaken, was fraught with more of interest than either his captor or the man who had sent him, knew. He was so used to hardship, and so careless of circumstances, that he worried himself but little, so long as he was moderately comfortable. Since the surprise at the encampment, and during the engagement at Friedland, he had been allowed to wander where he chose, and to do as he pleased, with the privilege accorded him of either starving, stealing, or begging his simple rations. But he had not been used to luxury; a couple of hard biscuits, a crust or two of dark and mouldy army bread, not unfrequently the refuse lying beneath the commissary's tent, served him for a meal, and the piece of white bread and the thick slice of cooked meat, which his captors gave him, was therefore a treat to him, inasmuch as this prison fare was better than that to which he was accustomed.

That there was something secret, and something

desperate going on, even his dull faculties readily perceived. The whispered conversation between the two soldiers, and the allusions which they had made to a woman, quickened his curiosity, but it was no easy matter to discover who the woman was.

As the boy seemed harmless, his captors considered it safe to leave him alone, and in his solitude he had ample leisure to reflect in his simple way, upon the close scrutiny to which they had first subjected him.

The strange message which the Russian officer had given him, had so fastened itself upon his mind, that he now repeated it several times with a bewildered expression, each time more puzzled in the attempt to divine its possible meaning; and while in this quandary, he threw himself down upon the hard floor of the room in which they placed him, and striving in vain to solve in his simple mind the mystery of his incarceration, he lay till the moonlight came shining in upon him, and he fell asleep.

It was, however, an uneasy, troubled sleep, and when after a time he partly awoke, and turning over, put the cap which he had used for a pillow under his other cheek, he saw the shadows of two men cast upon the wall before him. At almost any other time the simple-minded lad would have been frightened at the shadowy forms, and would have cried out in his fear, but now there was the low

hum of voices, and he aroused himself to listen.

It was the renegade soldier and his comrade, and they were discussing Falco, and the work which he had given them to do.

"I tell you, Grion, I don't like this work! Falco may be well paid, but we are not, and taking this woman off to the old tower is ticklish service for us both!"

The fellow spoke loudly enough for Franz to hear all that they were saying; and the secret of the prisoner would soon be told.

"But we must do it, I tell you! He has gone over to the tower, and we must take her there. I wonder who the little beauty is?"

"You've named her rightly,—she is a little beauty, and a brave one, too; she fought like a tigress when we carried her off, and the colonel won't find it easy work to conquer her!"

The last words told Franz all that he wanted to know; little guessing that their other prisoner knew the captive woman, they had exchanged their idle words within hearing distance of the idiot boy, and he knew from the description he had heard, that Marie had been taken by these men, and so, creeping on his hands and knees to a position close under the window by which they were standing, he listened to their plan with bated breath.

And then there was a woman's voice, soft and low, but very distinct, and the three stood beneath the window.

"Is she asleep yet, *Mignonne*?" asked the renegade soldier—and then there was a momentary silence, and Franz thought that he could hear the soldier struggling for a kiss; then there was a sigh, and then another struggle, and a low, chuckling laugh from his comrade.

The woman whom the soldier had addressed by the pet name of *Mignonne* was simply a camp-follower, who, from her notorious connections with the officers and men had been ordered to quit the army, and had followed her renegade lover into and beyond Friedland, and, as his mistress, shared the plunder which he received as his portion of the earnings which Falco was paid for his rascality.

To this woman's care had Marie Lascour been entrusted, since her abduction from the French encampment; the keen eye of the spy had noted her beauty, while she stood talking with Valmean, and in the work of the surprise, he had directed her capture by the ready hands of the men who were prepared to execute his orders, and in the deep villainy of his nature he had bargained for and sold to the Russian colonel, who lay wounded in the house in Friedland, the privilege of her attempted conquest; he had not even flinched at such a contract.

He had taken her away from the encampment into Friedland, and had kept her, strictly guarded, in one of the remotest quarters of the tower, till the necessity for a change had forced him to convey

her to the cottage near the wood where he had agreed with the renegade and the woman, that she should be safely kept.

The woman who had been appointed her guardian and keeper felt no jealousy of her; in the strange admixture of French life in the cities, this woman was one of those restless creatures who are like the bubbles upon champagne; she had followed the army from Paris, and while she was attracted by the form, feature, (and the generosity,) of Joseph, the renegade, she knew and felt that the woman they had placed in her charge was purer than she, and better.

As soon as Franz had brought the message to Falco, she had received her orders, and in the drink which she had given to Marie with her supper, she had mixed a powerful draught, which, while it would produce sleep and stupor, was not dangerous in its effects; and the two soldiers were now waiting for its proper working, to fulfil the orders which Falco had given them.

The room in which they had placed the boy had only one window, and one door opening into a narrow hallway. This window was protected by stout, wooden bars, as is often the case in country stables; the door was securely fastened on the outside.

"She is asleep by this time, Joseph, so you must get to work; come." They followed her into the house without replying.

Franz knew now, that Marie was in the charge of these men; and he threw himself down upon the rough board floor, with his face close to the opening below the door.

Franz heard them walk away, and knew that something was to be done, that some plot against Marie was to be put into immediate execution.

He tried the door, but it was fast; it would move a very little, to be sure, when he pressed against it, but a stout hook and staple held it firmly, and he would have no means of escape by that outlet. He tried the window, but the bars across it were too stout to be broken off; there were but two, but they were fastened too close together for him to creep between them.

There had been a fire in the room; they had been cooking their meals there, and the glowing coals were heaped together in the open fire-place; a broken andiron held up one side of the charred back log, but its edge was not sharp, and would be of no use to him; he could not hope to break the bars across the window with the dull iron which held the log of wood.

Going again to the window he looked out; it was but a few feet from the ground and opened on the rear side of the house, from which he could see nothing. He listened; in the hall and on the ricketty stairs which led to the second story, he heard the sound of feet.

Again throwing himself down upon the floor, he

saw the flash of a light moving in the hall, and the footsteps of the two men, as if they were carrying some one between them, was all that he heard—there was not a word spoken.

Just before the door, they stopped and put their burthen down.

"She will not wake up, I tell you, and this cloak will hide you if she does. Put it around her, and ride slowly, if you see any one along the river road!" It was the woman who spoke.

"Well, well, be quick—there's no time to waste. Ugh! It's colder than it was!"

The soldier came into the hall again, and there was the sound of a horse's hoofs upon the road, and then, still listening, Franz heard them lift their burthen up, and heard the directions given by the woman as they placed the insensible girl upon the horse which Joseph rode; and then there was a second horse brought to the door, Grion mounted it, and the door was closed. The soldiers and their captive had ridden away from the cottage, leaving Franz still a prisoner. The night air was chilly even in those early days of June, and now that the men had gone the boy crept to the fireplace, and stooping, blew the embers into live coals. The few sparks which his breath sent up against the partly burned log started a blaze; he fanned it with his cap, and soon there was a ruddy glare throughout the room.

As he crouched down by the fire, he rubbed his

hands in the genial warmth, and with the end of a charred stick, heaped the now live coals beneath the burning log.

Once warm, he crossed again to the narrow window of his prison-room, and tried the bars. They were still stubborn and would not give, though he tried them with all his strength; just then, the log blazing in the fireplace, broke in two, and sent a bright line of sparks up the chimney.

Suddenly across the usually dull and vacant face, there flashed an expression of shrewdness. The instinct of self-preservation is inborn, and that not in the human race alone, but even in creatures of the lower orders. It is not then greatly to be wondered at, if the dulled faculties of this half-witted changeling seemed in this sudden emergency to be aroused into a temporary activity, and his subsequent actions to partake of a degree of intelligence which he had never before exhibited.

Seizing the broken andiron he pushed it down among the glowing coals, and again fanned them gently with his cap. It was not long before the iron was hot; so hot that it lay among the coals almost as crimson as the fire around it; then it was ready for his purpose.

Stripping off his jacket, and winding it about the feet of the andiron, he held the rod extended, and placed the glowing point against one of the wooden bars which obstructed the window; the hot iron eat its way into the wood, and before it cooled,

it had burned half way through the heavy bar.

A second heating of the iron served to burn equally the other end of the bar, and then by a quick blow, he broke it, and thrust his head and shoulders through the opening.

The neglected patch of garden was all that he could see; for the house fronted upon the river, and past it ran the road which he supposed the men had taken. Laying hold of the upper bar with both hands, he contrived to force his feet through the opening, and then hanging by his hands, he bent his shoulders down, and caught the sleeve of his jacket around the bar. This enabled him to turn partly round, while a change of hands brought his body almost entirely outside, and with the jacket sleeve around the remaining bar of wood, he could stretch himself sufficiently towards the window-sill to force his head clear of the obstructions.

A moment after, he had swung himself from the window, and had fallen into the mass of briers and shrubbery beneath it.

Long before this the moon had become obscured by clouds, and now a chilly rain was falling, and Franz, who had been compelled to sacrifice his jacket in his escape, was wet to the skin long before he had been many minutes outside. Still, despite the falling rain the night was not dark, and this, at least, was in his favor; then, too, he was free, and possessed, so he thought, a clue to Marie.

It was surprising how the kind girl's gentle words had drawn his heart to her. He had grieved deeply, simple as he was, at her loss, and in the sudden freedom he had attained he did not forget the conversation he had heard under the very window through which he had escaped, and the unwonted sagacity which had assisted him to regain his freedom, would aid him in making use of the clue he had obtained to the whereabouts of the *vivandiere*, and render him no mean assistance to the imprisoned woman, should he be successful in finding her. Bending close to the ground that he might not attract attention from the occupants of the house, if there were any, he crawled on his hands and knees to the front of the house and across the road to the bank of the river. Then he rose to his feet and paused a moment to consider.

How to find Marie, that was the question; but it was a question that the boy, even with his newly awakened wit was little calculated to solve. They had taken Marie to an old stone tower; that he remembered, and that tower he must find if he could; so having settled upon his course, albeit in his simple manner, he trudged along by the water's edge, intent upon his mission, and having fortunately chosen the very direction in which the insensible form of Marie had been borne by her captors only a short time before.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

## WHAT A PRUSSIAN SPY DISCOVERED.

FALCO, Grion, Joseph: these three worthies, their work completed, were sitting beneath the shelter of an old stone porch, in one of the tumble-down wings of the pile into which they had taken Marie Niege, according to their instructions.

Pipes, tobacco, and a bottle of brandy made them comfortable, despite the storm, and as such characters sometimes are, they were in a conversational mood.

"What does all this mean, Falco?" asked the man called Joseph, filling his tin cup nearly half full of the undiluted liquor. "What is the colonel at, this time?"

The question was evidently not a pleasant one to Falco, who did the dirty work for the officer, and had just completed his latest task, and he turned savagely to the soldier who had with ill-chosen curiosity, dared to ask for such a piece of information.

"It is not for you to ask, my man," was the sullen reply. "Are you not well paid?"

There was enough of sarcastic wit in Falco's question to arouse in the maudlin hireling a sense of his rascally propriety. It came to his rescue in a moment, and he answered:

"Yes, well paid enough for ordinary work, but not for the work that we are doing now; it is too dangerous."

"Pshaw, Joseph! you and Grion both forget the debt you owe the colonel! Remember that he saved you from a file of soldiers and half a dozen bullets, when you deserted? Besides, it is only a woman, and you know—"

"I know that she is a deal too good for any one in Friedland, Falco; she is as pretty an Alsace peasant as you can find in the ranks of the grand army of Napoleon!"

