

Crockett Samuel Rutherford

**A Tatter of Scarlet: Adventurous  
Episodes of the Commune in  
the Midi 1871**



Samuel Crockett

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# Crockett S. R. Samuel Rutherford

## A Tatter of Scarlet: Adventurous Episodes of the Commune in the Midi 1871

### CHAPTER I

#### HOW THE TRICOLOUR CAME DOWN

Deventer and I leaned on the parapet and watched the curious things which were happening in Aramon across the river. We were the biggest boys in the school and kept even the Seniors in awe, being "Les Anglais" to them – and so familiar with the "boxe" – though Deventer was an Irishman, and I, Angus Cawdor, a Scot of the Scots.

We had explained the difference to them many times by arguments which may have temporarily persuaded some, but without in the least affecting the fixed French notion that all English-speaking people are of English race.

Behind us circulated the usual menagerie-promenade of the "Grands," gabbling and whispering tremendous secrets in files of two and three.

Hugh Deventer was a great hulk of a fellow who would take half a dozen French Seniors and rub their heads together if I told him, laughing loudly at their protestations as to loss of honour. He had been challenged several times to fight duels with small swords, but the Frenchmen had given that up now. For Deventer spat on his palms and pursued the seconds who came with the challenge round and round the playground till he caught and smacked them. Whereat he laughed again. His father was chief of the Small Arms Factory, which of late years had been added to the arsenal works of New Aramon opposite to us on the left bank of the Rhône.

My own father was a clergyman, who for the sake of his health had retired to the dry sunny Rhône valley, and had settled in a green and white villa at Aramon because of the famous *lycée* which was perched up on the heights of Aramon le Vieux.

There was not much to distinguish Aramon the Old from Aramon the New, that is, from a distance. Both glowed out startlingly white and delicately creamy between the burnished river and the flawless sapphire of the Provençal sky. It was still winter time by the calendar, but the sun beat on our bowed shoulders as we bent over the solid masonry of the breastwork, and the stones were hotter than in English dog-days as we plucked away our hands from it.

Deventer and I looked across at the greater New Aramon where his father lived. It was the Aramon of shops and hotels and factories, while Aramon le Vieux, over which our great *lycée* throned it like a glorified barracks, was a place of crumbling walls, ancient arcaded streets, twelfth-century palaces let as tenements, and all the interesting *débris* of a historical city on the verges of Languedoc.

Our French *lycéens* were too used to all this beauty and antiquity to care anything about it, but we English did. We were left pretty much to ourselves on our rare days of liberty, and as the professors, and especially the *proviseur*, knew that we were to be trusted, we were allowed to poke about the old Languedocian outpost much as we pleased.

It was the month of January, 1871. France was invaded, beaten, but not conquered; but here in the far South, though tongues wagged fiercely, in his heart the good bourgeois was glad to be out of it all.

At any rate, the *lycée* was carried on just as usual. Punishments were dealt out and tasks exacted. *Pions* watched constantly over our unstable morals, and occasionally reported

misdeemeanours of a milder kind, not daring to make their position worse by revealing anything that really mattered.

But, generally speaking, Aramon le Vieux dreamed away the hours, blinking in the sunshine. The war did not touch it save in the fierce clatter of *café* dispute. Only in the forts that rose about the arsenal of the newer city opposite to us a feeble guard of artillery and linesmen lingered as a protection for the Small Arms Factory.

For the new Paris Government was still far from stable, and some feared a renewal of the White Terror of 1815, and others the Red of the Commune of 1848. The workmen of the arsenal, hastily gathered from all quarters, were mostly sealed to the "Internationale," but it was supposed that the field-pieces in Fort St. André could easily account for any number of these hot-heads.

Besides Hugh Deventer and I there were several other English boys, but they were still screeching like seagulls somewhere in the Lower School and so did not count, except when an anxious mamma besought us with tears in her voice to look after her darling, abandoned all day to his fate among these horrid French.

To "look after" them Deventer and I could not do, but we gathered them into a sort of fives team, and organised a poor feckless game in the windowless angle of the refectory. We also got hockey sticks and bastinadoed their legs for their souls' good to the great marvel of the natives. Deventer had even been responsible for a trial of lacrosse, but good missionaries though we were, we made no French converts.

The Juniors squealed like driven piglings when the ball came their way, while the Seniors preferred walking up and down their paved cattle-pen, interminably talking with linked arms and lips close to the ear of a chosen friend.

Always one or two read as they walked alone, memorising fiercely against next Saturday's examination.

The pariah *pion* or outcast usher, a most unhappy out-at-elbows youth, was expected to keep us all under his eye, but we saw to it early that that eye passed leniently over Deventer and myself. Otherwise he counted for nothing.

The War – the War – nothing but talk of the War came to our ears from the murmuring throng behind us. How "France has been betrayed." "How the new armies of the Third Republic would liberate Paris and sweep the Prussians back to Berlin. From every side brave patriots were even now closing in upon the beleaguered city. Ha, then the spiked helmets would see!"

Still, a few facts grew more clear to us. At Lyons and Grenoble, Bourbaki was organising the army of the South-East. There came a sound from nowhere in particular that this army was to be joined and led by Garibaldi himself with thirty thousand of his red jackets from Italy.

Deventer and I were immensely excited. We made plans for immediate invasion. We would fight for France and wear a red cardigan in the Foreign Legion. But the *Lycée* St. André was well guarded, and so far no one had succeeded in escaping. I do not know that they tried very hard. They were French lads and brave – as many of them showed afterwards – but they were of the Midi, and even then the Midi was proverbially hard to budge. Not as in the North and East had the iron of the invasion entered the soul.

The parapet upon which we leaned was of very ancient masonry, solid blocks laid clean and Cyclopean with very little visible cement. It had formed part of the defences of an ancient castle, long since overwhelmed by the college buildings, the materials of which had mostly been quarried from its imposing mass.

Beneath us ran the Rhône in a fine, broad, half-mile-wide sweep, five or six miles an hour, yet save for the heaped hillocks of water about the bridge piers, and the swirl where the far bank curved over, as smooth as a mirror.

Hugh Deventer and I had been talking of the great '61 campaign of Garibaldi in Sicily and through Naples – a thousand red-shirts and a kingdom in the dust! Ah, the glory of that time!

But as we leaned and looked we fell silent. We saw Aramon the New opposite to us, as it were at our feet, across only that span of water. The factories were curiously silent, and from one fort after another darted the white spurt of smoke which meant artillery practice.

We listened, knowing that in a little we should hear the report.

*Boom! Boom! Rattle-rattle-chirr!*

Fighting – they were fighting in Aramon! Deventer's father would be in the thick of it. We looked and longed, but the way was closed. What could it be?

Deventer knew that there were continually troubles between the operatives and the "masters," or rather the representatives of the masters of whom his father was the chief.

The great *Compagnie d'Armes de Guerre Aramoise* was not distinguished for generosity. The men were well lodged but poorly paid. In these war times they had been over-driven. So many hundreds of rifles to turn out daily – field artillery, too, and a new department to be set up for the manufacture of mitrailleuses.

Outside, Dennis Deventer said little about the politics of the works, nothing at all to his son Hugh.

We of the *lycée* knew that France was already fairly evenly divided between true Republicans and those others who looked upon Gambetta's republic as a step to a monarchy or even the restoration of the Napoleons. The sons of functionaries mostly held the latter opinion. The scions of the aristocratic families of the neighbourhood, the old Whites of the Midi, prayed for the Bourbon flag and the coming of Henry V to his own again.

So when we heard the ripple of musketry fire and the sullen boom of the artillery, Deventer and I supposed that a mutiny of sorts had broken out at the works, or that news had come from Paris of some sudden change of government.

We were not far from the mark. There had been news from Paris and a mutiny had broken out. At any rate, they were fighting over in Aramon, and we must find out what it was all about.

For the moment this was impossible for us. The cliff was too sheer on the side of our recreation ground. There were over many eyes upon us. We must wait for the night, and in the meantime Deventer could only sniff the battle from afar, and hold in the desire to set off and help his father.

"The Dad doesn't want me," he said. "Of course, I know that. He would most likely tan me well for breaking bounds, but I can't bear being cooped up here doing silly mathematics when over yonder – But listen to them!"

A patter of what might have been heavy rain on a tin roof came faintly to our ears. A little white cloud hung over the statue in the market square, and presently flung down devilish fingers earthward. We did not then know the signs of the explosion of shrapnel.

By this time the school was crowding about us, as curious as ourselves. The bell clanged for classes to resume, but no one moved. The *pion* screamed impotently in the rear. None took any notice, and the windows above were black with the gowns of the professors.

Some thought that the noise was only the letting off of blasts in the Pierre de Montagne quarries, but it was pointed out that such explosions took place only at eight, one, and four, the hours when the men would be out of the quarries at their meals. Besides, the crackle of small fire was unaccounted for, and each moment it became more lively.

Practice at the Chassepot factories? Very likely – but at human targets.

Finally the college authorities caused discipline to prevail, and Deventer and I watched alone by the parapet. We had both passed our *bachot*, and were an honour to the college. So the strictness of rule and line was relaxed in our case.

Our hearts beat, and in the instancy of our watch we would not have turned our heads if the *provisieur* himself had been at our side.

Presently we could see soldiers marching, the flash of bayonets, and groups of a dozen, as if pushed beyond their patience, turning and firing with rapid irregularity. All this in flashes of vision, mostly at the bridge-end, or at the intersection of two streets. Through the northern gate a kind of uncertain retreat began to dribble – the red breeches of the linesmen, the canter of the artillery horses attacking the hill, with stragglers here and there looking about for their regiments.

Neither Deventer nor I knew enough to explain these things.

"There are no Germans nearer than Toul or Besançon," he said, with a puzzled anxiety.

The field guns answered him smartly. From all the houses about the northern gate a storm of rifle fire broke out. The soldiers on foot hastened their retreat. The artillerymen, better led or of firmer courage, faced about, and with one volley pitted the façades of the houses from which the attack had come. They withdrew regularly, covering the retreat of the infantry, and spat out their little devils' claws of shrapnel over every group which showed itself outside the wall. Slowly the soldiers passed out of sight. The artillery bucketed over the knolls of the Montagne of Aramon among the evergreen odoriferous plants and the faint traces of the last snow wreaths.

There was nothing left for us to see now except the town of Aramon, its green and white houses sleeping in the sun, the tall chimney of the Small Arms Factory, now smokeless – and the broad Rhône sweeping grave and placid between them and us.

Nevertheless we waited alone on the recreation ground, our heads a little dizzy. The swooning hum of the class-rooms awoke behind us, but we heeded not at all.

We saw the tricolour of the Republic come down with a run from the tall flagstaff on Fort St. André, and presently, irregularly tugged, rising a few feet at a time, a red flag fluttered out, probably an improvised table-cover or bedspread. It flapped out bravely in the brisk breeze off the water.

We had had our first glimpse of "The Tatter of Scarlet."



## CHAPTER II

### KITH AND KIN

I don't think I troubled much about my father when I resolved to run away from the *Lycée* St. André. He had, as I thought, never troubled much about me.

Afterwards I found that I had been mistaken, but perhaps not more than most. For it is the rarest thing in the world to find a son entering upon life, able to do justice to his father's ideas and motives.

Yet it was for my sake that he had given up the society of his fellow savants and had exiled himself to Aramon le Vieux, with only his books for company. At Nice, Mentone, or Cap Martin, the author of "The History and Growth of Italian Art" could have lived a great part of the year among kindred spirits, but because of me and St. André, he had shut himself up with his books and collections in the Villa Gobelet on the piney southern slopes of the long convent ridge, the summit of which was crowned by the immense acreage of rambling white masonry which constituted our *lycée*.