"Alsace—what part of Alsace?" asked Falco, suddenly.

"I don't know that; but the other night while she was asleep, she kept talking, and she spoke of some one whom she called her mother, and said something that we couldn't understand about some man called Jean; Jean Duprez, I think."

Whatever there may have been in the mention of the name which Marie had murmured in her dreamy sleep, to cause the sudden pallor which overspread Falco's face, that man thought it wise to conceal from his companions, so he turned his face away from the men, and laughed the matter off; but there was some meaning in his sudden



silence, and he soon left the two soldiers to their pipes and liquor, and went towards the ruined tower which stood near by.

"Duprez—Duprez—" he murmured to himself, as he walked along. "This girl cannot be from—"

The approach of a soldier who spoke to him, stopped Falco's soliloquy, and after a few moments' idle talk with the man, he went inside the tower, to see the prisoner, who, it seems, had disclosed secrets when she least suspected having done so.

An old crone whose face was wrinkled with age, and who was a fair specimen of the rude, uneducated German peasant, accosted him in a vulgar *patois* as he came into the squalid quarters which the dame in her position of cook to the men on duty, occupied as both kitchen and sleeping room. He made no reply, however, to her question of what he wanted, for he was master there; passing along a narrow, dilapidated hall, where the stones were here and there in spots covered with patches of plaster, the most of which had long before crumbled away, he took a key which hung upon a nail driven in by one of the windows, and then passed out of the beldame's sight.

A few moments after, in one of the old dungeons of the castle which had been a feudal fortress in earlier times, he stood beside a rude wooden bedstead, looking down upon Marie Niede.

The effect of the potion which had been given her had not quite worn away, and the poor girl

was still sleeping soundly, though her slumber seemed to be restless. She was still clad in her *vivandiere's* uniform and the worn cloak of a Prussian officer which had been thrown over her when she was brought to the tower from her former place of imprisonment, was loosely cast about her.

While Marie was still sleeping, Falco bent low down and looked into her face, scanning every feature; and then going to the side of the room, he kicked one of the stones near to the floor and it slowly turned upon a pivot moving two of the stones above it, and admitting a draught of damp air from somewhere without; he listened at the opening, and then pushing the stones back into their places, he touched Marie upon the shoulder.

She started up wildly, and raising herself upon one elbow, looked at the man who was standing only a few feet distant.

"Who are you?" she asked in a trembling tone, meeting the cold glance which he gave her, by one which betrayed some fear of violence at the hands of her captor. "How did you get here, and what do you want? Where am I?"

"Safe, my pretty Alsace *vivandiere*; safe with me, here in your pleasant quarters."

She looked into the face of the man before her, and sprang from the rude bed upon which she was lying as she recognized the soldier with whom she had struggled upon the night of the surprise at the French camp, and whose face she had distinctly



seen as she was borne away from the camp as a captive, leaving Pierre, and—it seemed to her—all the world behind.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, as she met his answering gaze with a look of resignation as at impending fate—"you are he who fought against me, a feeble woman, on the night of the surprise; it was a noble capture, truly!"

"Noble or not, *vivandiere*, my epaulettes were the reward for it! Captain Falco is my title now, and my rank is due to your sweet presence!"

He approached her slowly, and extended his hand to her in mock civility.

She started away from him, and standing close against the wall, motioned him threateningly back.

"Stand off! Your presence would be more pleasing to me were these prison bars between us. You have me in your power, though not for insult,—though your dungeon walls be thick enough to drown a cry for help or an appeal for mercy!"

"Then the less will be your chance of breaking through them, my Alsace beauty. But tell me, what would you give for liberty?"

"It would be of little value to me now, perhaps."

"And why not? Are there none whom you love, none whom you would wish to be with again?"

"Yes, one—my husband—whom you yourself struck down and murdered, foully, while he was fighting bravely!"

"But you may be released—"

"Not at the ransom you would be sure to demand of me. Who are my persecutors? Why am I kept here? I have some rights of exchange, perhaps? I am a *vivandiere* of the French army!"

"I know it, and that may procure you freedom," said Falco, warily. "You were with Marshal Davoust?"

"Yes; what of that?"

"Then tell us their plans and resources; you were the favorite of your captain—what were the plans laid out for the campaign after the retreat from Friedland?"

"I do not know—*vivandieres* are not taken into the confidence of the marshals of France," replied Marie, at a loss to understand the intention of such earnest questioning by one of Falco's rank.

"Excuse me, *vivandiere*, but you *do* know them, and they shall be told!"

He moved towards the door, as though he would summon some one to his aid, but she sprang before him and placed herself between him and the door, before which a sentinel, who did the double duty of guard and jailor, slowly paced.

"Stay, Captain Falco! If I knew all that they did, I would not tell it, were it at the price of liberty. It is not the habit of Julie Lascour's daughter and Pierre Niede's wife to lie, at least to such as you; she tells no falsehoods to a renegade who plays the spy upon his countrymen!"

The man did not appear to heed the last words; his face was of an ashen paleness, but there was no visible excitement in his manner as he asked—

“Julie Lascour, of Alsace? You are—”

“The daughter of Madame Julie Lascour, of the Canton Alsace; do you know her?”

“And your father, Jacque Lascour, is he dead or living, girl?”

“He died before my birth. But you start! Why do you ask these questions?”

Falco did not answer for some time; he paced the narrow limits of the dungeon with a steady, measured step, till she spoke again; and then he turned, and coming close to her, said, in a cool, clear tone:

“You are Jacque’s child, and Julie’s! I am glad of it—*very* glad—”

“Then you knew my mother and my father? I may hope for mercy?”

She saw a ray of hope dawning in the questions which had been asked of her, and she sank upon her knees and clasped her hands imploringly.

“Stand up, girl! stand up! this is no time, nor place to beg for mercy! You would like to hear my story? you shall have it. I once loved your mother; she was living at the Castle De Briennes, and she was called Julie Marchaud then. But I sued for her love in vain, for your dead father, Jacque Lascour, had a comelier face than I, and Julie Marchaud loved him. Well, I met this

Jacque Lascour face to face; we quarrelled—then we fought; I wounded him, (would that I had killed him!) and fled from Alsace, to lead a wild life in the Pyrenees with my merry comrades, my carabine, and my pretty Spanish women! You have heard of Jean La Sang?”

It was a strange look he gave her as he spoke, for she had started back in terror at the mention of a name which had been spoken in Alsace only with fear and bated breath, as one of the boldest robbers of the Spanish borders, a fugitive from Alsace for some dreadful crime.

“Bloody Jean, they called him? Yes—he was taken by the soldiers, and the night before his execution, the prison was burned, and his bones were found in the ruins afterwards.”

“Then the ruins *lied*, girl! He called the jailer to him when he brought his food, and choked him—aye, till his eyes started from their sockets, and his face was black and livid—then he unlocked his shackles with the jailer’s keys and changed clothes with him! *I* was Jean Le Sang! *I* fired that prison, and stood by to see its heavy walls fall in; in Switzerland I was unknown then, and I went there at first, until I joined the French; but I left them when I found the Prussian colonel would pay better for my work; he paid me well for stealing the pretty *vivandiere* for him!”

“You are Jean Le Sang! God help me then,

for if you hate my mother, you will show no mercy to her child!"

"Yes; such mercy as the French would have shown to me for avenging the wrongs your father, Jacque Lascour, had done me! Mercy, you say! You shall have it, girl, and soon, such mercy as *I* show, for you are not the colonel's prisoner now, but mine!"

He turned upon his heel and left the dungeon; Marie heard the heavy door grate upon its rusty hinges, and then she could hear the measured tread of the sentinel; nothing more, except the beating of the water against the tower walls, from which there seemed to be no escape for her.

After a few moments she seated herself to ponder upon the strange scene, when she heard steps before the door of the dungeon; a narrow grating, barred with iron, was opened, and Falco looked in at her for a moment; then it was closed again and she heard the sound of voices in the passage way.

There seemed to be two persons speaking; their voices were loud, and in one speaker she recognized the tones of Falco,—the other was strange to her.

"I won't do it, I tell you; there has been blood enough already!" She could hear the words plainly, for the speakers were close to the door; then there was a struggle and a heavy fall.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### AN ESCAPE NOT COUNTED UPON.

INTENT upon his purpose of finding Marie, the boy Franz had followed along the river road, until he reached the tower. As he stood before the gloomy walls he felt sure that within them Marie was imprisoned; but he was worn with fatigue and hunger, and as no present plan for rescue suggested itself to his simple mind, he crept beneath the shelter of a narrow archway half concealed among the thickly grown shrubbery which grew around the walls. It was the accumulation of years of undisturbed growth, and was matted and thick from intertwining without hindrance, with the ivy which hung in heavy festoons from the weather-stained walls.

It was a dark, damp passage-way into which he had crept, and within a few feet of the opening, it grew larger and he was enabled to stand almost erect. The wall was laid in courses of stone, which had been held in place by some sort of heavy mortar which still retained its hold. But the air was close and suffocating, and he feared to venture

farther, though curiosity led him to explore the passage.

He knew enough, however, to see that it descended gradually, and that it extended somewhere beneath the tower;—also that it had been lately used by some one for a shelter, for there was a broken camp-kettle and a few bones from which the meat had been picked off, and the ashes of a fire which had been built next to the wall were still warm as though the cooking had been lately done, and the place a frequent resort for some of the soldiers who hung about the river and the tower.

The lad knelt upon his hands and knees to examine the place, he heard when heavy footsteps near him; Grion and his friend came around the corner of the tower wall, and seated themselves in the opening, from which Franz retreated into the darkness of the uncertain passage.

A few biscuits and a bottle of brandy were produced by the two soldiers, and breaking the neck from the bottle, they sat down near the place where the fire had been built and began their bout of carousal, while Franz lay hidden a few yards away.

"So the captain struck you, did he, Grion?" asked the second soldier—"and you bore it like a coward?"

"Yes, if it is cowardly to strike back at a man who is armed, and who is desperate enough to kill anyone without reason, as he would have killed the girl."

"What! kill the little beauty that he stole away from the French camp, Grion?"

"Yes; the job he wanted me to do was to enter by the secret passage and kill her, before the colonel should come to claim her."

"And the story to be told to *him*—would Falco have told *that* also?"

"A blow from a dagger would have done the business for the woman, and it would have been thought a suicide—that's all," chuckled Grion. "But I'll be even with him yet, for that blow; I'll steal the woman for myself before to-morrow morning, if you'll join with me."

"That I will, man, if it's to the death. What's your plan?"

"This passage leads to the place where she is put. I know it well, and how to reach it. She will be glad of the chance to escape, and under that pretense I will get her away. Once in my power and yours, we'll make enough in ransom for the little beauty to let Falco do his work himself after this. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes, a bargain; when will you begin the work?"

"In an hour; meet me here and bring a cloak with you, and a rope, for the *vivandiere* may perhaps be troublesome! You go now, we must not be seen together!"

The two men separated, and Franz, crouching in the darkness of the passage-way groped after them

to the entrance. They had parted in silence, each going in a different direction, and the lad started to his feet, and watched them out of sight.