My father, Gordon Cawdor, mixed freely enough with the engineers in New Aramon. But I knew very well that he endured rather than enjoyed their society.

They talked of springs and hoppers, of pauls and recoil tampons, and my father sat with his gentle wise head nodding as if taking in each point. But he never spoke to them of his own work, and, excepting Deventer's father, there was not one who knew more about Italian art than a dim memory of a bad lithograph of Da Vinci's "Last Supper" could recall to him.

Dennis Deventer, a tall dark grey man with the most mobile eyebrows I ever saw in my life, lives much in my early memories of my father's house. He seems now to have been always there, though of course he could really have come but seldom – a massive, slow-moving, swiftly scrutinising man, who bent shaggy eyebrows upon his son and myself, and in whose presence it was not good to make the easily forged excuses which served so well for my scholarly father.

Hugh said that it was because he listened all day to excuses and explanations over at the Arms Factory, without believing any one of them.

He had succeeded a manager who had been driven from Aramon because he was afraid of his men. But now the men, though they hated him as the representative of the Company, freely acknowledged his courage and austere justice.

His house was the largest in New Aramon, and he had within it three daughters all verging on, or just overlapping early womanhood, besides a comfortable wife who purred her way contented and motherly through all domestic storms. She alone could tame her husband's furies. They sank before her eye, her husband changing obviously to all men's sight, his factory oaths silenced, his bullying temper visibly crumbling, and the man growing sweet and wholesome as newly ground meal.

These were the two houses best known to me as a boy, and indeed to the edge of manhood. Judge ye which I liked the best?

My father was a beautifully profiled Scottish minister of the old school, whom an unexpected fortune had enabled to follow his impulses in the matter of work. He had long ago retired from his parish, indeed before I could remember, and as I learned from his steadfast retainer, old Saunders McKie, immediately after the death of my mother.

"Irongray Parish was no more for him, oh no," Saunders would say, sententiously pausing in the polishing of my father's silver shoe-buckles. "He laid down his wark as if he had been stricken. He never preached again, and his pulpit was silent for three whole weeks after her death. Assistants and siccan cattle werena sae common to come at then as now – when ye send a telegram in the

morning, and the laddie is down on the six train wi' his baggie. So the elders juist read a portion, and sent down to the Cameronian meeting-house for a man fit to put up a prayer. We were Established, ye see, so the like was no to be expected o' *us*!

"Eh, a broken man was your farther in thae days. He would wander from room to room, tak' down a book here, look at it a while and then put it up again with a muttered 'Tush' as if he could make nothing of it. I doubt if he so much as saw the print line by line, but all troubled-like, as one might through a green whorl of skylight glass. Then he would dawner into the room where you were lying, or maybe being fed, and at sight o' ye, the state that man would be in!

"He could not get out o' the nursery quick enough, yet for all that he would be back within the hour."

Saunders was a great standby. His humour jumped with mine far more nearly than my father's. This, too, in spite of the fact that I rarely saw him without calling down the vials of his wrath. My father seldom reproved me, never in anger, but Saunders, with the care of my young soul heavy on his Calvinistic conscience, laboured faithfully with me in season and out of season.

One good he did me. He kept me from forgetting my Scottish tongue, and there was never a day that he did not supply me with some phrase sappy with mother wit and drowned in Scotland.

"Aängus," he would say, "I kenna wha it is ye favour – nane o' your faither's folk at any rate – all chestnut-brown and quick as an eel. No wonder ye can tie knots in yoursel' at the parallel bars that were siccan a trouble to set up for ye to caper on, and your e'en like sloes after the first frosts. It's a gipsy ye are and no real Cawdor of all. Though they do say that the Cawdors have gipsy blood on the distaff side. At ony rate ye will never be the 'sponsible sober man your faither is."

In spite of all this I stood high in the good graces of Saunders, and he would sometimes ask my father for the additional pocket-money which I dared not hint at myself. Saunders often wandered back into reminiscence of the time when he had been a jobbing stonemason on the Cromarty Firth, a companion of Hugh Miller's, and "the very deevil for raking the country."

He had tramped scores of miles with Hugh Miller only for the sake of hearing him talk, yet I gathered that he had not believed a single word he had been told about the great fishes and curious monsters that once swam in the lakes of the Old Red Sandstone.

"But I never telled him sae," he would conclude; "oh, no, Saunders kenned better. Hugh Miller was no doubt a wonderful genius, but at that time he was a man easily angered, and when roused, violent of his hands."

So now I have sketched the school, and the several domestic surroundings which we proposed to leave behind us. I do not think that we thought much about these. I know that I did not, and I don't believe that Deventer did either – not, that is, till we saw the soldiers retreating from the barracks and forts of Aramon, and that little oblong blot of red in the sky which meant insurrection, and God only knew what of terror and destruction, fluttering in the brisk mistral wind from the tower on which we had so long seen the tricolour.

At that time we had only the vaguest idea of what the Commune was, and none whatsoever of the new ideas of justice and equality which underlay that cumbrously ill-managed business.

## CHAPTER III

### THE LAUNDRY DOOR

After a while Deventer and I went back to our joint study, where we essayed to do some work. But mostly we spoke apart, with lips that hardly moved, of our plans and all that lay in liberty-land beyond the walls. Deventer would go nowhere but to his father's house, and though I meant to end up with the red blouse of Garibaldi on my chest, I did not see how I could fail him at such a time.

We had to wait till night, and the time was almost unendurably long. The lines in our textbooks which our eyes followed did not bite upon our minds. We were thinking so hard of other things that philosophies slid aside impotent and discomfited.

We began immediately to plan our escape, or at least I planned and Deventer, his great shaggy head on his hands and his eyes tight shut to concentrate thought, gave himself to the task of spotting the weak points.

At the bottom of the junior promenade was a door which opened upon the river, and on the opposite side dwelt a man who owned a skiff. The elders of the upper school used to employ this man, Jules Rameau by name, to ferry them across as often as they had enough money for a secret supper at a cabaret in some shy street. But some ill-paid *pion* must be bribed to allow the key to be "lifted" from the inside of his door. He must also take care to be in the deepest of sleep when it was returned. But this would not do for us. We were not coming back at all, and we could not allow any wretched usher to be sent about his business on our account.

In our leisure time we had studied the whole of the ground plan of St. André. The school buildings occupied an enormous amount of space, far more than was needed for educational purposes. By sticking to it we made some astonishing discoveries. For instance, after passing through the kitchen, by descending a flight of steps which led to an unoccupied wing, where all sorts of educational rubbish had been accumulated – globes, wall-maps, ancient copy-books with headlines set by hand, and a good bust of the first Napoleon – we reached a clean-smelling, brightly lighted range of offices all set out with tubs, soap, boiling vats, and blue stains which ran over smooth boards.

We had come upon the laundry of the college. On pegs, which ran all round, overalls were hung. There was even a shawl here and there, or a bonnet or two, as it were, flaunting their sex in this temple of the masculine virtues.

Not Crusoe on his island was more astonished when he came on the footprint. For it was not known to any of us, not even to the *pions*, that a single feminine foot profaned any part of the *lycée*.

But, whatever our surprise, it did not prevent us from locking the door and extracting the key of one of the range of exits which led out from the fixed washtubs upon the narrow drying ground, a terrace wholly invisible and unsuspected from our quarters on the opposite waterfront of the building.

Of course, Deventer and I said nothing about our discovery. We did not want the whole upper school playing leap-frog through the kitchens, or telling lies as to their conquests among the laundry maids.

It was possible that the lock of the door might be changed immediately, but we considered it more likely that the forewoman or caretaker in charge would say nothing at all about the loss, and trust to the key turning up.

We thought the whole matter well over, and considered it probable that a gate in the wall would be left permanently open to facilitate the comings and goings of the workwomen in the early morning. Such an opening in the wall must lead immediately out upon the main road that wound circuitously up the hill, and by which all stores and provisions were brought to the porter's lodge.

Then we made ready for the trip, laying out our most comfortable and inconspicuous town-going suits to take the place of the brass-buttoned *lycée* uniform.

With our door carefully locked, we raised a piece of the skirting board of our study and examined our store of arms, a couple of revolvers procured by Deventer in some vague inexplicable way at the works, three packets of ammunition apiece, and a couple of "surins," or long Apache knives – the use of which we had learned from the sous-préfet's son, a youth precondemned to the gallows, who before expulsion had sojourned an eventful and long-remembered three months at St. André.

We profited by his instructions as to guards and undercuts by practising with models whittled in wood. This we were enabled to do in open playground by the simple expedient of calling the exercise *legerdemain*.

Except what we could carry in our pockets, and the warlike accoutrement mentioned above, we left the whole of our property at the college. At the last minute Deventer packed away a Globe Shakespeare, and I found room for a limp Bagster Bible of small size, which my father had given me.

The clatter of the bedward-driven flocks began to tramp past our study door. The hum of lesson preparation in the schoolrooms ceased. We carefully set our house in order, for it was time for our evening visit from Professor Renard. But he was called "Renard by Name and Renard by Nature" among the Juniors whose small deceits he had the knack of seeing through, even before the explanation was well under way. He was a Jesuit of the newer school, of an educated candour, which seemed natural to our young eyes, and a ready sympathy for our misdemeanours, which made him the most popular professor in the *lycée* of St. André.

He always tapped at our door before entering. He never listened nor made use of the information of the common school spy. These things counted for much.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, as he came in and sat down in our one arm-chair, "you were too long on the terrace to-day to have a good report of your studies!"

We convinced him to the contrary. For we had always gone on the principle that who does his work early and well has his way made plain for him, and in him a thousand things are overlooked for which a "slacker" would get himself jumped upon.

After he had examined our exercises and approved of them, he looked up at us suddenly from under his overhanging brows.

"You understood what the disturbance was about over there?" he demanded.

"I knew," said Deventer, before I could stop him, "that if my father was left behind with his factories to look after, he would find himself mightily short-handed. He would have only the English staff to support him."

"Ah," said Professor Renard, "you look at it from a personal point of view, as is natural. Your father – "

"I have also a mother and sisters over there – "

"I think I can promise that they will be safe whatever happens to your father. And you can trust to my judgment. By custom and training my class, the clergy of France, parochial and regular, are royalists. The fight over yonder was only tiger eating leopard. The reds of Gambetta's hue were chased out by the deeper scarlet of the Commune. Did you see that flag of theirs to-night, just before sunset? It glowed with the true hell-fire light."

I had been in the habit of arguing in favour of the working men who were to constitute the brain and brawn of the Commune, but to-night I said nothing. Renard did not notice my silence, however, but continued his diatribe.

"We have had Napoleons of victory and Napoleons of disaster – republics of guillotine and republics of veiled Cæsarism. And now we have a third which is a house divided against itself. Listen well, young men – the Bible speaks the truth – it cannot stand. Even now the time for its

fall is almost come. The little financier Thiers will pay off the Germans from the chimney-corner hoards of the peasants. Oh, make no mistake, lads, we are beaten as a nation, because we have not obeyed God and His anointed king. The atheist Garibaldi, spoiler of churches and enemy of the Pope, will do nothing for France, except to widen the area over which the German flood will spread. Their armies of Rouen, of the Loire, and of the South-East are condemned in advance. It is as if the Lord of Hosts had said, 'I am against thee, O France! Thou wast once the eldest daughter of the Church. Now thou hast defiled thyself with the unbeliever, with the captains of Assyria, and art become a castaway.'"