"Marie is here," he said, in a mumbling tone; "this dark place leads to where they've shut her up; it's very dark, but I'll try it!"

He stooped down quite to his knees, as the roof of the passage-way forced him to do, and he found that with his head bent low down, he could make good progress. Yet he could see nothing, and could hear nothing. The walls were now damp and cold to the touch, and he felt cold, icy water trickling upon his fingers as he groped his way along.

It seemed an endless journey in the darkness, but Marie was in danger—he knew it all now, and he kept feeling his way along till his hands, outstretched before him touched a smooth stone wall which apparently blocked his way so that he could go no farther.

He looked back, but not a glimmer of light penetrated to him from the entrance, for the tunnel had wound from its course and struck the foot of the tower on its opposite side, almost next the river, running parallel with it, till it reached its terminus.

Thoroughly frightened at the loneliness and the darkness, the lad shouted again and again in his fear. But no answer came to him; the sound of his feeble voice could scarcely penetrate to the en-

trance of the winding passage, and even if that were possible, it could only have fallen upon the ear of some rude soldier whose superstition would doubtless have attributed it to some supernatural cause, or to the agency of some uncanny spirit.

Ceasing his cries he again groped about him; there was nothing that he could find, except a few loose stones,—no doorway, no bolt, no chain,—nothing to guide him in his search. The face of the wall seemed all the same, as he pressed against the stones and knocked upon them with one of the pieces which he had picked up.

One of the stones which he struck by chance, gave forth a broken, uncertain sound; he struck it again and again, sobbing in his impotent wrath; weary at last of his futile efforts against the apparently solid masonry, he threw himself against it with considerable force; as he did so, it seemed to yield to his pressure; a crevice opened through which a faint light shone, and a welcome draught of air blew upon his hot face; then the stone moved slowly around upon a pivot, carrying the one above it also, and making an opening through which the boy could creep.

The light which he saw was from the lamp left burning in Marie's dungeon, and he crept through the aperture, and entered the prison where she was lying, holding the displaced stones apart with his hands, and calling to Marie in a loud whisper.

"Who calls me? Is it you, Pierre?" asked the

girl, in a startled voice; she had been asleep, dreaming, perhaps, and at the mention of her name, she sprang to her feet.

"No, not Pierre, but me, Marie; don't be afraid, it's only Franz!"

"You here! Good heavens, how is this?"

"I don't know, Marie! But give me that stool and jug; quick, for this loophole will close up again!"

He still held the stone with both hands and nodded to her impatiently to give him the stool and the jug he asked for.

She did so, and he placed them in the opening so that the stone might not close in upon them, and then turned to Marie with his arms extended.

"Come, Marie, come, I want you; come away with me."

"But, Franz—"

"Don't say but any longer, I tell you; come, they will be here after you soon!"

He threw the cloak over her shoulder, having taken it up from the bed where she had dropped it, and laid his hand upon her arm.

"Who is coming after me, Franz? It seems like a dream, all this—where am I?"

"In a tower," was the rather indefinite reply. "Some men want to kill you, but two rascals won't let the other rascal have his way. I heard them talking, and they are going to steal you from Falco, to have you for themselves, and get a ransom."

"And you—how did you find me, Franz?—I was a prisoner."

"I'll tell you all about it by-and-by, come, we must get away before they come to find you. It's dark and lonely where we have to go, but I came once, and we will find our way, I guess."

"No, Franz, I cannot; it is too dangerous, it will cost us both our lives. Go, boy, and leave me where I am!"

She threw the cloak from her shoulders as she spoke to him, and sat down upon the bed in silence; all her presence of mind had forsaken her; she fancied she saw Falco's cold, unfeeling face looking down upon her, and then her eyes closed and she sank upon the floor, her head falling upon the stones, and the bright red blood trickled down her forehead from a wound cut by their hard, uneven surfaces.

"Come, Marie, come, I say! I want to take you away from here! Don't you hear me?" asked the lad, stooping over and raising her head in his arms.

She did not answer, and her breath came in heavy, steady sobs; yet she did not seem to know him, and he was afraid that she was dying.

"Don't die, Marie, don't die; I'll get you away from here."

He threw the cloak over her, and took her in his arms, moving towards the opening in the wall.

It was not large enough to admit of his carrying

her, so he placed his back against the side of it, and shoved her body through; then following it, he threw the jug and stool back into the dungeon, while the stones slowly revolved back into their places, and he was alone in the dark passage-way with his burthen in his arms.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

## AN INTERRUPTED STORY.

THE action at Friedland had been the pivot upon which the result of the war was destined to turn. Crafty as Napoleon ever was, he had weighed the chances with all the foresight of which he was the master; Ney, Davoust, all, had been allotted their parts, and they had each faithfully performed the duties assigned; the marshals of France, in obedience to the master's will, had seen the troops retreat from Friedland, and felt that some motive of diplomacy in which the force and weight of the French armies were simply the adjuncts, had been devised.

The keen perception of the Emperor, who planned his campaigns first and played his men in battles as a chess-player would use his pawns, had forced the Russian general to accept engagement upon the terms which he, Napoleon, saw fit to offer, and the masterly retreat without being vanquished, which Napoleon accomplished, illustrates a page in his history where his stubborn character in all its



details and its tenacity of purpose, is shown in the best possible light.

So well had he matured his plans, and so effectually had he succeeded in their execution that the fulfillment came, when on the raft moored in the river Niemen, near the town of Tilsit, the Emperors of France and Russia met to agree upon an armistice, and to lay the foundation of a treaty in which the King of Prussia, though an invited guest, held at a distance by Napoleon, had no voice, except the one privilege of assent. The Treaty of Tilsit, devised by the Emperor on the 23d of June, 1807, and ratified on the 7th of July, left Napoleon free to order his legions, shattered and worn out as they were, back to the Cantons of France, and to the splendor and gayety of the French capital.

There was great rejoicing in the ranks of the grand army when the officers announced the ratification of the armistice, when the news of the expected treaty was whispered at the bivouac, and when the train wagons were prepared for the march towards France.

When the treaty was proclaimed to the men of the regiment in which Fusil and Valmeau held their commissions, the veteran color bearer waved his eagles and the men shouted for joy; shouted, despite their half healed wounds and the memory of their terrible sufferings and privations.

On the parade square in the fast fading light of the sunset, their colonel gave the expected orders

for return, and there was fresh liquor in the canteens of the *vivandieres*, and the camp songs rang out merrily, as Fusil moved around among the men.

Valmeau, just arrived from head-quarters with dispatches, threw the bridle of his horse to an orderly, and came up to Fusil with a smile upon his countenance.

"Glorious news, captain, glorious news, but then—"

"'But then,' Valmeau! Why, man, your countenance has changed till it has become as pale as the shadows of moonlight on the side of a general's marquee; you sigh like a lover who has lost his mistress, or as though you were sorry that the campaign is over."

"Indeed! I may have more reason to regret it than you imagine, Maurice!"

"A love affair in Friedland, perhaps? Some blue-eyed German blonde has been teaching you the *patois*, Louis, and shooting barbed arrows from her bright eyes 'way through your heart, during the lessons?"

"No; you seem to forget Marie Lascour—"

He playfully opened his vest, and handled the trinket and chain which hung around his neck, and then, glancing nervously at Fusil, he answered Fusil's inquiring look with a reply which startled him.

"I have found traces of my beauty."



"How? Where? In the town?"

"Yes; she has been a prisoner, captured by the order of some Russian officer; I found the house where he had placed his treasure, and the woman who took care of her—but she is gone now, and no one knows where."

"Gone, poor girl! dead, I dare say, by this time! she had too high a spirit to suffer insult calmly, and that may have been her fate; the half-witted boy Franz, is missing too. I have not seen him since I parted with him in the street, on the day of the engagement in the town."

"Pshaw, Fusil! You mingle remembrances of that half-brained fool with remembrances of pretty Marie as though their fortunes were inseparable. I tell you that Marie has been in Friedland, but she is gone now, and I have lost a pretty mistress in this infernal campaign."

The words were so doubtful in their meaning that the remembrance of the story of the necklace which Valmeau had told him, was unpalatable to Fusil. Faith once destroyed or shaken is hard to recover, and Fusil had lost his faith in Marie since he had been compelled to believe that she had given the necklace to Valmeau as a *gage d'amour*.

They had walked away from the line of tents and were standing by the outposts, away from the men, and where they were comparatively unobserved, so Fusil could question Valmeau unreservedly. A few straggling soldiers only were near to

them, and half a dozen invalid prisoners awaiting exchange, whose parole of the camp gave them the privilege of loitering.

"Valmeau, one word, and only one. I must confess it—I have honored this woman, and believed her a true wife; tell me again on your word of honor, (you swore it once before) was that necklace a love-pledge from Marie Niede to you?"

His eyes were bent steadily upon Valmeau, and the hot blood mounted to the lieutenant's forehead as he replied with some twinges of conscience: "On my word of honor, yes! Are you satisfied now?"

He raised his hat as he spoke to Fusil, standing only a few feet from him, and looking up into the captain's face with an air of conscious triumph. He felt that the words he uttered must cut deeply into Fusil's heart, and he took pride in saying them.

"Satisfied, Louis Valmeau? Yes, quite satisfied; your plan has been a good one and well worked, lieutenant. Poor Marie!"

He raised his own hat as he turned away. It was all that a French officer could say, but the civility between them had the semblance of a mockery.

Valmeau stood a few seconds only in the enjoyment of his triumph; the sound of the distant drum-beat called him back from love thoughts to thoughts of duty, and he turned to go.

A man with the cloak of a Prussian officer thrown over his shoulders, stood in the way, and Valmeau turned aside to pass him, rudely brushing against the shoulders of the intruder, when a hand was laid upon his arm, to arrest his progress.

"Stop a moment, Lieutenant Valmeau; you have lied, to-day; lied, against the good name of a woman!"

Turning his back to Valmeau, the man moved away, his shoulders covered by the cloak which hung quite to his feet, and the regulation fatigue cap of the French army visible above the up-turned collar.

Doubting not but that some one of the invalid prisoners had spoken to him, Valmeau sprang forward, and with suddenly aroused anger, grasped the stranger by the shoulder, just as Fusil, whose curiosity had been aroused, re-approached them. Already Valmeau had drawn his sword, and was making a thrust at the stranger, but throwing himself *en garde*, the unknown soldier turned fiercely towards him, and a second sword blade could be seen in the uncertain light.

A moment more and the two blades had met; there was a quick thrust, a parry, and then Valmeau sighed, pressing his hand to his breast, and staggering back into the arms of a soldier standing near him.

"Help, help, Fusil! I'm hurt! Look to that Prussian prisoner, there!"

But there was no attempt to escape on the part of his opponent; with head bowed upon his breast, and shielding his face with the hood of the cloak, the strange intruder had dropped his sword, and stood leaning over Valmeau, who had fallen at his feet.

"You lied, I say again, Lieutenant Valmeau, as basely as when you told the story of your escape from Dantzic!"

With a grasp of iron, Fusil placed his hand upon the throat of the strange prisoner, and tore the cloak from the face the stranger sought to hide; he gave but one glance at the countenance he exposed, and then started back aghast.

"Good God, Valmeau; it is a judgment on your perfidy—'tis Marie Niede!"