He seemed to recall himself. He was speaking as he did in the pulpit. The glow faded from his features. He smiled a little contemptuously at himself.

"I am gabbling like a novice of the first year, and withal to a couple of Protestants," he said, getting up and extending his hands, one to each, as was his habit. "Forgive me!"

Cramming our special themes into his pocket for after-consideration, he went downstairs with a heavy regular tread, and the noisy dormitories hushed at the sound. The Renard could not be taken in with the usual explanation that they had been reciting their prayers. Not till he was safe in his own room did the hum and clatter begin all over again.

It was past midnight before we judged it prudent to begin our descent. Safe of course it was not, nor could ever be. In a school directed by clerical influences, supervision is personal and unceasing. The two of us owed our comparative immunity to our having passed our recent *baccalauréat*, and to having done honour to the college in the national examinations, but still more to the fact that we were English heretics, whose eternal damnation was assured beforehand, and whose lesser transgressions, therefore, mattered little, so long as they did not flaunt themselves before the pupils, devout, Catholic, and Roman.

There was a faint sufficient light from the southern windows, for the moon was nearly full. The empty class-rooms smelt heavy and sour, and their doors stood open like the portholes of a battery, setting our hearts fluttering. We did not mean to let anything stand in the way of our purpose, but as we had been on good terms with the heads of the *lycée* of St. André, we did not want any trouble now at the eleventh hour, or rather when for us the time was close on the stroke of twelve.

We passed through the schoolrooms unchallenged. The dormitories were hushed and silent. We could see the dim light of the *pions'* watch-candles under the doors. We considered that we had passed the zone of danger, and were hurrying forward with less precaution, when a light in the open door of the kitchen pulled us up all standing.

I was lighter than Deventer, so I slipped my shoes and went forward on my stocking-soles to spy out the land.

A "mitron," or cook-boy, was writing a letter to his sweetheart with incredible pains. He wrote with his hands, with his body, with the wrinkles on his brow, and the tongue which stuck out of his mouth, responsively vibrant as a compass-needle to the spirit of his composition.

Here was a pretty pass. We must wait on this white-capped, dirty-aproned rascal who seemed in no hurry to finish his task. He had a file of *feuilletons* bound in brown paper before him, and he turned over the leaves of these in search of expressions which had pleased him, and which he now desired to appropriate. There seemed no end to his literary zeal, and if he was not hurried morning might come before we could get clear.

Then I remembered that among Deventer's accomplishments was that of being able to imitate the wheezy asthmatic breathing and hollow cough of the *proviseur*. So I sent him back with instructions to carry out his imitation at the foot of the kitchen stairs.

At the first wheeze and accompanying shuffle of a hand on the smooth wooden stair-rail, out went the "mitron's" candle. I could hear him gathering up his home-bound books of *feuilletons*, and whisking away his letter paper. I drew back as close to the wall as possible, for I suspected he would pass my way in order to reach his bedroom. I was no more than in time, for he stumbled over

my foot, which had been carelessly thrust forward into the passage way. He did not stop to inquire into this, probably thinking that someone had put out their shoes to be cleaned in the morning. It was a narrow escape, for if it had chanced to be the boot-boy instead of an amorous 'prentice-cook we might not have escaped so easily.

Deventer and I crossed the kitchen quickly. The wick of the "mitron's" candle was still smoking red, as we stole down the corkscrew stair which led to the laundry. Everything here smelt strongly of damp clothes and lye, but somewhere a window was open, for the current of air was pronounced, and suggested possible alternative if the lock of our door had been changed.

But in this we were fortunate. The key which I had carried so long in the inner pocket of my jacket turned easily. The door swung noiselessly inwards, and the clean breath of the salt breeze from the Camargue marshes made our faces pleasantly chill and our lips sticky. We locked the door on the outside, and in another minute stood in the roadway, looking back at the great ghostly pile of the Palace of the Monks – as Louis the XIV had called it, when he cut down the plans so that it should not rival in dimensions that "abyss of expenditure" which was Versailles.

But it was no time to stand sentimentalising upon architecture. We turned and went down the vacant white road as fast as our legs would serve us.

## CHAPTER IV THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES

"Halt there!" cried Deventer suddenly to me. We were passing a pleasant white and green villa with a light in one ground-floor window.

I stopped, and Deventer took me by the arm, with forceful compulsion.

"I am going to help *my* father," he whispered. "Don't you run off without telling yours what you mean to do. He can't prevent you, if you have made your mind up."

"He won't try – he will only be glad to get back to his books."

"Perhaps, but at any rate tell him yourself. He will like it better than when the hue and cry gets up to-morrow over yonder. You take my word for it, Angus Cawdor."

I did not want to go, for at that time I did not understand nor much like my father. But Deventer said that if I would not walk he would carry me, a threat which at any other time would have made me smile. However, to please him I walked carefully to the window. With his habitual thoughtlessness about external things, the sash swung a little open and the light air blew the curtains back. My father was sitting like a student, with a shawl over his knees, a quite necessary fire of olive roots smouldering on the andirons, and his head, shining and silvery, bent over a book in which he was making notes.

I did not wish to startle him, so I spoke in English, and in as commonplace a tone as I could muster.

"Father," I said, as if my calling hours were the most ordinary in the world, "will you come across to the window for a moment?"

He rose instantly and came over to the open window, one half of which I had pushed wide. The note-book was still in his hand, and the breeze ruffled its leaves so that he shut and clasped it.

"Why, Angus, where do you come from?" he said. "Is it late? Won't you come in? Are you on your way back to college?"

"No, father," I said; "I ought to be, but I have made up my mind to go to the war. I have had enough of learning, and examinations disgust me even when I come out first."

He looked at me long and quietly, and then nodded his head.

"I know – I know," he said, "it is the riot in the blood. I do not say that you do wrong to go, but you will need some money. I have a few hundred francs by me for which I have no use. They will not come amiss. Let me see – six, seven, eight hundred and fifty. Does Deventer go with you?"

"He is waiting on the road below."

"I thought as much – well, bid him good luck from me, and now good night, and God be with you, boy! Get your wild-oat sowing done as soon as possible and come back. You will find me waiting for you. You and I will do something yet."

My father coughed a little in the draught through the open window, whereupon I made haste to be gone. The movement was purely unconscious, yet it was just such slight things that kept me such a long while from understanding my father. He seemed to be so careful for himself in little matters of health, that he had no care to spare for me, his only son, and this thought, I am ashamed to say, I carried away with me, even while my fingers caressed the eight hundred and fifty francs nestling safely in my breeches pocket.

On the road I found Deventer waiting for me.

"Well," he said, "I see you are glad you went?"

"Yes," I answered, "eight hundred and fifty francs glad, but the old man hurried up my going, because the open window made a draught that irritated his cough."

Deventer did not answer directly.

"My governor thinks a lot of yours!" he said, and left the reproach to sink in. The which it did, all the more because *I* thought a lot of Deventer's father, and was presently to think more and better.

We took our road between the rows of sleeping houses, alternately black in shadow and mildly radiant under the moon. Not a light showed anywhere, not even in the *auberge*, with the huge branch stuck over the door in token of the excellence of the wine served out within.

A vagrant cat or two, a baying dog spasmodically darting in and out of an alley-way, alone took note of our bygoing.

The crowning buildings of the *lycée* on the Convent Ridge showed up massive and almost martial among the dark pines. Then, after a sprinkle of villas, we struck the close-packed town with the clean water from the Gardon river prattling in the sewers at either side of every street. Aramon was one of the towns of the Midi (now rare) where they had not forgotten ancient Roman lessons as to the value of running water.

As we descended the flat plain the river-meadow came up to meet us. We crossed the marketplace among the splotched trunks of the plane trees, and turned along the quay of the great canal of the Little Rhône. Barges in long lines and solid tiers occupied it from end to end, and on each of these was a dog. So that we passed through a chorus of yelping curs, till the massive pillars of the great suspension bridge rose stark and marble-white in the moonlight. On the Old Aramon side the *douanier* was asleep in his little creeper-covered cabin. We saw his head pillowed on his crossed arms as he bent over the table, and a smoking tallow candle guttered low at his elbow.

Along the wide quadruple track of the bridge, stretched like the taut string of a bow for half a mile ahead of us, we saw nothing except the glistening planks underfoot, and overhead the mighty webbing of chains.

But as we were stepping down the little descent which leads into the newer town of Aramon-les-Ateliers, we found our way suddenly barred. A couple of fellows, not much older than ourselves, suddenly sprang out of the shadows, and set shining bayonets to our breasts, demanding at the same time where we came from and whither we were going. It had been arranged between us previously that in any difficulty Deventer was to let me do the talking. Somehow he did not tell his lies with conviction, at least not yet.

I gave our names, and said that we were runaway Seniors from the *lycée* on the hill, on our way to enlist with the red-shirts of Garibaldi. I think that on hearing this one of the youths would have let us go on our way, but the younger, a cautious lad, spoke out in favour of taking us to head-quarters.

"What! And leave the bridge unguarded!" cried his companion. "Either shoot them out of hand, say I, or let them go on to seek their Garibaldi. They wear the red as well as we. We have heard of his army at Dijon, but his son is recruiting at Orange, so your tramp will be so much the shorter."

Finally they permitted us to pass after a whispered consultation, but the younger put several questions to us to prove whether we really came from the college or not – what days certain meats were served, the names of the lay brothers, the woodman, the *ramoneur* or sweep, with personal details of several others. These we answered promptly, and to his apparent satisfaction. He knew much about the *lycée*, but we could not place him. His smooth face was hidden under a great Biscayan bonnet with red tassel, and his common speech was probably assumed.

They directed us to follow the outer boulevard which skirted the town, and which should bring us to the Avignon gate without our needing to enter Aramon at all. The younger drew out a small box filled with inkpads and brass *tampons*, with which he stamped an order that would permit us to pass the opposite gate without annoyance.

Naturally we took the road between the scant white poplars, as it had been indicated to us, and stuck to it faithfully so long as we were in sight of the post at the bridge-end.

Then, at a particularly dark corner where the blank gable of a workshop loomed up to meet the overhanging flange of a fitting-shed, Deventer, who was now on his own ground, slid suddenly



aside, and was lost in a devious track along which I had hard work to follow him. I could see his big figure, black against the glimmer of white-washed walls. I stumbled over anvils and heavy gearing scattered about, among which Deventer steered his way with the crafty experience and dainty serenity of a night-raking cat.

From this labyrinth we emerged on innumerable tiny little gardens, with the stubs of cabbages and a few trenches of early vegetables for sole contents. Rickety cane hedges leaning over at every angle surrounded these, and Deventer pushed his way through them with the silent expertness of an Indian on the trail.

Soon we came out on a wide park which was surrounded by a high wall. Deventer made directly for this. He struck it at a spot where a tree had thrust a sturdy limb through a fissure. The crack had been mended with plaster, but perhaps from curiosity, perhaps owing to carelessness, the branch of the tree had been allowed to go on growing. It was easy to swing oneself upon it and so gain the top of the wall.

Deventer and I had made a good straight rush from cover, and flattered ourselves that we should be able to mount unnoticed, but a patter of bullets went buzzing like bees over our heads, while others buried themselves with a sullen "spat" which threw up little fountains of black leaf-mould in the ground at the foot of the wall.

None, however, came our way, and the next moment Deventer and I were crouching among the lean spiky laurels and green-bedrippled statues of his father's garden.

"They are besieged," he whispered; "we must be careful. We are not inside yet, and you may be sure they will shoot quite as readily as the insurgent jacks behind there, and with better aim too. Dad kept the English and Americans on the ranges every evening all last summer."