The work of retribution had been surely done; and as Valmeau was lifted from the ground and borne, fainting, back to camp, a file of soldiers marched to head-quarters with the *vivandiere*, a prisoner under strict guard.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## A DEATHBED SECRET.

THE sudden re-appearance of Marie and Franz, made Franz a semi-hero in the camp, but the wounding of Lieutenant Valmeau had thrown a cloud over Marie, which was a poor recompense for her dangers and her suffering.

Released under parole, she was compelled to await her trial by court martial, being under the strict regulations of the army orders, and under the edict of Marshal Davoust, who bade her await the issue of the encounter, while Valmeau lay in the hospital delirious with fever.

In vain Fusil exerted himself to soften the marshal towards Marie. Davoust was stern and inexorable. He cherished no very pleasant remembrance of Valmeau's conduct towards Pierre Niede when at Dantzic, but the success of the mission upon which he had been sent, however much Niede may have contributed towards it, mitigated the dishonor of his abandonment of Niede, and there was no one but Niede to dispute the account which

Valmeau had himself given of the imperative necessity which compelled him to leave his comrade to the tender mercies of the enemy.

For a fortnight, Valmeau lingered between life and death. The camp nursing was rough at best, though Fusil gave all the attention that he could give without a positive neglect of the duties which his command imposed upon him, to prepare the men for their return to France.

At night he visited the hospital, and in his turn watched by the sick bed, and Marie had been assigned to temporary duty as nurse, at Fusil's request; she watched Valmeau as best she could, ministering to the wants of the invalid with the whispers around her of a *liaison* which some believed, struggling to forgive the man who had injured her so cruelly, and repenting,—how bitterly she alone knew—the fatal thrust which she had given in her desperation, and impelled by outraged honor. Her conduct was closely observed by the stern-browed marshal, who, strict in the performance of his duty, but concealing beneath the dignity and the severity of a commander the feelings of a tender-hearted man, longed to exercise the pardoning power, and her faithful performance of duty he resolved should serve as a palliation for the offence, of which Valmeau's death would convict the *vivandiere*.

All day long Marie had wandered about the tents, and nightfall found her weary and exhausted

among the few patients, when Fusil came into the line of hospital marquees, and inquired for her.

"She is there, captain, as she always is, poor girl," said the staff-officer in charge, pointing to the tent where Valmeau lay.

"And Lieutenant Valmeau?"

"No better—the delirium is leaving him—a bad sign, very bad—go in."

Fusil passed into the tent where the sick man was lying, and where Marie was applying the cooling lotions to his wound, and bathing his forehead with her lightest touch.

"Ah, Marie, the end will soon come, my poor girl; false as he has been to you, he was a good officer and a brave one; we shall miss him in the company!"

He took the hand of the wounded officer within his own. It was cold, damp, and emaciated, and it fell from his grasp as the lieutenant raised his eyes towards his captain.

"He will not know you," said one of the nurses who was standing near, and had moved away only to make room for Fusil. "He has been talking strangely, and speaks of some package that he has, and talks of France and Alsace, and of a castle somewhere, and then of a hospital for foundlings—see, he is waking up again!"

Valmeau looked up into Fusil's face, and then closed his eyes as though the effort pained him; then trying to raise his hand, it fell back upon the

bed, and he moved his lips as if about to speak.

"Maurice Fusil—old friend," he said. "You are here to see me die."

He looked beyond them, towards the opening of the tent, as some one entered, and Fusil turned to follow the line of his gaze.

Behind them, with his hat in hand, and with a face no longer stern, but sorrowful, stood Davoust, and, looking in upon them all, was Franz, clinging to the canvas of the tent, his face only visible.

The dying man recognized the marshal, and with an effort raised his emaciated hand to his forehead and gave the salute.

It was a touching tribute to his superior, and the discipline of the French soldier was a testimonial to rank which brought a blush to the face of the man who had fought his half a hundred battles.

"I am dying, marshal," said Valmeau, motioning them to raise him up from the pillow, and leaning his head upon the breast of Captain Fusil who answered his implied request by raising him in his arms. "But it is not the fault of Marie Niede; she is as pure as the virgin, marshal, and she gave no pledge to me."

He placed his hand beneath the mattress and drew forth the trinket and chain which he had taken from the *nivandiere* on the night of the surprise.

Marie had knelt beside the bed and bowed her head upon the coverlet. The dying man reached

forward and put the chain about her neck; then, with his gaze riveted upon the kneeling figure, and his eyes full of a remorseful tenderness, he made to the woman he had wronged, the only reparation that lay in his power.

"I have sinned against you deeply, Marie, though I thought it was the love I bore you that tempted me so sorely. But I am dying now, and I see my fault. The love I fancied that I felt was only a base counterfeit; a truly noble heart is unselfish, and would sacrifice itself upon the altar of love, finding its sweetest reward in the happiness of the object of its devotion. I am guilty of much, and there is no time left me in which to atone. I shall soon be gone, and all I dare ask is that you will try to forget that such a man as Louis Valmeau ever lived."

His voice fell to a whisper as he uttered the last words, and faint with the exertion it had cost him to speak so long, he closed his eyes in a momentary slumber. A silence fell over those who stood about his bed,—that awful silence which the presence of death exacts—and they who stood in that fearful presence waited for the final struggle when soul should separate from body and pass into the land of the unknown.

But Valmeau had one duty left to perform, and he exerted all the little strength that was left him for its completion. Raising his hand to his neck, he took a small key from a faded ribbon which was

tied about his throat. Putting it into Fusil's outstretched hand, he spoke with difficulty the following words:

"In my box—Maurice—you will find—a packet of old papers.—You know something of my history—I think I should like you to know more;—use the papers as seems best to you;—they might have been of use if I had lived;—my name is Louis De Briennes."

He sank back; the hand which held Fusil's relaxed its hold, a grey pallor crept over his features, and a film came over his eyes, blinding them to earthly objects; they looked into the future, not the present.

Not a word was spoken, even Davoust was silent; with his rough, brown hand he closed the eyes of the dead soldier, and turned to the table where a desk lay open. He wrote a few lines upon a scrap of paper, folded it, and handed it to Fusil; then, with a salute, he passed away.

The paper which he had given to the captain was quickly read. Its words were few, but they were welcome words to Fusil, proving that his work of intercession had not been wholly in vain; Valmeau's confession had had its effect upon the tender heart of the rough old marshal, and as a proof of his confidence Davoust had given the words of pardon to the captain of the Alsace regiment which held the bridge at Preuss-Eylau.

*"Marie Lascour, vivandiere, arrested for assault on Lieutenant Valmeau, will not be tried. Her acquittal and release is hereby ordered.*

DAVOUST."

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### THE RETURN TO ALSACE.

COURIERS had entered the towns and villages of France, spreading the news that Napoleon had returned to Paris; and the peasants had put on their holiday dresses to receive the returning veterans of his army. Some, there were, whose holiday attire was the badge of mourning, but the intelligence that a portion of Ney's division and the greater part of Davoust's had been disbanded and provided with transportation to their homes, was glad news in the Vosges districts, and the little *auberge* where Gaston dealt out his wine and brandy was a merry one that day, when the conscripts who had left the village when Fusil marched away came back as veterans, to tell the story of the war to those who waited their return, to exhibit their souvenirs of camp life and battle field, and to tell to those who had lost friends, the sad particulars of their deaths.

Duprez was with the crowd of peasants which lined the road to receive the soldiers, and Lisette,

walking beside Gaspard, had also followed in the train.

The old enmity which Gaspard had borne Duprez seemed to have been forgotten, for they were often seen together now; Lisette had returned to Duprez's house, and the ex-steward seemed more kind to the old woman than he had ever been before.

All night long the village had been full of rumors, and several of the younger peasants had gone over into the adjoining Canton to come back with the soldiers—for the line of march of the whole division lay through Alsace, and the men who were to be mustered out of service were to be dismissed at the square before the inn, while the column halted.

'Twas nearly noon when the son of Gustav Ridot, the *forgeron* of the place, rode at a full run up the steep road upon his father's only horse, waving his cap in the air, and shouting with joy.

"They are coming! they are coming!" he cried again and again, as he leaped down from the horse whose sides were covered with foam and bore the deep marks of the spurs; "they will soon be here!"

He was surrounded by eager questioners anxious for tidings of their friends, but bewildered by the confusion of voices, he could give but little information, and his replies were vague and unsatisfactory.

Suddenly from the crowd arose a wild shout of

joy. A dark line was seen moving slowly along the valley, and above this dark line there flashed a line of light as the steel of the bayonets caught the sunlight upon their polished blades. As the line drew nearer the wildest excitement prevailed among the anxious peasants, and when they saw the tattered colors fluttering in the breeze, and the eagles nodding to the time of the soldiers' steady tramp, and when the sound of the drum and the bugle broke upon their ears, they could contain themselves no longer, and their enthusiasm vented itself in loud and prolonged cheers; thus were the soldiers of the grand army welcomed back to their simple homes, after the long and tedious campaign.

Fusil was with his company, or rather with the remnant of his company, and Franz, clad in the uniform of an artillery sergeant—which had been given to him by a camp-companion and which he wore by Fusil's permission—kept his place in the line, and held a prancing horse by the bridle, as the soldiers halted in the square.

Clearly and distinctly Fusil's orders were given. The men of Alsace stepped to the front, and the roll was called. Then, after turning their arms over to the quarter-master's sergeant, the men were dismissed, and when the rank was broken, they were free from the grand army and its service.

The artist's pencil would serve better than the pen to picture the ensuing scene. Bronzed and



bearded faces were bedewed with tears as their necks were encircled by the arms of loving, patient, long suffering women. Wives and sweethearts faltered their welcome amid fast falling tears, aged men and women clasped their hands in silent thanksgiving that they had lived to see the sons whose return they had never hoped to behold. And children of all ages, from the sturdy and mischievous urchins and shy little maidens, to the wee toddlers who had been helpless babes in arms when their conscript fathers marched away, stood hanging by the mothers' skirts or threw their arms about the fathers' knees, impatient to attract attention and receive the loving kiss.

But for Marie Lascour there was no word of welcome, except from old Lisette, who found time to take the poor girl's head upon her bosom after her embrace of Franz. The old housekeeper's wrinkled face was buried in the neck of the idiot when she reached him, and all the joy that a mother could have felt was shown at the lad's return.

"And you too, Master Gaspard!" said Franz, proud of his uniform, and sensible, perhaps for the first time in his life that some one loved him. "See, I am home from the wars a soldier; see, Master Jean, I should have been a general if they hadn't stopped their fighting."

With a glance of indifference towards the boy, Duprez advanced to meet Fusil; but Fusil remembered too well his treachery regarding the white

ribbon, and drew back from the ex-steward's outstretched hand.

"As you please, captain," said Duprez, with a cold smile of impudence. "As you please—but your former kindness served my purpose, for the man has not returned with you!"

Fusil could make no answer, and turning to Gaston, asked for a meal, and left Duprez waiting for Marie.

"At home again, Marie, and safe, I'm glad to see!" he said, as the *vivandiere* came towards him.

"Yes, Monsieur Duprez, at home again—but not to meet my mother!"

Duprez knew too well the temper of the woman he had wronged to press her further, and withdrew from her presence as Gaspard approached and offered her his hand.

She was standing near Lisette, and as she hesitated to accept it, the old woman whispered:

"Do as he bids you, girl, he will prove a friend."