It was I who had the idea this time.

"Lend me your lantern and I will Morse them a message."

"The sentinel may not be able to read it off."

"No, but he will bring someone who can. At any rate let us try."

We established ourselves in an old summer-house at the edge of a pond, with a foolishly rustic door which opened straight upon the front of the house. Our light would be seen only by someone on the balconies, or at the windows of the upper floors. It was entirely dark, of course, but Deventer had no doubt that his father was there with all his faithful forces, "keeping his end up like a good old fighting Derryman," as his son expressed it.

"Hugh – Deventer – and – his – friend – Cawdor – are – down – here. Answer – by – Morse – by – which – door – they – can – enter – the – house."

I had Morsed this message three times before any notice was taken from within, and I had begun to give up hope. There must be nobody inside Château Schneider, as the place was called. But Deventer was far more hopeful.

"They have gone to waken my father," he whispered. "You see, they daren't do anything in these parts without the old bird. He is quite a different man from the one you saw poking about among your father's books, or drinking in his wisdom. Here he makes people do things. Try her again."

It was tedious work, but I flashed the whole message over again, according to the Morse code. This time the reply came back short and sweet.

"What – the – devil – are – you – doing – there?"

"That's Dad," said Hugh Deventer triumphantly. "Now we shall catch it."

I answered that having seen the soldiers retreat, we had come to help.

"Did – anybody – send – word – that – you – were – wanted?" twinkled the point of fire somewhere high among the chimney-stacks on the roof. These were a rarity in a district where one chimney for a house is counted a good average, but after one winter's experience of the windy Rhône valley, Dennis Deventer had refused to be done out of an open fireplace in every room.

Now he reaped the fruit of his labours, for in summer he had sat behind his low wall and taken the air of an evening, and now it needed little to convert the chimney-stacks on the flat roof of his house into reliable defences.

It was difficult to say in slow Morse alphabetage what we were doing down in the old summer-house, but at least I managed to convey that we had run the insurgent pickets and were in danger of being captured.

We got our reply quickly enough.

"Hugh – knows – the – door – under – the – main-outer – staircase."

"Of course," said Hugh, "I always went in that way when my feet were dirty. Come on!"

And we hurried across the sward, keeping between a sundial and fountain-basin railed about, into which half a dozen copper frogs sent each a thin thrill of water, with a sound quite unexpectedly cheerful and domestic thus heard in the darkness of the night.

This time there was no clatter of firing behind us. The sharpshooters of the insurrectionaries had learned a lesson of caution near the house of the manager of the Small Arms Factory. Dennis Deventer had been training his assistants and lieutenants the whole year at movable butts. He had rigged up a defile of six men-shaped figures which passed in front of a firing party, or, bent forward in the attitude of men running, dashed one by one across the men's field of vision as they lay at the firing line.

Hugh Deventer and I took for our goal the great double flight of steps, broad as a couple of carriage ways, which in the style of the Adams architecture united in front of a debased Corinthian portico at the height of the first floor windows of the Château.

"What, Jack Jaikes!" cried Hugh to the grinning young man who opened the door for us.

"Aye, just Jack Jaikes same as yesterday, and eh, but the chief is going to leather ye properly afore he sends ye back to school."

"But we are not going to school any more!"

"Maybe not – maybe not, but in this house we mostly go by what the master says. 'Tis more comfortable like all round. Eh, but ye have come in time to be leathered proper. If the lads of the Internationale yonder had been brisk at the firing ye might have gotten off, but as it is the auld man has nothing better to do than attend to ye on the spot!"

This made me a little uncomfortable as to our reception, but Deventer did not seem greatly disturbed.

"You tell me where my sisters are, and then go and find somebody else who will believe your lies, Jack Jaikes!"

The dark young man with the large hands grinned still more.

"Where should the three young ladies be at this time of night but in their beds? Go and take your dose, young gentlemen. No use stopping to think it over. In an hour, maybe, the worst of the sting will be by with – and at any rate there are sofas in the parlour!"

"Get out, Jack Jaikes! Hannah and Liz may be in bed, but I warrant that Rhoda Polly is somewhere on the look-out with a gun ready."

"Correct!" admitted Jaikes, with a chuckle. "I saw her at the window just over this old stone staircase a minute before t'owd man shouted the order for me to let you in."

"Come on then, Cawdor," Hugh cried; "let's find Rhoda Polly!" He ran upstairs as fast as he could, anxious to find his sister before having the first interview with his father. For though he knew that Jack Jaikes had been lying, he could not be sure on what basis of fact so much imagination reposed.

And then there was the message flashed from behind the chimney-pots, "Did anyone send you word that you were to come?"

"You did not want to go and see your father," he whispered, as we stood close together, panting in the dark of the second landing. "You came away with well on a thousand francs in your

pocket – got without asking, too. I run a thousand dangers to see my father, and all I am likely to get is a hiding."

The moon was lighting up one side of the landing, and showing where mattresses and corn-sacks had been used to block the windows damaged by rifle fire. The house was wonderfully still, astonishingly so when one thought how many people were in it on the alert. But we must have made more noise than we had supposed in coming up the stairs, for as we stood here out of breath with the speed of our rush, a voice came calmly from the shadows by the window curtains.

"Come over here, Hugh – and you, Angus Cawdor – I am Rhoda Polly."

## CHAPTER V

### THE DEVENTER GIRLS

I suppose this is as good a place as any to bring in and explain the daughters of the house of Deventer. I had known them ever since I could remember. First as "kids" to be properly despised, then as long-legged, short-skirted, undistinguishable entities, useful at fielding, but remarkably bad at throwing in to the wicket.

During our long stay at the *lycée* these creatures had been at schools of their own. Their hair had gradually darkened and lengthened, so that it could be more easily tugged. It had been gathered up and arranged about their heads at a period which synchronised with the lengthening of their skirts, and the complete retirement of the ankles which had once been so freely whacked with hockey sticks and even (I regret to say) kicked at football practice.

There was no great difference in age between the girls. They might have been triplets, but denied the accusation fiercely and unanimously, with more of personal feeling than seemed necessary. Often as court of last appeal the arbitration of their mother had to be referred to. In her gentle cooing voice she would give the names of the various medical men who had ushered them into the world. These were settled in various mineralogical centres.

"There was Doctor Laidlaw of Coatbridge. He was Rhoda Polly's. A fine sharp man was Doctor Laidlaw, sandy-whiskered, but given to profane swearing. Not that he ever swore in *my* presence, but he had the name for it among the colliers and ironworkers."

"It's from him," insinuated Hugh, "that Rhoda Polly gets her vocabulary."

"That's as it may be," his mother would reply patiently, her thoughts travelling before her to pick out number two.

"Let me see. For Hannah I had Doctor Butterworth – Tom Butterworth of Barrow-in-Furness – and of all the upsetting conceited creatures on this earth, commend me to Tom. Tom-Show-a-Leg he was called, because he came to the balls in knee-breeches and silk stockings. But for all that I will never deny that he did his duty by Hannah, though at times I had my own adoes to keep Dennis from heaving him out of the window.

"And there was Liz, poor thing. She had to put up with a 'locum' at Herbestal, in Belgium, before your father came here. There was not an English doctor in the place, but it made no great difference, for Madame Batyer was wiser than a whole college of doctors, and I will always think that beginning to be used to the language so soon has improved Liz's French accent!"

Obviously it was impossible for me during my salad days to escape from falling in love with one or other of these three pretty girls. I solved the question by falling in love with all three in turns, the rotation of crops being determined chiefly by whose vacations coincided with mine.

This bred no jealousies, for the girls were large-minded, and at that time a sweetheart more or less had no particular significance for them.

Rhoda Polly was the learned one; she had been to college at Selborne, and still retained in speech and manner something Oxonian and aloof. But really she was gentle and humble-minded, eager with sympathy, and only shy because afraid of proffering it where it was not wanted. Rhoda Polly was a creamy blonde with abundant rippling hair, clearly cut small features, and the most sensitive of mouths. Yet she was full of the most unselfish courage, ready for long smiling endurances, and with that unusual feminine silence which enables a woman to keep her griefs to herself and even to deceive others into thinking she has none.

Did anyone want anything, Rhoda Polly would find it. Had two tickets only been sent for the theatre, Rhoda Polly would not mind staying at home. Rhoda Polly never minded anything. She did not cry half the afternoon like Hannah over a spoilt dress, nor fall into any of Liz's miniature

rages. She was Rhoda Polly, and everybody depended upon her. The girls confided in her largely, and never expected her to have any secrets of her own for truck, barter, or exchange.

Hannah had been delicate always – or at least had been so considered by her mother.

Her character had been formed between her mother's favour and her elder sister's habit of giving way rather than face an argument. She was dark and slender, placidly sure of being always right, and of looking best in a large picture hat with a raven plume.

Hannah had been sent to school near Lausanne, which was kept by the daughter of the famous Froebel, assisted by a relative of the still more famous Pestalozzi. An English lady was in residence at the Pestalozzi-Froebel Institute, to teach the pupils the aristocratic manners, so rare and necessary an accomplishment in a country where the President of the Republic returns from his high office to put on his grocer's apron, and goes on weighing out pounds of tea at the counter of the old shop which had been his father's before him.

Liz was all dimples and easy manners, the plaything of the house. She knew she could do no wrong, so long as she went on opening wide her eyes of myosotis blue, now purring and now scratching like a kitten; she would often dart away for no reason whatever, only to come back a minute after, having apparently forgotten the cause of her brusque disappearance. She was accordingly a good deal spoilt, not only by the young engineers who frequented the Château Schneider, but by her parents and sisters as well.

One of the former, asked the reason of a decided preference for Liz, declared that it was because she could never be mistaken for a French convent-bred girl. It was pointed out to him that the same might be said for the other two, but he stuck to his point. Rhoda Polly with her Oxford manner of condescending to undergraduates, and Hannah with the Pestalozzi Institute refinements, might speak and look as if they had a duenna hidden in the background, but Liz – never! She was more likely to box somebody's ears.

## CHAPTER VI

### AN OLD MAN MASTERFUL

Deventer and I came upon Rhoda Polly while we were getting our breath after the rush upstairs. We were old friends, and Rhoda Polly did not even put aside her rifle to greet us.

"Come from school without leave – run away – good!" she exclaimed. "Have you made it all right with father?"

"Not yet – that is – the fact is – we thought you might as well come along with us, Rhoda Polly."

"You think there will be a storm, Hugh?"

"Sure of it, but at least you can tell the Pater that Cawdor here is no prodigal. He comes with his father's blessing and a whole pile of paper money."

"Father is among his entrenchments on the roof," said the girl; "better wait till he comes down. He is never quite himself when he is up there and the wind is blowing. Now tell me what made you run away?"

"We are going to enlist among Garibaldi's volunteers, and fight for France – at least that's what Cawdor says. But I mean to stay here till all is safe for mother and you."

At this moment Rhoda Polly nudged us. There was a sound of heavy decided footsteps grating on the steel ladder which led to the roof, then a thump and the noise of feet stamping on the floor above us.

"He has been lying behind the chimney till he is stiff," whispered Rhoda Polly. "Give him time to limber himself."

For a minute all was quiet along the Potomac, and then a mighty voice was heard demanding "those two young rascals."

Deventer's smile was somewhat forced, and it might only have been the moonlight, but he certainly looked both sick and white about the gills. I was not greatly affected, but then I had not had his discipline. My case and credit were clear. All the same, it was obvious that the Dennis Deventer who captained his forces against the insurgents within the walls of Château Schneider, and the seeker after knowledge who prowled about my father's library or listened modestly to his interminable expositions, were very different persons.