Hesitating no longer, she placed her hand in Gaspard's, and spoke to him of Alsace and the changes that the war had brought; then they walked away together, and entered the cottage where Gaspard was living.



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## A COUNCIL OF THREE.

It was a relief to Maurice Fusil after the arduous service he had seen, to have the opportunity to lounge away a month at the little village inn, where he was quite a hero. Gaston had assigned the best room in the house to his use, and he found so many friends among the peasants that he was much annoyed when orders came commanding his presence at head-quarters.

Marie was grateful to him for his long continued kindness to her, and although she had taken her residence at Gaspard's cottage, he found her always ready to receive him, and he and Gaspard had become good friends.

As he approached the house when he went to pay his farewell visit, he found Gaspard, according to his usual custom, smoking on the doorstep in the early twilight.

"I leave to-morrow, friend; where is Marie?"

"She will be here soon, captain. Have a pipe?"

He accepted the offer, and the two had sat for

some time smoking in silence, when Gaspard turned suddenly to Fusil.

"To-morrow, captain? I am very sorry, for I have some work for you to do in Alsace. Come with me."

Fusil followed Gaspard into the house and up into the chamber where he slept. The box which Madame Julie Lascour had given into his care was taken from a chest which stood near the window, and Gaspard sat down before the captain with the box upon his lap.

"First, captain, let me say, not a word of this to Marie; the time has not come yet."

"A secret? On my honor as a soldier, not one word; what is it?"

"You remember Pierre Niede?"

"I should think so; and I remember the trick of Monsieur Jean Duprez which sent him off as a conscript in my company," replied Fusil, warmly, and enjoining Gaspard to secrecy on his part, he recited to him the story of the white ribbon.

"Well, that is past now; but you owe Duprez something for his treachery to you, and I owe him more still for his acts towards me. Is Pierre Niede dead, or is he living, captain?"

"God knows, Gaspard Jarome, I wish *I* did! Why do you ask?"

"Because he was *not* Pierre Niede."

"That was the name he went by here in Alsace, was it not?" asked the captain somewhat surprised.

"Yes; and he himself knew no other. He owes a debt of hatred to Jean Duprez, greater than yours or mine, though he does not know it. Duprez and I were always counted friends, captain, but it was only a sham on my part, for he had me in his power; I made a false step once, and one sin leads to another; but the tables are turned now; I know his secrets, and some time I'll make them known for Marie's sake and for Pierre Niede's, if he lives."

"Pierre Niede was her husband—so she says."

"Yes, but she has no proof of marriage; there is no record at the convent, and the priest who married them died years ago. Here comes Lisette."

The woman was trudging slowly up the road, and looking anxiously towards the window through which Gaspard espied her. Hurriedly he set down the box and beckoned to her.

She was evidently expected, and Gaspard met her at the head of the steep, narrow stairway which lead to the room in which they were sitting, and waited anxiously till she had recovered her breath from the exertion of mounting the stairs, before he spoke to question her.

"Well, what news? Did you find the man? Is he the one you suspected?" he asked, one clause of the interrogative sentence following close upon the other.

"Yes; but he knew nothing; the man is a Prussian, at least he looks more like an old German

soldier than a Frenchman; he was badly wounded, and has been very ill."

"His name, woman, his name—did you learn that?"

"Francois La Pierre."

"That will do. Now, Captain Fusil, you shall have an explanation. The day after the boys returned to Alsace, a strange soldier came down the valley road afoot; he had a military cloak over his shoulder, but no baggage, and he stopped at the house of Leforge, a wood-cutter, living on the mountain."

"There is nothing strange in that, said Fusil, evidently in haste to reach the story's end. "Strangers in Alsace can be no novelty in these times. Is the man poor?"

"He seems to be; he will tell nothing of his history, but he talks, Leforge says, as though he knew the people here."

"That is not strange, either. Who did you think he was?"

"Pierre Niede; you know we never had a good account of him; how he died, or where he went to, captain!"

"The poor fellow's dead, no doubt. Died as many a noble hearted man has died before him—in the trenches, from Prussian bullets or Prussian bayonets. Go on with your story, Gaspard, I have no time to lose."

"Pierre Niede, then, to make a long story short,

must have been Phillippe De Briennes, one of the heirs to the old castle yonder," Gaspard said, opening the box and handing Fusil the cloak which lay within it, and showing him the initial letter worked in silk upon it.

"Lisette worked that letter and crest in that very cloak, and she can swear to it. It was wrapped about the child that Madame Lascour found in the snow, just after she married Jacques, and which she reared as her own after her husband's death. Close that door, Lisette!"

Gaspard's voice trembled as he gave the order, and Lisette went to the door, listened a moment, then, closing it carefully, returned to her seat beside the captain and Gaspard.

"You have pledged your honor, captain," said Gaspard, "and I will trust you—you are a friend to Marie, and bear no good will to Jean Duprez."

"Go on," said Fusil, quietly. "I shall respect the secret, and will aid you if I can."

"Twenty years ago, I was a servant at the Castle De Briennes, and so were Lisette and Jean Duprez—he was the steward. When the marquis died, his pretty wife took her two twin children to return to Spain to her own people. They left the castle on a stormy morning, and Duprez went with them. I followed under his instructions, and met him on the Spanish borders. He had constructed a hellish plan, and compelled my assistance in carrying it out, for he knew a secret of my life

which placed me in his power. The dead marquis had made a will—Lisette and I were witnesses to it—but this Duprez destroyed, so we supposed, and forged another which he compelled us both to witness; he was my master then, remember, and hers too. Well, he promised me a large sum in gold and some of the land he intended to steal, (he bought Lisette's silence too, though I don't know how,) and I agreed to help him in making away with the twin boys. On her journey to Spain the mother died, and Duprez gave me one of the boys to be disposed of. He supposed I would murder him, but I couldn't do that—the child was so pretty and so helpless, and the old marquis had been so proud of both the boys, and the poor young mother had been very kind to me,—I took the child to the south of France and put him into the box at the *Hospital des Magdalenes* at Toulouse, tossing in after him a sealed packet in which I had written his name and something of his history, though not enough to make discovery possible, for it was dangerous to me then as well as to Duprez. When I returned Duprez asked me no questions, and I did not question him; but now I know that the Pierre Niede which Madame Julie found and adopted was the other twin boy, Phillippe De Briennes."

"What was the name of the boy you left in France, Gaspard?" inquired Fusil, slowly, watch-

ing the countenances of the woman and of the man who were in council with him.

"Louis De Briennes."

"Enough. You did not kill the boy, but he is dead, and I can prove it. Does Duprez suspect the identity of Pierre Niede?"

"No, I think not; if he does, he keeps his secret well."

"I have reason to think he does know it, my friends. The trick by which Pierre was sent away from Alsace as a conscript is accounted for to my mind. But was the will which the marquis made actually destroyed?"

"No, captain. I knew from a long acquaintance with Duprez that he disliked to destroy old papers, and we—Lisette and I—thought he might have saved this though he told us it was gone; so we searched for it, found it, and hid it in a safe place. I will show it to you."

He loosened some bricks in the side of the chimney, and behind them, hidden in a place made to receive them, were the contents of the small iron box which Lisette and Gaspard had taken from the old well at the castle.

"The forged will to which Lisette and I were witnesses, placed the bulk of the property in Duprez's possession, and the rest of the estate was eaten up in claims which Duprez found lying unpaid against it."

"There are other papers," said Fusil, turning

over the documents; "A release from confiscation and—what is this?"

Twice Fusil read carefully the words traced on the scrap of paper by the trembling hand of the old marquis, and then laid it aside with the other parchments.

"These papers are valuable to you both," said he—"but what you want is the proof of Marie's marriage, which cannot be found—could Duprez have stolen it?"

"No, Franz took it from the chimney where it had been hidden, and Duprez had it at the inn. I have his own words that it was destroyed."

"Then there is little hope of establishing the marriage; but keep those papers, and leave the rest of this affair to me. Remember, silence, and we may learn something from this stranger. Hush, Marie is coming!"

There were steps heard in the room below, and the sound of Marie's voice calling to them.

Fusil descended the stairs to meet her. "I am going away to-morrow, Marie, and I came to say good-bye to you!"

She kissed him fondly as a sister might do, before Lisette and Gaspard came down, but not without being seen by Jean Duprez who looked in at the door and asked for Lisette.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## SOME INFORMATION FOR DUPREZ.

FUSIL had bade adieu to Marie, and had walked back to the inn, when he espied the stranger known as Francois La Pierre, standing by the window talking with Franz, whom he had treated to a glass of wine and a biscuit. His back was turned to the light and Fusil walked up close to him, and signalling Gaston to be silent, called for a glass of liquor.

The stranger and the boy moved away from the bar together and stood beside the tree near the kitchen.

Fusil followed them, going back to the cook-room and stationing himself beside the window, hidden by the curtains which hung from it.

"Madame Lascour is dead, you say," asked the stranger, giving the boy a piece of silver coin. "Tell me, Franz, when did she die, and how?"

"Franz!" said the lad with a quizzical glance at him. "Why, how did you know my name?"

"I heard it at the tap-room yonder. When did Madame Lascour die, I asked."

"I don't know exactly, sir—some time when I was away to the war a-fighting with Captain Fusil."

The stranger smiled at the remark which the boy made quite with the air of a veteran, and then laid his hand upon the lad's shoulder and looked down into his face.

The look was such a strange one—so earnest, so full of inquiry,—that Franz, somewhat startled, receded a few steps, and stood balancing himself on one foot, looking at La Pierre.

"You're not afraid of me, I hope, my lad," said the stranger, nervously; "don't go away from me!"

"No—I'm not afraid! You're nothing but a man, and I'm nothing but a fool, and I don't know enough, people say, to know when to be afraid. Where did you get that scar on your forehead? in the war? they must have hit you hard!"

La Pierre threw his hand up to his head and his face grew crimson as he passed his fingers carefully over the scar, and then pulled the dark, thick hair down over it.

"Yes, I got it in the war, Franz—and it *was* a hard blow, a very hard one. But tell me more; where is Marie Lascour, the *vivandiere*? is she living with Jean Duprez?"

"No, not she; she lives in the cottage over

there with Master Gaspard; why, Monsieur La Pierre, you know all about the people here! perhaps you used to live in Alsace before the war, and have come home to die, since they didn't kill you in the war; you look as if you were going to die."

"No, not to die," said the stranger, moodily, "but I shall stay here awhile; here, lad—" he gave the boy a couple of silver coins, pressing them into his hand—"not a word of what I've said to you; can you meet me here at the inn to-night? I have something for you to do."

"Oh, I can keep a secret!" was the answer that the boy made, as he walked away from the window, and the stranger passed slowly down the road, just as Duprez and Gaspard came into the tap-room. They were together, and seemingly good friends, though Duprez was watching Gaspard with a very searching gaze, and Gaspard was attempting to appear careless in his manner, though he too was engaged in studying Duprez.

"Well, Jean, what is it now?" asked Gaspard, seating himself at one of the small tables and drawing a stool up before him on which he placed his feet—"what new plot? Haven't you given up the chase after Marie yet, my man?"

"Yes, yes—but something worries me. Lisette is getting troublesome to me; she is useless in the household, and spends more than half her time at your place with Marie, and wastes the other half

fondling that prattling fool and listening to his stories of the war. Come now, Gaspard, I'll make a bargain with you."

"What for—another piece of old rascality revived?" said Gaspard, with sarcastic humor in his looks. "Too late, Jean! I'm too old for any new iniquity."

"I am going away from Alsace, and I want you to take charge of affairs for me while I am gone."

"Away from Alsace, Jean Duprez! What's in the wind?"

"*Toulouse*—and the carpenter who took charge of Louis De Briennes after you placed him in the foundling hospital!" whispered Duprez. "Don't start so, man, or they will notice us. I know the story, and as there is no help for it, and the will was not suspected, I'll find out what history may remain to be learned of him before it is too late."

Fusil, who had followed La Pierre a short distance, had re-entered the room where they were sitting, and had caught the last sentence spoken by Duprez.

"No need of that, M. Duprez," he said, standing by the table. "No need of going to *Toulouse*. The man you speak of died in the hospital near Friedland, just at the end of the campaign, and all the property that he had he left to me!"

Duprez started from the table and confronted Fusil—not in anger, but in fear. Fusil had surprised him into a momentary exhibition of dismay

which, in a second or two gave place to his usual craftiness.

"Poor Louis! It is a great relief to my mind to obtain some knowledge of him, Fusil. The attack by brigands on the traveling carriage, and the death of his poor young mother left him to the care of Spanish relations who had but little love for him. He left some property, you say,—relics perhaps; I would like to see them, they may be of use."

"Yes, they are of use, and at the proper time, I will produce them! Duprez, I may be able before long to pay the little debt that lies between us!"

The captain turned away from them and said no more, and Duprez knew better than to question him. There were several idlers in the room, and he did not care to excite their attention; moreover he was too much agitated to prolong the conversation, even with Gaspard; so he leaned over the table and whispered to him while his hands played carelessly with the wine bottle and the glasses.

"Meet me at my house to-night; I have much to say to you, Gaspard; that man is dangerous."

"No, I will not, I have no time to waste in parley; our game is being ended fast, Duprez!" replied Gaspard in the same low tone that Duprez had used.

"Then here, to-morrow morning, will you?"

"Yes, I'll do that if you wish it; to-morrow morning, early."

"To-morrow morning be it, and come alone. And now, good night!"

They parted, seemingly the best of friends, and Duprez did not look back as he left the inn and walked homeward in the twilight.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE.

A LIGHT burned in Jean Duprez's chamber throughout the night; the ex-steward had ordered Lisette to build a fire there, although it was summer, and then he had retired into the privacy of his own room. He had drawn the curtains close to the windows, but occasionally when Lisette stole out of doors to watch, she could see sudden flashes of light from behind them, as if Duprez were burning papers. The old housekeeper passed a sleepless night and it was almost morning when her wakefulness left her and she sank into a troubled slumber.

In the early morning when Gaston, the innkeeper, having aroused the barmaid, threw open the heavily barred shutters, he saw Franz standing by the door.

"Good morning, Gaston, let me help you, please," he said, following the innkeeper to the stable and going to work without any further instructions;

so Gaston allowed him to continue and returned to the inn to prepare breakfast for his guests.

His earliest visitor was Jean Duprez, who met him at the door, greeted him with a jolly word of morning welcome and called for brandy. That given him, he ordered breakfast.

"For two, Gaston, for two; Gaspard will be here to meet me soon;—ah, there he comes!"

Gaspard was coming, and Duprez stood leaning on his cane as he approached.

"Good morning, Jean Duprez!" was his salutation. "I am here as I promised, though why you should want me I cannot guess. Our friendship has been more apparent than real, of late, and I am curious to learn your object."

"Business, Gaspard, business. We have not been good friends of late, it's true; but our quarrel was a foolish one, and now that the war is over, and all the heirs to the De Briennes estates are dead, let us be friends again for mutual safety. We parted once in anger, you with hard words—"

"And you in rage and disappointment, Jean. We shall quarrel now, perhaps, and I will have nothing to do with this offer of yours; we had better part before it comes to worse."

"Tut, tut, man! that is no way to talk. Come, let us breakfast, and then if you choose to go—so be it!"

The meal which Gaston had prepared was put upon the table, and the two sat down to it quietly,



maintaining for some time a silence which Duprez was the first to break.

"Better friends than enemies, Gaspard. I began the quarrel, years ago, but we should trust each other now for the sake of old acquaintance and the secrets which lie between us. We can at least agree not to quarrel in our later years, and I will manage this affair myself, if you will not aid me. Here, Gaston, brandy, and of your very best; stop, I will pull the cork myself!"

He arose from the table and picked out a bottle from a number that stood on the shelf, and brushed the dust away from the cork. It was old liquor, very choice, such as Gaston furnished only to his best visitors who chose to pay for it. So pre-occupied was Duprez in making his selection, that he did not notice the entrance of Franz, who crept stealthily into the room and passed behind the screen which hid the door leading to the kitchen.

Two glasses were provided, and drawing the cork from the bottle, Duprez proceeded to fill them with the liquor, growling, as he did so, at Gaston, for the careless way he washed his glasses; they had a brown, dirty look, but he filled them both nevertheless, and passing one glass to Gaspard, he tasted the liquor in his own.

"Bah! good brandy in a dirty glass is poor stuff! Throw it out, Gaspard, and the glass after it!" he said, handing the tumbler to his comrade, who simply smiled at his ill-humor, and going to

the door, tossed liquor and glass out into the road.

Gaston saw the movement and was vexed at it, but he merely looked at Gaspard, and did not see the quick motion of Duprez, who placed his hand in the bosom of his vest and drew from its place of concealment a small phial holding a few drops of some colorless liquid. Hurriedly he poured its contents into an empty tumbler which he filled with brandy before the man returned to his seat.

Before Gaspard had fairly seated himself, Franz came from behind the screen and approached the table.

"I may have some breakfast, Master Jean?" he asked, in a foolishly unconcerned manner, with a half-witted smile upon his foolish face. He spoke with a degree of assurance which roused Duprez to anger at the lad's presumption.

"Yes—in the kitchen, but not here in the tap room. Gaston! give this brat some bread and a stoup of wine or coffee. Now, begone!"

As he spoke, Gaspard, fearing some outburst of cruelty towards the lad, and hoping to distract Duprez's attention by moving as if to go, rose again from his seat and walked to the door. He succeeded in his design, for Duprez rose also and followed, urging him to return to the table, and pleading that he had something to say to him. Gaston had gone from the room, and thus Franz was left at the table unwatched.

Attracted by the brandy which he loved quite too well, the lad raised the glasses from the table, holding them to the light as he had seen his master do. Then casting a look at the two men who still stood in the doorway, he hastily sipped a little from Duprez's glass, when, startled by the motion which the men made to return, he put the glasses down again, but in so doing changed their position, placing by Duprez's plate the brandy which had been intended for Gaspard. Then fearing a blow from Duprez if he should linger, he left the room as the two men pledged each other in their after breakfast draught of Gaston's oldest brandy. This ceremony completed, they went away together, as Duprez was anxious to avoid Fusil, who had just then sauntered into the tap-room, meeting at the door the strange soldier, known as Francois La Pierre, who had been a guest at the *auberge* over night.

As the two men stood face to face, Fusil greeted the soldier with the words of an old campaigner.

"Seen service, friend, I take it?"

"Perhaps; replied the stranger, evasively.

"No perhaps about it, my friend," said Fusil, laying his hand upon the man's shoulder, "the scar on your forehead just showing beneath the hair, betrays you; it is a sabre wound. I've seen too many not to know their scars when I see them."

"Yes, I have seen service."

"And you are not a stranger in this neighborhood, I take it, either?"

"Why so, captain?"

"From the inquiries you have made of the idiot lad, Franz."

"Well, you are right; I am not a stranger here, and I know the people—better, perhaps, than they know me!"

The man spoke in a strong tone, raising his eyes towards Fusil; there was a gleam of sunlight shining on his face as the window curtain was suddenly raised by Gaston, and the eyes of the two soldiers met—Fusil's look was frank, open, and earnest, and the stranger's frank, open, and confiding.

"I have questioned others than the lad, captain, and I have learned some secrets. Come with me, please; we are watched by the landlord, and I do not wish to be discovered here."

The words with which he closed the sentence were timely, for the stranger had been recognized by the man with whom he spoke.

"You are Pierre Niede," exclaimed Fusil in an undertone, as they removed to a remote corner of the room. "You are here in time to be of service."

Suddenly there was a confusion of voices at the door, and a shout from some one without, calling Gaston from behind the counter. At the roadside stood Franz, his face white with terror.

"Master Jean, oh, Master Jean! I found him

lying dead by the road. They have taken him up, and are carrying him home now!"

At a little distance, half a dozen stout men could be seen approaching the inn, bearing on a rude litter an apparently lifeless body; they passed the inn door with a steady step, while new faces were constantly being added to the crowd, which cast angry looks at those standing with the idiot boy in the tap-room door; the terrified lad prattled incessantly about finding Duprez dying by the roadside, till Fusil stopped his talking. "Hush, boy, hush, for God's sake! La Pierre, there is some mystery here! let us see to it! It looks as though the lad had killed him."

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### THE IDIOT'S WORK COMPLETED.

THE circumstances which had cast a mystery over the death of Jean Duprez, gave it very much the appearance of a murder, and the anxious crowd which had assembled before the door of the *aeburge*, followed the bearers of the corpse to the cottage recently occupied by the deceased.

The necessary inquest was conducted by the notary of the village; upon examination of the body several severe contusions were shown; evidently occasioned by a heavy fall, and upon the head was a sharp cut. Suddenly overcome by the poisonous draught, (which he had intended for Gaspard, but which had been exchanged for his own unadulterated wine by Franz's thoughtless handling of the glasses) Jean Duprez had fallen by the roadside, and a sharp-pointed stone had inflicted the cut upon his head. But there was no other witness of his death but the half-witted boy, and the wound upon the head might have been produced by some sharp blow from behind. There

was a strong chain of evidence against the lad. Gaston and Gaspard Jarome gave their testimony, though the latter spoke reluctantly and with a strong feeling of pity for the boy—and each corroborated the other as to the fact that Duprez had given hard words to the lad only an hour before his death.

"It must have been the boy that killed him!" shouted one of the wood-cutters—"there was an old grudge between them!"

"Aye, the boy! the boy!" was the cry which ran through the crowd, and was carried from mouth to mouth. "Let the idiot be secured!"

To speak was only to act, with the wood-cutters of the Vosges; strong hands were laid upon the boy, while a returned soldier raised the butt of his carabine to strike him.

But one who had always been ready to protect the boy was ready now—Gaspard Jarome sprang upon the soldier and wrenched the weapon from his hand.

"Stand back, men, and give the lad a chance! He may yet be innocent."

The crowd surged nearer to him, and the lad fell down at Gaspard's knees and begged for mercy.

"Indeed, indeed, Gaspard, I did not kill him!" he exclaimed. "I found him lying by the road when I was going home. He said he had been a wicked man—wasn't that a queer thing for Master Jean to say?—and that he had drank some poisoned

brandy which he meant Gaspard should drink, and he asked me to hurry off for help; I ran to find some men, and when we got back he was dead. Oh, don't let them hurt me, Master Gaspard, I am telling you the truth."