"Better not keep him waiting," said Rhoda Polly. "I will take you. He has a room for himself fitted up on the third floor."

At the opening of the door we saw a long table covered with guns and revolvers, each ready to the hand, while behind the centre ran a continuous mountain range of ammunition in packets of gay-coloured green, red, and yellow.

"What's all this, boys?" said Dennis Deventer gruffly, as soon as he caught sight of us. "Now, you Rhoda Polly, hold your tongue! You are not put up to tell their story. Come – out with it. What is it?"

He thrust his hands through his crisping mane of hair with quick, nervous movements.

"Come, get it into word, Master Hugh Deventer. You were put to do your duty at school. Why didn't you stay put?"

Hugh Deventer had a difficulty about articulation. He was bold and brave really, besides being extraordinarily strong of body, but something in the tones of his father's voice seemed to make all these qualities, which I had seen proved so often, of no use to him. I looked at Rhoda Polly, and, to my amazement, even she appeared a little anxious. I began vaguely to understand the difference among parents, and to realise that with a father of the calibre of the Old Man Masterful I might have turned out a very different sort of son.

Finally Deventer managed to stammer out his account of the retreat of the troops and the hoisting of the Red Flag.

"I knew that they would be besieging you," he said, "so I came. I could not stop there doing mathematics, hearing the shots go off, and thinking what might be happening to my mother and the girls!"

I could see in a moment that he had taken good ground with his father. The strong muscular hands were laid flat on the table, with a loud clap which made the pistols spring.

"You did pretty well in your examinations – they tell me?"

"Second – Cawdor was first. He coached me, or I should never have got within smelling distance. As it was we halved the honours, and were asked to dine with the *provisieur* and professors when we got back."

"You look a perfect ox for strength. Let me see if you can lift this table without disturbing anything."

Deventer smiled for the first time, and after trying about for a little time so as to find the proper centre of gravity, he lifted the table, guns, ammunition and all, holding them with flexible arm on the level of his father's eyes. I think he was perfectly happy at that moment.

Old Dennis did not smile like his son. He only nodded, and said, "Yes, you may be useful. Can you shoot?"

"Fairly," Deventer admitted, "but not so well as Cawdor; and you should just see him send the Frenchmen's foils twirling to the roof of the gymnasium. He has fought three duels, Pater, and won every time. Even the Frenchmen could not deny it!"

"Gilt-edged nonsense – duelling," old Dennis broke out, "though your grandfather was out a score of times in County Down in his day. But what do you do when the Frenchmen challenge you?"

"Oh," cried Hugh gleefully, "I just chase them or their seconds till I catch them, and then I spank them till they agree that honour is satisfied. Generally by that time they are crying with rage, but that does not matter. However, they mostly let me alone now."

"Well done, Hugh," said his father; "have something to eat, and then come up and find me on the roof. We ought to have something lively to amuse you before the morning. By the way, Cawdor, what does your father say to all this?"

Deventer forestalled me, for he was anxious that I should say nothing about the draught from the window or my father's sending me off.

"His father sent him along with his blessing, and eight hundred and fifty francs."

"Well," rapped out the old man with the mane of grey hair, "you can keep the blessing, but I will take care of the money for you."

And with that he held out his hand. Quite instinctively I gave it to him, without thinking what I was doing. Then, the next moment, I regretted the act and strove to undo it. I remembered muttering something about fighting for France and joining the levies of Garibaldi, when I should need all the money I could get.

But old Dennis calmly locked my banknotes away in his safe, and assured me that I might 'list if I liked, but that it would be a downright fool's trick to carry about so much money among a parcel of Italians. He would send it on to me as I wanted it – twenty francs at a time. I could pick it up as I went, either at a bank, or from a correspondent of the Small Arms firm.

Once left to ourselves, Rhoda Polly seemed to think that we had come rather well out of the scrape.

"But it was Cawdor being there that saved you," said Rhoda Polly. "Father got so keen about Angus not spending his father's money, that he forgot about you. Now, you have only to run straight and do as you are bid –"

"Do you think I shall be able to go with Cawdor when this simmers down? I want to wear the red blouse as much as he does."

"As to that I don't know," said Rhoda Polly. "I don't believe he took it that you wanted to go soldiering as well. He means to put you into the works – fair field – no favour – up at five in the morning, breakfast in a tin can – that sort of thing – and as for Garibaldi's red jackets, he will sell them guns, but I rather fancy he will keep his son at home."

"Well," said Deventer, "I shall be ready for the works all in good time, but if Cawdor goes off with Garibaldi, I go. I could not stay behind. Nor could even the Pater keep me. He would not chain me to a wall, and –"

"At any rate," broke in the watchful Rhoda Polly, "here you are now, and the better you please the commander-in-chief the better chance there will be for you afterwards when the time comes. I shall do what I can for you, Hugh."

"Thanks, old girl," said Deventer. "Where are Hannah and Liz?"

"Where should they be but in bed, where, of course, I ought to be also. Only I have a dispensation to get what sleep I can in the daytime. I can see in the dark better than anyone in the house. I saw them gathering for the attack under the shadow of the pines on Thursday night, an hour after the moon had gone down. The Pater said it was a near shave, and spoke about my 'high-power vision' as if it were an attachment he had had fitted before I was born."

The defence of the Château was undertaken by the entire English-speaking colony of Aramon. The wives and children of the overseers and foremen were lodged in the rooms looking on the inner quadrangle, but took their meals in the great hall floored with many-coloured marbles. Their husbands and the younger unmarried men looked in occasionally when they could get off, ate what snacks stood handy on the sideboard and disappeared.

It was their duty to keep a watch over the workshops of the Company, and on the roof of the stables were half a dozen mitrailleuses ready to sweep the open square which lay out flat as a billiard-board beneath the windows of the Château Schneider, surrounded by workshops and storehouses on every side.

But a far more dangerous task was the raid through the ateliers themselves, which Dennis Deventer ordered to be made at irregular intervals.

"The devils would be breaking up the Company's machinery if I did not keep all their little plans in the back of my head. And that's none so easy, young Cawdor, for mark me this, 'tis easy to keep track of what a clever man will imagine to do. You have only to think what you would do yourself in his place. But you never know where ignorant stupid fools will break out, and that's the danger of it, Angus me lad!"

"But," I said, "they cannot all be such fools, for with my own eyes I saw them send the regular soldiers to the rightabout."

"The regular soldiers – raw levies mostly, I tell you," burst out old Dennis fiercely. "I should know, for I armed them man by man out of my own gun-sheds and rifle-racks. And I tell ye that beyond a few instruction sergeants from the artillery, there was devil a man among them who could point a chassepot or lay a piece. Our noisy revolutionaries simply frightened them out of the town, and if it had not been for our little stock company here, the biggest manufacturing arsenal in France would have been in their hands. Even as it is they have found enough rifles to arm themselves, but so far we have saved the mitrailleuses and the field artillery. The deputation which came from Marseilles did not go away very much the richer."

"But what is it that they want, sir?" I asked.

Dennis Deventer looked at me straight between the eyes.

"They want what they ought to have, Angus me boy, and what they should have, if I were not a servant of the Small Arms Company."

I was taken aback at his answer, though I had heard something like it from my father. But in his case I had taken it for mere poetry or philosophy, and so thought no more about it. But a man like Dennis Deventer, who was fighting these very insurgents – why, I tell you it was a curious



thing to listen to, and made me wonder if I had heard aright. The old man continued, his bold blue eyes looking straight over my shoulder as if he saw something beyond me.

"You ask me why in that case I am fighting men who are in the right? Right is right, and wrong is wrong, you say. But bide a moment, Master Angus. I agree that these poor devils should have better wages, shorter hours, and a chance to lead the lives of human beings. I agree that at least half of the net profits we make ought to go to the men who made every penny. The proportion would not be too large. I should be willing that my own share should be cut down to help this along. But, also, Angus me lad, I know that murder and arson are not the best way for men to get their rights. General insurrection is still worse. They have tried to kill me, who am their best friend. That is nothing. It belongs to the business of manager. It is one of our risks. But they have also tried to break the machinery and to set fire to the buildings. They would burn Aramon if they could – they are so ill-advised. And what for? Only to find themselves left stranded without work or wages.

"This is a flea-bite," he went on. "I defend the Château because of my wife and daughters. But the business began when the men saw the masters flaunting their riches, entertaining the Emperor and Empress at the cost of millions on the very day when processes were being served from door to door of the rows of cottages belonging to the Company. A man may burn his hand or hurt his foot, but he must by no means get behind with his rent. If we had not laid a dozen firebrands by the heels without troubling the police, blood would have been shed in Aramon that day of the Imperial reception."

Dennis Deventer had spoken with such determination and cold anger, that it took me with a new surprise to see him spring like a boy up the steel ladder on to the roof in answer to some call unheard by me.

Rhoda Polly followed, and Hugh and I did not stay behind. Rhoda Polly gave us both a hand.

"Mind your feet," she whispered, "there are all sorts of things scattered about."

I could hear the voice of Dennis Deventer somewhere in the darkness. The stars were still keen and bright, though the morning of the Midi was nigh to the breaking.

"Clear machine-guns three, four, and six," he ordered. "Train them on the doors of the fitting-shed. There are lights over yonder I don't like, and I can sniff the paraffin in the air!"

Deventer and I stood quite still with Rhoda Polly between us. Neither of us knew what to do. We had received no word of command, and what we had just heard had somehow dislocated our simple world of duty. We had imagined all the right to be on one side, all the wrong on the other. Now quite unexpectedly we saw the "tatter of scarlet" from a new angle. Its colour heightened till it glowed like a ruby. After all it stood for an idea – the ideal even which had brought us from school, and sent us on our wild-goose chase for Garibaldi.

The weak were to be supported against the strong. Perhaps, after all, those who had been long driven to the wall were at last to hold the crown of the causeway.

Meanwhile, peering into the night we could see the dark masses of men clustering about the street corners of Aramon. The stars were paling a little when we saw them suddenly bunch together and run towards the long tiled roofs of the fitting-sheds, filled with valuable new machinery. Lanterns winked and tossed as they went, torches flamed high, and there came to our ears a kind of smothered cheer.

"Are you there, Jack Jaikes?"

"Here, sir."

"Aim well in front of them, and let them have it as soon as they get close to the buildings. The ricochet from the walls will scare them as well as anything else."

There was no hesitation in the Old Man's fighting dispositions, whatever he might think privately of the men's cause. He would protect his master's property, and point out in the most practical way to the men that they were going the wrong way about to get their wrongs redressed.

"B-r-r-r! B-r-r-r!" whirred and spluttered the mitrailleuses. These first machine-guns made a curious noise like the explosion of many sulphur matches held one after the other over a lamp chimney. The effect, however, was wonderful. The black rush of men checked itself a score of paces from the fitting-sheds. Several fell to the ground, with a clatter of spilt petroleum cans, but the most turned tail and ran as hard as possible for the shelter of the streets and the trees along the boulevards.

One man only, very broad in the shoulders, bareheaded and belted with a red sash, kept on. He was carrying a torch dipped with tar, and this he thrust repeatedly under the doorway of the atelier.

"Give me Number 27, quick!" commanded Dennis Deventer. "I know who that man is, and I am sorry, but he must be stopped."