As the boy spoke, La Pierre had started towards Gaspard, and old Lisette had forced her way through the crowd, and had fallen on her knees beside him.

"Stop, men, if you be not cowards!" exclaimed Fusil. "It may be that he tells the truth."

"Yes, that boy is innocent. I'll answer with my life for his integrity!"

The words came from La Pierre, who now spoke for the first time and who had just made room for Marie; she had heard the news, and showed anxiety concerning the fate of Franz.

"You vouch for him?" asked the notary. "But we do not know you."

"Then you shall know me as well as you have known good Master Jean Duprez. That boy has done no murder; he was with me nearly all last night, and I saw him at the inn this morning."

"But who are you, I say?" shouted a brawny wood-cutter, brushing up towards him. "Some Prussian spy perhaps, or a deserter from the army—"

The man who had approached the stranger, aimed a blow at him with the short, knotted stick he carried; Franz saw it; springing quickly to his feet he caught the blow upon his head and shoul-

der, and sank back with a cry of pain at Gaspard's feet.

"Coward!" hissed La Pierre, grasping the man by the throat and dealing him a crushing blow upon the face.

"You know me now, my friends, and may believe me! See, I am no stranger to you all!" he shouted, as he bore the wood-cutter to the earth and placed his knee upon his breast. "I will protect the boy, for he is innocent. I am Pierre Niede!"

He tore the false grey beard from his face, and the close-fitting wig which he wore upon his head, and before the crowd of excited peasants stood a man whom they had long thought dead.

"Here in Alsace, I brand the dead man for a villain—"

He was interrupted by a cry from Marie, who threw herself upon him and buried her head in his bosom and whose frail form shook with a tempest of sobs.

Pierre threw his arms about her and drew her closer. For a moment he forgot everything but her presence.

"My wife, my noble wife," he murmured in her ears, "I was a monster to doubt your purity! But you have not learned to hate me for my cruelty, and forgive me like the angel that you are! Thank God I have you in my arms again!"

Pierre's words could not be heard by those who

stood near wondering at his sudden appearance, but they gazed at the couple in silence for a time, awed by their emotion and by the shock of the discovery; then there arose a murmur in the crowd; the villagers had been disaffected towards Marie and towards Pierre Niede ever since Marie had failed to produce the marriage scrip she had affected to possess; they thought Pierre had attempted to shirk the conscription, and that Marie's claim to the name of wife was a false one; so now there was a re-action, and the touching re-union of Pierre and Marie which had at first appealed to their sympathies and aroused many an unbidden tear, caused a feeling of repugnance among the matrons, and outspoken dislike among the maidens who had themselves looked with favor upon Pierre Niede's lithe, manly figure, and comely face. The word "coward" was spoken in tones sufficiently loud to be heard by Pierre. He released Marie from his close embrace, and turning, faced the crowd with flashing eyes and indignant face. With difficulty the notary quelled the rising disturbance.

"Do not be angry, Niede," he said, "the people mean no harm, but they cannot forget that you could show no proof of marriage when it would have saved you from the war, and so they think Marie is not an honest woman."

Gaspard had stood in silence for some time,

apparently in deep meditation, but now aroused by the words of the notary, he spoke:

"You are mistaken, Gerard Redoule, there *was* a proof, but it was stolen by the boy who did not know its value, and Duprez destroyed it."

"How do you know that?"

"From Duprez himself; he took it from the boy. But now listen to me, for I have a startling announcement to make: this man is no longer Pierre Niede, the foundling. He is Phillippe De Briennes, one of the twin boys whom all thought dead twenty years ago. But they did not die, though Duprez meant to murder them and tried to make me help him. It is a long story, and it must be told first to M. Redoule, the notary, but you may be sure that there is no mistake. Lisette has the proof of Pierre Niede's identity as Phillippe De Briennes, and I have the genuine will of the old marquis—the one you all know of was forged by Duprez;—Niede will be sole heir now, for the other twin died in the late war; Captain Fusil possesses all his property and papers, and he will bring them forward at the proper time. I wish from the bottom of my heart I could produce Marie's marriage scrip, but I swear to you that there was one, and that Duprez destroyed it."

"I stole the paper, did you say, Master Gaspard? Yes, I stole it from the chimney where Marie put it while I was playing; I didn't know it was good for anything; but Master Jean Duprez did not

burn the paper, I got it away from him, and I can find it if you'll help me!"

He was very weak, for the blow had grazed his head and inflicted a deep wound upon it, which was not seen until now.

"Please help me, Captain Fusil; take me over to the cottage where Madame Lascour lived; it is only in the valley a little way."

He pointed down the path towards the brook which ran through the valley, and supported by Fusil and Gaspard, and followed by the notary, Lisette and Pierre and Marie closely pressed by the crowd, they accomplished the distance almost in silence. The cottage had been rented by strange tenants who were absent at the time, and there was no one to respond to their summons but a little child left playing alone. So they entered and in obedience to the lad's directions, he was led to the fireplace, where the embers of the dying fire lay upon the hearth.

"Take away the coal," he said, "and I'll tell you where to find the paper."

He knelt down and helped to blow the ashes from the hearth with his feeble breath, and then pointed eagerly to one of the stones which were laid in a regular course beneath the andirons.

"That one, captain—take it up!" he said, knocking the stone with his fist, "that was my hiding place for all my pretty things."

Gaspard and the notary were quick to obey the

request. Beneath the stone which had been loosely laid was found an old tin box, once used for a rough brand of tobacco, and in it were the treasures of the poor idiot boy. A few bright buttons, a knot of faded ribbons, an old knife, a few small silver coins, and lastly a piece of stained and crumpled parchment, which he handed to Fusil.

"Let me have it, captain!" said Marie, and she took it from his hands. Her face was pale with her great anxiety, and she held her breath as she looked at the parchment; then her breast heaved, her eyes grew luminous with joy, and thrusting the parchment into the notary's hands, she cried aloud:

"Yes, it is the scrip from Father Michel! See, Monsieur Redoule, I am an honest woman, now!"

"And you are not a widow!" said Fusil. "Pierre has returned, and poor Franz has been a good friend to you."

Suddenly Lisette uttered a sharp cry and fell upon her knees beside the boy; he had fallen back and lay with his head upon the captain's knee. The woman's quick eyes had seen a sudden change in the lad's face; the light had faded from his eyes, the nervous clutching of the fingers of his unharmed hand told her that death was approaching fast. The mother's love so long repressed, asserted its claim, and Lisette's hot tears fell upon his breast.

"Yes, Marie," she exclaimed, "you have the

proof of marriage, and happy days are in store for you and Pierre; but I shall be alone now in the world. My son—my poor, poor son is dying fast!"

"He is dead, good woman," said Fusil, "but he died with no guilty burden on his soul. Nor will you be left alone; Marie and Phillippe De Briennes owe you a debt that they can never pay, and they will care for you!"

But Lisette heard not the captain's words. "My boy, my poor boy," she cried, as seated upon the ground, she caught the lifeless form in her arms, and bent her head over his. Her bosom heaved convulsively and her strong arms tightened their hold, but she uttered no word of lamentation.

Pierre and Marie stood silently by her side, with clasped hands and tearful eyes, deeply awed by this voiceless manifestation of a mother's agony.

At last the poor woman's breathing grew weak, and her arms visibly relaxed their hold.

"Pierre, Pierre," cried Marie, "she is dying!"

Pierre bent down and gently lifted her sinking form from the breast of her dead child, and pressed her crucifix to her lips; she looked feebly but gratefully from Pierre to Marie, and then a film came over her eyes. She was dead.

Pierre and Marie were alone. Amid the silence of death that brooded over them, the love that made them one assumed a deeper, wider significance, seemed to unite them with that higher power in whose presence they stood, and to consecrate their

double life to its own supernal ends. They felt that love is more powerful than death,—that death, indeed, is but the shadow of its wing.

More powerful, too, than fate or circumstance, is the divine potency of love. 'Tis love that holds above the fatalities and mischance of life, a fair ideal, but uses these for the moulding of character, and the consecration of it to noble ends. A divine Prospero subdues the storm and reveals the over-arching sky; and to each struggling soul, who, like Marie, has kept faith amid the darkness and turmoil, he repeats the assuring words:

"All thy vexations  
Were but my trials of thy love, and thou  
Hast strangely stood the test."

THE END.



LIST OF THE PUBLICATIONS  
AND  
**FORTHCOMING WORKS**  
OF  
**HENRY L. HINTON,**

744 BROADWAY, [COR. ASTOR PLACE,] NEW YORK.

1873-4.

*GIFT BOOKS.*

**RIP VAN WINKLE, THE JEFFERSON**

EDITION. WASHINGTON IRVING'S LEGEND illustrated by PHOTO-RELIEF PRINTING OF JEFFERSON AS "RIP VAN WINKLE," by SARONY, together with designs by DARLEY, HOPPIN, and other Eminent Artists. 8vo., Tint, Cloth Extra, Black and Gold, \$2.50.

**A WINTER'S TALE. SHAKESPEARE'S**

PLAY. Edited by HOWARD STAUNTON and containing Twenty-Seven Illustrations by JOHN GILBERT. Bound in White Morocco Paper, with an illustration by HENRY VAN DER WEYDE. Square 8vo., Gilt, \$1.25.



Two very beautiful little volumes are Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale" and Irving's "Rip Van Winkle," in the "Jefferson Edition." The former work is illustrated by John Gilbert and Henry Van der Weyde, and, we hardly need say, is an exquisite example of illustrative art. The "Rip Van Winkle" is elegantly printed and is embellished and enriched by four of Sarony's beautiful pictures of Jefferson; of which we have already had occasion to speak in terms of the highest praise. These pictures are what are known as carbon prints, and are fine specimens of the furthest reach of the photographic art.—*N. Y. Evening Post*.

### THE MERCHANT OF VENICE. SHAKESPEARE'S PLAY.

Edited by HENRY L. HINTON. The text as arranged for the "Grand Revival" of the play by EDWIN BOOTH at the OLD WINTER GARDEN THEATRE, and with illustrations of the principal scenes. Royal 8vo., Tint, Cloth Extra, Full Gilt, \$1.00.

### ENOCH ARDEN, THE EDWIN ADAMS' EDITION.

TENNYSON'S POEM, illustrated by PHOTO-RELIEF PRINTING of EDWIN ADAMS as "ENOCH ARDEN" by SARONY. In large type, beautifully printed, Square 4to., Tint, Cloth Extra, Black and Gold, \$2.50.

## FICTION.

### PUT TO THE TEST. A STORY OF

WOMAN'S FAITH. By CHAS. CHAMBERLAIN, JR. Cloth, 390 Pages, \$1.50.

A literary correspondent, of whose judgment I think highly, writes me as follows with reference to Mr. Charles Chamberlain, Jr.'s, new novel, "Put to the Test," which we announced some time ago as being in press. "Thoroughly healthy in tone, and fresh and varied in plot, the book offers a marked contrast to the ordinary sensational novel. It would hardly be fair to give the story, but it turns on the strong attachment of Marie Lacour for honest Pierre, to whom she clings in all his misfortunes, and for whom she bravely battles against the intrigues of the crafty Duprez, whose vice is half redeemed by the sincerity of his love for Marie. Round these central figures are grouped Old Lisette, a strongly marked character, who gives timely aid

to poor Marie, and several subordinate but firmly drawn personages. Mr. Chamberlain writes in an easy and graceful style, and his novel is sure to take."—*The Arcadian*.