Jack Jaikes placed the rifle in the old man's hand, and everybody held their breaths. The lintel of the fitting-shed protected the fire-raiser a little. We could see him thrusting with his torch till the sparks and smoke almost enveloped him. Then he threw down the torch and ran heavily back. He took hold of the first jar of petroleum which had been abandoned in the flight, and was hastening back with it when Number 27 spoke. The man appeared to gather himself up. Then he made a spring forwards, spilling the oil in a gush in the direction of the smouldering torch.

But there came no answering burst of flame. The distance was too great. Dennis watched a moment after reloading, then shook his head gloomily.

"He was a good workman too – yet that does not help a man when once the maggot begins to gnaw underneath the brain pan."

The next day broke fresh and bright, with only that faint touch of Camargue mist which the sun dissolves in his first quarter of an hour.

From the roof and northern balcony we could hear a curious thudding sound in the direction of the moulding-works.

"The steam hammer," said Jack Jaikes; "pity we did not think to put her out of gear."

When he came down the chief listened a moment with his better ear turned towards the sound. Then he smiled ironically.

"They are trying to get a big field-gun ready for us. Luckily we have sent off the last we had in store. But they can't do it. At least they can't do it in time. There are good workmen and capital fitters among them, but who is to do their calculations?"

"No matter," grumbled Jack Jaikes, half to himself, "they will go by rule of thumb, and though their gun would not pass army tests, they will make it big enough and strong enough to drive a solid shell in at one side of this house and out at the other."

At that moment the girls came down for breakfast, and there was no more talk about the insurgents, or the state of siege at Château Schneider.

## CHAPTER VII

### OUR FIRST COMMUNARD

Hannah and Liz Deventer came in arm and arm. Hannah grave and sweet, with her air of taking admiration for granted and being rather bored by it; Liz dimpled and glancing from one to the other, deciding which of the young men would best serve her for cavalier that day. As for Rhoda Polly she had been in and out of the room for an hour, enforcing authority in the kitchen, rousing new courage in frightened servants whom only her example and abounding vitality shamed into remaining at their duty.

Dennis Deventer did not appear. Jack Jaikes came down presently and carried him up a pot of strong coffee and some rolls. Most of us hardly made even a pretence of sitting down, so eager were we to get back to our posts, but Hugh Deventer and a young apprentice, Laurent, the son of an English mother and a French father, stayed to keep the two younger girls company. As for me, I followed Rhoda Polly out upon the roof.

There I cleaned her rifle for her carefully, while she sat and watched me, her chin upon her palms. We were both quite comfortably hidden behind the stack of north-looking chimneys.

Rhoda Polly had always been a friend of mine, and there was no false shame between us, any more than between two college comrades of the same age and standing.

In quickly lapsing phrases she told me how the trouble had begun.

"It was," she said, "altogether a political matter at first. It had to do with the position of Procureur of the Republic, held by young Gaston Cremieux of Marseilles. He had been appointed by Gambetta in September, in the war year. But he was a 'red' and belonged to the Internationale, so that the solid people of the department, royalists for the most part, set about to try and dislodge him. He used to come often to our house, and he and father sat long arguing. I think we all liked him. He had great influence with the men up at the works, and so long as he was permitted to speak to them and go to their reunions, we had no trouble.

"But when Gambetta lost his power, and Thiers became dictator, or president, or something, Gaston Cremieux could not long remain Procureur. They stripped him of his office, and gave it to a dry-as-dust lawyer who did as the military tribunals bade him."

I put a question here.

"No," continued Rhoda Polly, with a flash of indignation, "if you knew my father better, you would know that he does not shelter himself behind anyone. Still, Cremieux was undoubtedly a help. My father can explain better than I can, but the men down here wanted to make our department a sovereign state like the American ones – New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, and so on."

"But," said I, "over there they have just fought a long and bloody war for the purpose of proving that no state is sovereign, but each must be subordinate to the central authority at Washington."

"Well, I don't know," said Rhoda Polly, "at least, that was the idea of these people down here, and I suppose all over France wherever there are many workmen. The peasants and agriculturists are different. They want only two things: low taxes and high prices."

Rhoda Polly was swinging herself back and forward on the low parapet which ran round the roof in so careless a fashion, that I begged her to take care that she did not lose her balance. At my words she stopped, cast a glance behind her, was instantly brought to her feet by what she saw, and ran towards the steel ladder crying, "It is Gaston Cremieux. I must let him in."

I went to the parapet holding the cleaned gun idly in my hand. A tall young man, with dark hair and a slight pointed beard, was coming straight across from the head-quarters of the insurgents. He walked easily and with a confident swing up the wide Stair of Honour which led to the front door.

Before he had reached the top the bolts were already shooting from within, and the door soon stood open; for Rhoda Polly had gathered in Jack Jaikes on her way, to help in undoing the intricate barrage and strengthening of the defence.

I am not sure that Jack Jaikes looked with much favour upon the welcome which Rhoda Polly gave to the young ex-Procureur of the Republic, but the lady knew well what she was about. In losing his office he had neither lost in influence nor authority, and she knew that if anyone could help to end the strife, it was this polite and deferential young man.

"I have been over at Nîmes seeing the family of my friend Rossel," he explained. "I heard there was some trouble at the works, so I took Aramon-les-Ateliers on my way back to Marseilles."

"That was good of you," said Rhoda Polly, "if anyone can set things right, you can. You know what my father thinks, and what he has done for the men, but he will not have the firm's machinery tampered with if he can help it."

Gaston Cremieux nodded his head of crisp black curls.

"I understand," he said; "but there are men over yonder who cannot understand the uprightness of a man like your father. Worse still, they cannot believe that he wishes them well, just because he is a manager in the pay of the Company. He must on that very account be their enemy, they say, and they remain blind to the fact that he alone can put their needs and demands before the masters."

"Come up and see my father," said the girl, and without waiting for any word of consent, she turned and led the way, flitting before him with the lithe grace learned in the gymnasia of Selborne College.

Some minutes afterwards I encountered Jack Jaikes who had returned from re-bolting and restrengthening the door.

"If I could break that young scoundrel's neck I would be doing some good. He is at the bottom of all this trouble. I went to one of his speechifyings to see what he was after, and he led them like a flock of lambs. He was preaching revolt and red revolution, so far as I could make out – the works to belong to the workers and such-like clotted nonsense – and now Rhoda Polly receives him like an angel from heaven, and up they go to throw dust in the eyes of the old man. If I had my way of it —*augh!*"

And here Jack Jaikes turned away snorting to express the suddenness and certainty with which he would regulate the case of ex-Procureur Gaston Cremieux, if the matter were left in his hands.

On the roof another view was being taken. I heard the details from Hugh Deventer, who at this time was constantly with his father, now that he had been forgiven and, as it were, taken back into the general scheme of things as conceived by Dennis Deventer.

"Rhoda Polly brought him up" (so ran his narrative), "and it was like watching a hen with a new brood of chickens to see the pair of them. Rhoda Polly is like that. She was quite sure that she had found the specific remedy for all our woes, so she could hardly let the man speak at first, so anxious was she that he should say the right thing.

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"She kept at it interrupting so long, that at last the Pater, who was not specially patient just then, told her to go away and let them talk it out in peace. And that is pretty strong from the Pater to Rhoda Polly, for mostly he encourages her to say and do just what she likes. She is not like the others. There is nothing of the mother's-apron-string-girl about Rhoda Polly. She likes running about the works in a dirty blouse much better than sitting all day, with embroidery on her knee, listening to mother purring.

"As for Cremieux and my father, they understood each other from the first. It was wonderful to find how much they had in common. And he will help to stop the rioting. He says he will not go away from Aramon till the men are back at work. Cremieux's opinion is that these sporadic risings

do no good, even when run on the best lines, without personal violence or destruction of property. To succeed, the thing must be a national movement, concerted and directed from each one of the great towns, otherwise the bourgeois government merely waits till its feet are free elsewhere, and then tramples out one by one all the little revolts."

At that moment Deventer caught me by the arm.

"Hold hard," he whispered, "here he comes with the Chief. I declare they are as thick as thieves, and yet in an hour he may be leading the rascals over yonder to burn down the Château."

The restless eyes of Dennis Deventer spied me out.

"Ah, Angus me boy," he hailed, "come this way. You two ought to know one another. This is our philosopher's son from Gobelet, who has run away from college to take service under Garibaldi."

"If he casts his eyes in that direction," said the dark young man, smiling, "I can find him more profitable work nearer home."

"Come, none of your proselytising on my ground!" said Dennis Deventer, laying a heavy hand on his companion's shoulder. "If he chooses to go and get a bullet in him for the sake of France, that is his own affair. But I will not have him mixed up in your little revolutions about which he knows nothing at all."

"But I will teach him. He is intelligent – of a fine race – it is such men we need. Let me speak to him, I beg."

But Dennis Deventer would listen to nothing. He pushed his visitor out of the hall, laughing and shaking his head good-humouredly.

"Take anyone you like from my rank and file," he said, "but leave my staff officers alone."

But I did not forget that tall, grave young man, who talked so earnestly and pleaded so strongly for a chance to teach me the wisdom of insurrection.

## CHAPTER VIII

### I SEE THE SCARLET TATTER NEAR AT HAND

I might have thought much more about Gaston Cremieux and the dark fatality of his eyes, if other things had not immediately distracted my attention. The garrison had had its noon dinner in the great hall, and at one o'clock the family were served in the fine red and gold dining-room, the furnishings of which had been the gift of the Emperor. Dennis Deventer sat at the top of the table with the gleeful air of having dispatched the business of the day.

There was a feeling of picnic unceremoniousness about the feast. The servants were somewhat thinned by flight, and as there was no hard-and-fast etiquette in Dennis Deventer's house on any occasion, several of the younger apprentice engineers assisted in the service, partly from a general feeling of loyalty, and partly because they liked to steal glances at the three Deventer girls – glances of which only Liz appeared conscious and or in any way prompt with a return fire.

Even Jack Jaikes, a dark figure of a Spanish hidalgo, in engineer's blue serge and pockets continually bulging with spanners, looked in and said with brusque courtesy:

"Anything I can do for you, Chief?"

"Nothing," said Dennis Deventer, over his shoulder, "except to come in and sit down with us."

"Thank you, Chief," answered Jaikes, "but I have dined already. I am watching the rascals from the roof. They have gone away for a while to their 'speak-house,' where doubtless they are talking over the matter. But it will not do to trust to appearances. I wish you would let me run that live wire from the big dynamo in the power-house. That would curl them up by the score if they tried any more of their rushes."

Dennis Deventer turned on him savagely, the carving-knife in hand and upheld threateningly.

"You pirate," he cried, "do as I tell you, and if I hear of your meddling with the wires I will blow your brains out. Don't you see that we have got to go on living here, and the men we have to work the factory with are the fellows out in the brush yonder? They will try to kill us now, but they will not bear any lasting malice if a few of them are bowled over while we are defending ourselves. But electrocution by a live wire is a different thing. They can't fight us with those weapons, and I am not going to have our lives made impossible by any wholesale scientific butchery."

Jack Jaikes held his ground in the doorway, his thin body flattened against the panels to let the hurrying servants and apprentices pass.

"I don't know about 'scientific butchery,'" he said, "but I do know that some one of them is pretty handy with the trick of short-circuiting our new Gramme armature. It wasn't any garlic-smelling 'Gugusse' who worked that out. I have put it right three times, so I know it was no accident. But at any rate I am going to watch, if I have to slink about the dynamo-sheds all night. I shall carry the new Henry thirteen repeater I had from Edinburgh yesterday, and if I don't touch up that other gang of scientific ruffians my name is not Jack Jaikes, and I never smelt the good Clyde water from the Broomielaw."