### THE PUCK NOVELS.—THE NEW 75

CENT SERIES OF BOUND NOVELS. This is a series of stories now issuing, by POPULAR FOREIGN AND AMERICAN AUTHORS. The series is limited to stories embracing a single continuous plot, containing the pith of what, in more pretentious works, is usually extended over a wide field. These books are handsomely printed, tastefully bound in cloth, and published at 75 cents a volume.

#### No. 1. THE COMING RACE. BY BUL-

WER LYTTON. "Together with his usual strength of style and power of arousing interest, 'THE COMING RACE' contains a vein of philosophy peculiarly interesting to those who study social questions and science."—*The Herald*.

#### No. 2. THE BELLS. A ROMANTIC

STORY FROM THE FRENCH NOVEL,—'LE JUIF POLONAIS.' By MM. ERCKMANN-CHATRIAN, authors, also, of the play "THE BELLS," which is founded upon this story.

This is a very excellent translation of a beautiful story which is told very much after the manner of Dickens, and possesses more than ordinary dramatic interest. It is gotten up in neat style, being one of the Puck series, and will more than repay a perusal.—*New Orleans Herald*.

#### No. 3. POWDER AND GOLD. A STORY

OF THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR. From the German of LEVIN SHUCKING.

"Powder and Gold" is an interesting story of the Franco-German War, and relates the fortunes of a Prussian Sergeant, who, after occupying a French Château, accomplishes the capture of a large sum of contraband gold, and achieves promotion and a lovely wife by the incident.—*The Sunday Times*.

#### No. 4. A BROWN-STONE FRONT. \*A

STORY OF NEW YORK SOCIETY. By CHANDOS FULTON.

This book is so quaint and attractive in its appearance that one is tempted to read it without reference to its literary merit.

It is a pleasant story of Saratoga life, and shows that a brown-stone house may be the abode of happiness and peace as well as the humblest cottage. It is in its light and shades more like real life than such productions usually are.—*The Philadelphia Age*.

The story is altogether a capital one in its manner and material, and is, above all, valuable for the tribute it pays to women who act from principle rather than from impulse or passion. It will wile away a summer's day delightfully.—*The Poughkeepsie News*.

"Just the book to put into one's satchel when going off for a railroad trip, or for an airing down the bay."—*The Daily Graphic*.

---

*The following novels will be issued during the Fall and Winter.*

**NOT IN THEIR SET; OR, IN DIFFERENT CIRCLES OF SOCIETY.** From the German of MARIE LENZEN. By MS.

**MY COMRADES. A STORY OF THE HUDSON.** By HOWARD HINTON. Containing adventures among the Highlands, and giving, by way of episode, a *mélange* of the History and Legendary Lore of the Hudson.

**THREE TYPES OF WOMANHOOD; OR, FENICE, LAURELLA AND HELENE MORTEN.** From the German of PAUL HEYSE. By ANTOINETTE W. HINTON.

**THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD.** A NOVEL IN SIX BOOKS. From the German of PAUL HEYSE. To be published in one large 12mo. volume.

---

### GENERAL LITERATURE.

**THE HUMOROUS CHAPBOOKS OF SCOTLAND;** in three volumes, by JOHN FRAZER, late of GLASGOW UNIVERSITY. (The first of these volumes is now ready, the second and third will appear in the course of the Fall and Winter.) Crown 8vo., Flexible Cloth, \$1.25 per vol., complete work \$3.00.

By "Chapbooks" is meant the penny histories which, during the last century, formed the chief literature of the Scottish commonalty, and were sold by travelling pedlars, or chapmen. These books afford a pleasant insight into Scottish character, and rescue from a fast-coming obscurity many amusing legends of a people then in a rude stage of civilization.

"A very valuable contribution to literary history \* \* \* it should be a part of every book collector's library, as an invaluable guide to many old matters nowhere else so well set forth."—*Appleton's Journal*.

**THE CLUBS OF NEW YORK. WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE ORIGIN, PROGRESS, PRESENT CONDITION, AND MEMBERSHIP OF THE LEADING CLUBS.**

An essay on New York Club Life, with pen portraits of the most prominent club men. By F. G. FAIRFIELD. Large 12mo., Cloth Extra, Gilt Top, \$2.25.

This book cannot fail to be interesting to those who are already acquainted with this great feature of Metropolitan life; and to those who would gain a knowledge of the personal peculiarities and habits of the celebrities of the Metropolis, it will be an invaluable manual. It combines the careful research, collection of materials, and perspicuous arrangement of a history, with quaint remarks, and descriptions of character, which give spice and flavor to every page of the narrative. It is published in the most elegant style of printing and binding.

"Mr. Fairfield has evidently performed his task with a keen interest in the subject, and great zest of description."—*The Tribune*.

**SPIRITUALISM ANSWERED BY SCIENCE.** CONTAINING PROOFS OF A PSYCHIC FORCE, by EDWARD W. COX, S.L., F.R.G.S., 12mo., Flexible cloth, 50cts.

Contents: The Phenomena—Is it Delusion or Fraud? Is it Unconscious Muscular action? Are the spectators Biologized? What is the Psychic Force? The Theory of Spiritualism. The Scientific Theory of Psychic Force. How to investigate.

"The book is written in a calm spirit by one who reports the evidence of many experiments, and reasons upon them like a man determined to sift evidence, and believe accordingly. The subject needs further investigation. If there be a force antagonistic to gravitation, or exempt from its influence, or at least operating to counteract gravitation on the bodies in which

it is diffused, science should be eager to discover all that can be known about it. We recommend Mr. Cox's most interesting book to the inquiring and curious. The psychologist and physiologist should be equally alive to the statements it contain. —*The Westminster Review*.

**SOCIAL SCIENCE. A REVIEW, HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL, OF THE PROGRESS OF THOUGHT IN SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY.** By ROBERT S. HAMILTON. 12mo., Cloth, 340 pages, \$2.00.

This truly great work is the latest and most valuable contribution to sociology, from any American source at least. Its distinguishing characteristics are extreme accuracy of statement, profundity of research, and vast voluminousness of thought. While it cannot fail to arrest the attention of advanced thinkers it will at the same time be invaluable to the scholar, embodying as it does the condensed essence of all anterior thought on the same subject. Few works have combined, so fully, the elements necessary to make a BOOK OF THE TIMES.

**BOOTH MEMORIALS. PASSAGES, INCIDENTS, AND ANECDOTES IN THE LIFE OF JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH, [THE ELDER] BY HIS DAUGHTER.** Illustrated with a Steel Engraving of BOOTH AS RICHARD III. 12mo., Cloth, \$1; paper, 50cts.

**STANDARD DRAMA, ADAPTED FOR SCHOOL READING.** By HENRY L. HINTON. Printed in Large Type with Foot Notes and a Glossary. 12mo., Flexible Cloth, 50cts. each.

- I. THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.
- II. ROMEO AND JULIET.
- III. THE LADY OF LYONS.
- IV. OTHELLO.
- V. MACBETH.
- VI. RICHARD III.

**MARIAMNE. A TRAGEDY OF JEWISH HISTORY.** By LAUGHTON OSBORN. 12mo., Cloth, 75cts.

This is the Third of the Tragedies of Jewish and Biblical History, and the Second in Continuation of Vol. IV. of Mr. Osborn's Dramatic Works. (A list of the dramatic works of this author with prices annexed may be had on application.)

## THE ACTING PLAYS OF EDWIN

BOOTH (VOL. I.) Edited by HENRY L. HINTON. Large, 12mo., Cloth, \$1.75. Containing RICHARD III., MACBETH, MERCHANT OF VENICE, ROMEO AND JULIET, and OTHELLO, adapted to the Stage from the text of the Cambridge Editors. To which are added THE FOOL'S REVENGE, BRUTUS, and THE LADY OF LYONS, from the Author's Editions; including Introductory Articles on the History of the Plays, on the Personation of the leading rôles by Prominent Actors, on Costume, &c., with Notes Original and Selected.

## LIFE AND ADVENTURE.

**BUCKSKIN MOSE, OR LIFE FROM**

THE LAKES TO THE PACIFIC. Written by HIMSELF. 12 Full-page Illustrations. Cloth, \$1.50.

The *Home Journal* says: 'BUCKSKIN MOSE' is a plain and truthful, but very interesting, account of life and adventure in the far West. The book appeals to the reader with a veritable Defoe-like charm, although the rough life of action it depicts has little in common with the idyllic romance of a Crusoe on a desert island. Much of the author's adventure had its place among the mines and savages of Nevada and the country east of the Rocky Mountains. His observations of the Indians and the effects on them of the policy pursued by the Government give a value to the book beyond its interest as a narrative.

**SCHOOL DAYS AT MOUNT PLEAS-**

ANT. Including Sketches and Legends of the "Neutral Ground." By RALPH MORLEY. Illustrated by FORBES, BONWELL and WAUD. Tinted Paper, 328 Pages, 12mo., Cloth Extra, Elaborate Designs in Black and Gold, \$1.50.

The records of the scholastic novitiate, when pleasantly written, are always entertaining, for they recall the most delightful period of every man's existence, when life was but a giddy anticipation of worldly success and coveted fame. The author of this volume, which has been beautifully published by Henry L. Hinton, 744 Broadway, has narrated under the pseudonym of Ralph Morley, the joys and sorrows, the past-

times and emulations of a cadet. There are many fine passages, both of dialogue and description, in the book, which has the obvious and decided merit with-al of being a genuine outgrowth of the soil, a distinctive production of New York.—*New York Evening Post.*

### **PAMPHLETS.**

#### **BOOTH'S ACTING PLAYS. SHAKESPEARE'S AND OTHER PLAYS ADAPTED FOR REPRESENTATION AT BOOTH'S THEATRE. 8vo., paper, 30 cents.**

- I. RICHARD III.
- II. MACBETH.
- III. MERCHANT OF VENICE.
- IV. FOOL'S REVENGE.
- V. ROMEO AND JULIET.
- VI. BRUTUS.
- VII. LADY OF LYONS.
- VIII. OTHELLO.
- IX. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.
- X. RICHELIEU.
- XI. MERCHANT OF VENICE, ending with the 4th act of Shakespeare.
- XII. RICHARD III. Colley Cibbers' version.
- XIII. HAMLET.
- XIV. JULIUS CÆSAR.

#### **RIP VAN WINKLE. THE BOOTH'S**

THEATRE EDITION, IRVING'S STORY, with illustrations, by DARLEY. 8vo., Tinted Paper, 50 cts.

#### **ENOCHARDEN. THE BOOTH'S THEA-**

TRE EDITION. TENNYSON'S Poems, Beautifully Printed, Royal 8vo., Tinted Paper, 50cts.

#### **BOOTH'S THEATRE PORTRAIT GAL-**

LERY. A concise description of the Stage of Booth's Theatre. Illustrated by nine Large Wood Cuts, also a fine cut of the exterior of the building, with eight Portraits of leading actors. Printed on heavy tinted paper. Royal 8vo. 32 pages, 25cts.

#### **SELLING OUT YE POPE. A SATIRE.**

By M. BYER. 16mo., 32 pages, 25cts.

"The satire is humorous rather than sarcastic, and the author holds up his subjects for merriment more than for ridicule."