Having thus had the last word, he shouldered his notable new Henry rifle and strode off with his head in the air.

"Bit of buccaneer blood in that fellow," said Dennis Deventer, "a hard horse to hold in sober times, but deuced dependable in an emergency. Hates the Frenchmen, however, and does not get on with them. Mostly I have to keep him on special duty, or in the office, though he is a capital engineer, and a capital 'driver' with Englishmen or Scots of his own breed who understand him. But if he is not careful he will get something for himself one of these days – a knife between the shoulder-blades as like as not."

Gentle Mrs. Dennis had her lament to make.

"I wish you would give him to me to look after. He can do almost anything. He mended my spare sewing-machine which has not worked for years, and made the missing parts himself. I believe some of them were given to Liz to play with when she was a little girl, and I have never seen them since."

"By all means have Jack Jaikes to tinker at your embroidery frames – that is, if you can tame him. For myself I do not see him in the rôle of family emergency man. But you must wait till we get the things all fixed here and the shops running handily. Then I dare say it may be just as well for Jaikes to eclipse himself for a day or two. If you can persuade him to spend his time in the Château without coming into the works till things cool off a bit, it will be best for all of us. He will not find himself exactly popular for a while."

"Of course I can, Dennis," said his wife, who never doubted her powers of persuasion. "There are hundreds of things that need to be done, and the girls and I can easily find him work for a year. The place is going to rack and ruin. High or low hardly a bolt will slide. Not a door will lock except the outer ones which you yourself have had looked to recently. What do you say, girls?"

"It is quite true, father," said Rhoda Polly. "I was trying to get Hugh to do some little things down in the kitchen yesterday, but whatever they teach him up at St. André, to make himself useful is certainly not among them. He was as dense as a French plum-pudding, and I had far more idea of how to handle a tool, for all he is older and twice my size."

Both Hannah and Liz agreed that there was a decided missionary call for the assistance of Jack Jaikes in the Château as soon as possible. Something in the tone of his youngest daughter touched Dennis Deventer's educated ear.

He looked up sharply from his plate.

"Now, Liz," he said, "I will have no nonsense of *that* kind!"

Liz blushed and dimpled, but kept her eyes well on her knife and fork without a word. But there was a smile which lurked about the corners of her mouth which said that her father, though a wise and masterful man in his own house, could not control what was in the mind of a young girl.

It was a family tradition that at table Dennis Deventer should not be argued with. Their mother might say inconsequent things in her purring fashion, but only Rhoda Polly was allowed to stand up to their Old Man. Even she rarely interfered, except in case of flagrant injustice or misunderstanding, or when the subject matter under discussion had been agreed upon beforehand in the family conclave. In Liz's case Rhoda Polly judged there was no cause to interfere. It had become too much Liz's habit to count all males coming to the house as "her meat," hardly excluding the halt, the maimed, and the blind. If her father had noticed this growing peculiarity, he had done so "off his own bat," and on the whole it was a good thing. The knowledge that she was under suspicion at head-quarters might do something to keep Liz within bounds. At least if she did get tangled up in her own snares, she would not have the face to go to their father for pity or demands for disentanglement. Rhoda Polly hoped that this would put some of the iron which was in her own blood into that of her more temperamental and impulsive younger sister.

The turmoil, the constant clatter of knives, forks, and plates, the discussion which swayed from one side of the table to the other, the well-worn family jests, which, because I held no key to their origin, shut me out from the shouts of merriment they provoked – all produced on me a feeling of dazed isolation. I liked the Deventers singly, especially Rhoda Polly and her father. I could talk to each with ease and an honest eye to my own profit or amusement. But I will not hide it from you that I found the entire Deventer family, taken together, too much for me.

I think I inherit my father's feeling for a "twa-handed crack" as the only genuine method of intercourse among reasoning beings. More than three in a conversation only serves to darken counsel by words without knowledge. In a company of four my father is reduced to complete silence, unless, indeed, he assumes his gown professorial and simply prelects. In this way alone,

and on condition that nobody says a word, my father could be induced to give forth of his wisdom in company.

But a sympathetic touch on the shoulder from Rhoda Polly, one of whose peculiarities was that she understood things without being told, delivered me from my awkwardness.

"I don't think you have been here since we all grew up," she said, with a smile. "We *are* rather *assommant*, I admit. We stun people with our trick of throwing ourselves at each other's heads. But you will soon get used to the clamour. Meantime, if I were you, I should go out and walk in the acacia avenue. It is a good place to be quiet in, and I have it in my mind that you may learn something there" – she paused a moment – "something that will take the taste of Jack Jaikes' threatenings and slaughters out of your mouth."

She had moved back her chair a little so as to let me slip out, and then with a nod and half-smile she launched herself into the fiercest of the fray. So keen was challenge and *réplique* just at that moment that I was outside the fine old tapestried dining-room without being perceived by anyone.

I ran downstairs and reported to the sentinel on duty at the front door. I told him that I did not feel well and was going to take the air. He asked if I had my revolvers with me, and was only pacified at sight of them. He had gone often with messages from the Chief to my father at Gobelet, and so took an interest in me.

I skirted the house, and was just plunging into a belt of woodland through which I could gain the acacia walk without being seen, when I was hailed from the roof by Jack Jaikes. He wanted to know where I was going, and what I was going to do when I got there.

Instead of being rude and obvious I made him the reply which I knew would baffle him.

"Ask Rhoda Polly!" I said, and he swore aloud. If he had not been safe on the roof he would have come after me at once. As it was I advised him that he had as much responsibility as one man could safely shoulder, and that he would do wisely not to fret about me.

With that I waved my hand and stepped into the thickest of the bushes. The little wood ran round an artificial lake, and was prolonged right to the great wall of the Château policies half a mile away. It was the part of the grounds most distant from the works, and from what might be called the centre of disturbance.

I climbed a young but good-sized plane which overtopped the wall. It had been pollarded, and the step from the tree to the top of the wall was rather a long one. I managed it, however, without difficulty, thanks to the bough of an acacia which came swaying and trembling over from the highway beyond. The next moment I had dropped like a cat out of the acacia boughs into the road. A young man was sitting on a fallen tree trunk, pensively smoking a cigarette, his hat pulled low on his brow, and his eyes on the road.

I had no chance to escape his notice, for the sound of my feet attracted him and he looked up at once. He rose smilingly and held out his hand. It was Gaston Cremieux.



## CHAPTER IX

### A REUNION OF THE REDS

"Did Rhoda Polly send you?" Cremieux asked, though I am sure he knew.

"She bade me come here, saying that perhaps I might learn something to my advantage."

He looked at me queerly, and with a shade of suspicion which I quite misunderstood.

"Then I may take it that she does not mean to come herself?"

"I am sure she has not the least idea of that. She was in the very thick of a discussion upon the possibility of factories and ateliers being run entirely by working men. The whole family had taken sides, and when I came away I expected every moment to see them leap at each other's throats."

"They are extraordinary, but quite admirable," he said, throwing away his cigarette and rising. "We cannot breed anything of the kind in France. Our spirit of family discipline forbids it. We have the cult of ancestor worship as in China, only we do not get farther back than father and mother. It is mainly the mother who leads the young men of France. We have them among us too, these good mothers, women who teach their sons to fight to the death for the great Day of Freedom. But they are scarce. Our women are still under the heel of the priesthood, and the young men, though they may follow us, still keep the inmost corner of their hearts for their mothers; and one day when we most want them, we may find them missing at roll-call. His mother cannot bear that her son should be outcast and accursed. He need not go to Mass, but if he will only see her favourite priest a moment in secret, she is sure that he will stay at home with her. Like you, Rossel is a Protestant and has not this to put up with. He is now in Metz with Bazaine, but he will return, and then you and the world will see a man."

I asked him what the men meant to do, and if he thought he could not prevent further fighting and burning.

Before he had time to answer a bell began clanging furiously in the town.

"That is the signal," he said; "the Commune of Aramon is to meet in general assembly. Will you come? You will be quite safe with me, even though I am going to make them very angry. And besides, as Rhoda Polly says, you will learn something to your advantage."

"Do you think she meant that?" I asked.

"Ah, you may go far and look long before you find out all that is in Rhoda Polly's mind, but at any rate I suppose she meant that you would be safe with me, and might hear a few things that are not included in the curriculum of the *Lycée St. André*."

We took our way towards the clanging bell, and it had the weirdest effect as we topped a knoll, where the noise came so fierce and angry as to put a stop to our conversation. Anon descending into deep dells out of which the pines shot straight upwards like darts, sheer trunks for a hundred feet before the first branch was poised delicately outwards as if to grasp the light, we lost the sound of the rebellious tocsin, or it came to our ears soft as the Angelus floated over the fields to a worshipping peasantry in days that were yet of faith.

But Gaston Cremieux kept on his way without paying much notice to the woodland sights about him. His colour rose, and his shoulders were bent forward with a certain eagerness. The bell seemed to be calling him, and I doubt not he was thinking of the responsibility of guiding aright these darkened souls. His convictions, his aspirations were theirs. But their volcanic outbursts of destructive energy, sudden, spiteful, and inexplicable, vexed and troubled him.

Yet the reason plainly was that they had been hurt by those in authority over them, and they struck back as naturally and instinctively as bees fly out to sting when their hive is overturned. That the affair is partly an accident does not matter either to bee or workman.

Presently we began to pass little villas – "Mon Plaisir," "Mont Dore," and "Château des Roses." The mountain path among the pines began to widen into a made road, and to carry traces of wheelmarks. My leader quickened his pace, and after a few minutes of threading our way among the houses of New Aramon, we turned aside and entered a wide space in the centre of which was a hall roofed with corrugated iron. Doors wide and high as those of a barn stood open, and in the interior we could see many people, men and women, already seated on rude benches.

There were also groups outside, but these were mostly younger men, sullen-faced and furtive of eye. To me it seemed as if they regarded my companion with no favourable looks. Several had been wounded in the fighting, and now carried bandaged arms or white-wrapped heads. Somehow I knew at once that this was the dangerous element, and I knew that the whirring machine guns behind which glanced the pitiless eye of Jack Jaikes, had had something to say to them.

Outwardly the Reunion of the Reds had nothing to distinguish it from other political gatherings in the Midi. Indeed the type had been struck out in the earlier pre-Robespierre period of the great Revolution, improved upon in 1830 and 1848, and had now imposed itself even upon the anarchists.

A president was appointed, who had his pair of vice-presidents and a couple of secretaries to prepare a report of the proceedings exactly as you may find described in Mirabeau's *Courier de Provence*.

The Hall of the People at Aramon had been an old riding-school in the days before Solferino, when the scheming Emperor was hotly preparing for his campaign across the Milanese plains. It was now a rather dimly lighted, well-ventilated meeting-place, with a clean light-varnished platform in front for speakers, and behind a broader space on which cane chairs had been set out for the "assessors" – as we would say "members of committee." These were being filled as we entered the hall. Names were called out, and sturdy fathers of families rose from beside their spouses to tramp up to the "assessors" chairs, not without a certain conscious dignity as citizens whose worth was unexpectedly made apparent to all men. I have seen the same expression since on the faces of men pressed to become members of a municipality, or even a village council, and I suppose Cabinet Ministers look like that when the new Prime Minister hints at the object of his visit.

The entrance of Gaston Cremieux called forth a kind of shrill cheer, but the Latin races had not at that time learned the full-bodied roar which greets and encourages a favourite orator in England or America.

I was seated at the right of the speaker's platform, and a little behind in shadow – which was as well, for there I could see without being seen. And what I saw astonished me. There were nearly a couple of thousand people in the riding-school by the time that Gaston Cremieux had shaken hands with the President and taken his seat. The iron galleries which ran round contained the younger people, many girls and their sweethearts, while at the far end were a score or two of long-limbed fellows clustered together – probably day labourers whose dusky tints and clustering black curls indicated their Italian origin.

So long as the great doors remained open, I could see outside the restless hither and thither of the young men who had scowled at us as we came into the court.

It was not long before the President and Bureau of Workmen of the Ateliers des Armes at Aramon declared that this properly called and constituted general meeting was open.

It was evident that some of the elder men were ready enough to speak, and a grave-faced grey-headed man rose to make his way towards the speaker's platform. But long before he reached the *estrade*, it had already been taken possession of by a young man with a shaggy head and wild beady eyes. This was Georges Barrès, a moulder in the new big gun factory. He had but recently arrived from St. Etienne, and had instantly become a notable firebrand.

The speech into which he plunged was a fierce denunciation of the masters and managers, through which ran the assertion that all property was theft. The workers, therefore, were justified

in redressing their wrongs with the strong hand, and he and his companions would see to it that they did not die of starvation with so many rich and fine houses all about them. As for Monsieur Deventer and his English vermin of overseers, they must be killed out like rats. Only so would the town be purified. Only so would their dead comrades be avenged, and a solid foundation be laid for the Free Commune in which the works and all within them, the profits and everything included in the year's trading, should belong absolutely to the workers.

There was some applause from the groups that had gathered in, ceasing their rapid caged-wolf sentry-go to hear their leader. But for the most part the meeting sat silent and unresponsive.

At a nod from the chairman a sturdy mechanic rose. He was an "assembler," or skilled workman, who takes the parts of the gun as they are sent in from the various departments, and then with file, saw, and sandpaper, but especially by the wisdom of the eye, "assembles" them into one complete weapon such as can be issued to fill the orders of the Government. Père Félix was a man much regarded in Aramon les Ateliers, and a silence followed his taking of the speaker's place. He was in no hurry to begin. He knew his power and the worth of his opinion, and was determined to conduct himself with the restraint and gravity which he demanded from his audience.

Père Félix opened by a word as to the speaker who had preceded him on the rostrum. Comrade Barrès had spoken (he said) with an earnestness which would have been noble if it had been allied with wisdom. But of course their companion laboured under the double disadvantage of being a foreigner himself, a Spaniard from Catalonia, and of knowing nothing about the district. The Englishmen who were to be killed like rats had been for the most part of them friends and neighbours ever since the works were opened, and in any case for a much longer period than Comrade Barrès had spent in France. Besides, like themselves, they were men with wives and families. They had aided each other in sickness, their wives had interchanged kindlinesses, their children had played together – why should they be doomed to a slaughter of the innocents worse than that of Bethlehem?

As for Director Deventer, he had defended himself when he was attacked in his own house as every man has a right to do. And what was the use of founding an Internationale in Aramon to bring about universal peace if its first action was to send men sneaking forth under cloud of night to kill women and children? Blood had been shed and he regretted it, but the lesson learned was a useful one, bitter in the mouth, but sweet in the belly.

When Gaston Cremieux rose to give an account of his mission he was received with a storm of applause, but the young men at the back, clustered near the door, were conspicuously silent. But lately Cremieux had been their idol, and would be so again; but for the moment he was under deep suspicion, and they stood sullenly glowering at him, occasionally murmuring to each other the accusations so typical of men of Latin race, when their idol does not exactly fulfil their expectations.

Gaston was a traitor. He had sold himself. So much was evident to them, though as usual it was difficult to see who would have money or interest to buy the traitor to the Cause.

But after all there is something communicative in the thunderous applause of a great assembly, and many of those who had come to hoot were readiest with their cheers before Cremieux had uttered a score of sentences. He spoke rather slowly, with marked emphasis, and repeated each point of his argument in different words till he had firmly impressed his meaning on his audience.

Yes, he had seen the manager. He had talked with him on the subject of their grievances, and he knew that so far as the power lay with Monsieur Dennis Deventer, their demands would be granted. Moreover, the Director would use what influence he had with the Government to prevent reprisals for the expulsion of the garrison from the town on the 21st of January.

They, on their side, must return as good workmen to take up their jobs. Nothing would be said. No man would suffer for the past, and pay on the higher scale would begin from the day they started work.

"And the comrades who died fighting, what of them?"

The question came bitter and scornful from the back of the hall, deep under the shadow of the gallery.

"What of them?" answered Gaston Cremieux calmly. "Well, we are all travelling the same road. We shall all end the same. They a little earlier, I a little later. We are not making revolution by sprinkling rosewater. From the beginning your Aramon outbreak was a mistake, as all such things done in a corner must be. When the bells ring for that august Twilight of the Newer Gods, you must waste no time storming through the streets of Aramon, shooting and destroying. You must go in mass to the railway, requisition trains, get yourselves instantly transported to Marseilles, to Lyons, or to Paris. There your brothers will have formed governments which your disciplined bayonets must sustain. Then, having established a firm rule over the big towns, the submission of the rural districts is only a matter of time.

"But," he added, with slow emphasis, "we can only succeed by being sure of our comrades. They must wait for the signal, and the signal may not be long in coming."

He concluded with a moving picture of the new Heavens and earth which would arise when the workman was made part owner of his factory, and when wars were no longer made by kings and emperors against the will of the people – a glad peaceful world, well ordered, well content, and without poverty.

It was very noble and very convincing, delivered with a kind of austere fire strange in one so young and fragile. The people shouted for "Gaston" as if he had been a son of each of their houses. The motherly women shed tears, and I heard prayers spoken aloud that this and that saint, or more especially the Holy Virgin, should protect him.

There was no doubt at all that he carried the meeting with him. The works of Aramon would be reopened next day, and the director's terms would be accepted.

This was the sense of the meeting as interpreted by the President. It was put to the vote and carried unanimously, but the sullen young men under the gallery had already opened the doors and passed silently out. I could see them resuming their wolf's prowl in little packs of four or five, keeping quite distinct from the decent burgesses who had so lately filled the body of the riding-school, and were now pouring towards their homes in Aramon in dense black streams.

## CHAPTER X

### JEANNE'S VELVET EYES

"These are our potential Troppmanns," said Gaston Cremieux, as we passed through the grounds of the riding-school. "We must not blame them too much. It is partly our fault. We have taken their religion from them, and they have not yet enough moral sense to balance the loss. They have learned at our meetings and conferences that they have not come to their own, and they want to break their way to immediate wealth and independence by the stroke of their own hands. All they can see is that the rich have pleasures from which they are shut out – wine, women, and feasting chiefly. This orgy of their imaginations heats the blood so that the younger of them have come to think such things the only good. The schoolmasters also are to blame. They have not instructed them in noble thoughts and duties. The Church which has let them slip without effort is to blame. But we of the liberating societies are most to blame, for we have given them nothing to replace the Catechism they learned, and the mystic trappings of that religion in which we have taught them not to believe. Hence they are our Troppmanns in haste to be rich, on edge to taste every sort of forbidden fruit, and in order to reach their pleasure they are ready to slaughter men, women, and little children with as much cold-bloodedness as did the murderer of the Kinck family at Pantin."

Gaston spoke of a terrible crime which had shaken France the year before, when a young man of twenty, active and intelligent, had with devilish cunning slain an entire family of eight, his friends and neighbours, in order that he might "get rich quick," and begin a new life in a new country.

Cremieux seemed to feel himself in some measure responsible for these lost sheep, but he made no attempt at present to conciliate them, feeling perhaps that the pains would be thrown away or his motives misunderstood.

"If we can keep them from active mischief till we want them, all will be well," he kept repeating. "A time will come when such as they will be invaluable, but at present they exist in every town and village in France – budding 'hooligans' or 'Apaches,' ready for robbery and murder, counting their own life a light thing and the taking of another's a jest. If only they would take service with Garibaldi and be made into men! That is where the North and East are going to outstrip us in the coming years. Their Troppmanns are all being swept into the fighting line, and will come out honourable citizens, while we of the South, untouched by the German armies, have our idle rascals on our hands, becoming a greater curse and burden every year, and a standing menace to the next generation.

"But," he paused thoughtfully upon the phrase, "when the day for the real struggle begins, we can find them work to do, and shoot them if they will not do it. To keep them quiet in the meantime is the difficulty."

By the time Gaston Cremieux had thus delivered his soul upon the question of the town-bred ne'er-do-weels – the Vauriens of the Midi – he was striding along the edge of the Rhône, till at the end of the quay we turned in the direction of the Durance, the swift river which comes rushing from the mountains, and the muddy torrent of which makes turbulent the clear glaucous-blue of the Rhône from a little below Avignon.

By this time my stomach, always on campaign, began to remind me that, though I had been learning the secrets of Communism, particularism was still rampant within my body.

"Let us go to see Madame Félix," I suggested. "Her husband spoke at the reunion to-day. He is a chief among the workmen, but his wife is worth a score of him when a fellow is hungry, and his daughter Jeanne Félix is the girl best worth looking at in these parts – our friends at the Château alone excepted."

Gaston Cremieux smiled indulgently and with a sort of patient scorn for my enthusiasms.

"I hardly know what it is to be hungry," he said gently; "and except some of our brave mothers of the Commune, and of course Rhoda Polly, one woman is much the same to me as another."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say, as I should have done to Deventer, "Then the more fool you!" But there was actually something about the young ex-Procureur of the Republic which made one shrink from familiarity. Instead, I turned through a growth of tall rushes, the cane-brakes peculiar to Provence, in the direction of the little ferry-house. It was war-year, and nobody had thought of cutting them. The stiff leaves whistled frostily as we pushed our way through, the supple yellow *cannes* clattering behind us as they sprang back. After them came a tangle of withered vines, still clinging to the trellis of a dismantled house, and then we found ourselves on the river bank overlooking the cottage belonging to Mère Félix of the Durance Ferry. The boats were all on the other side, so I was obliged to make a trumpet of my hands and call loud and long for "Mariana," which besides being the baptismal name of the lady of the house, is an excellent resonant word to carry across an estuary. Now the Durance, though an absurdly tricky river, is no arm of the sea. Its race is short and turbulent, though it makes as much trouble as possible (which is no little) for those who dwell on its banks. It plays with inundations, whirlpools, eddies, and deceitful currents, as a child with toys. You cannot row for ten strokes straight upon it, for it will bubble up and snatch the oar out of your hand, or failing in this, it will suddenly send the bow of your boat deep into a reed-bed as if it were part of a conjuring trick. I knew somewhat more of the matter than most, for had not Jeanne Félix taught me? I had often gone over to spend a day there during the long vacations. For my father, buried among his books, made no objections to my roaming the country at will.

Cremieux and I presently stood at the top of a rough and tumble-down flight of steps which led to a pier in somewhat better condition. I recognised the work of my own hands upon this last. For Jeanne and I had coopered it up only last year, so that her passengers might land without risking their lives each time. Paths extended both up and down stream, but as yet nothing had been done to the flight of rough-hewn steps of split pinewood leading to the forest above. These things I did not communicate to my new revolutionary friend, for I was busy wondering what effect Jeanne Félix would have upon him.

My fourth or fifth shout brought the Mère Félix wrathfully down to the river edge where her white cap and broad head ribbons showed between the tall *cannes*. She had a couple of oars upon one shoulder and called across at us, "Who is making such a noise with their Marianas? There is no Mariana here except to my husband, the Père Félix, who is now from home, doubtless at one of his foolish reunions –"

"Dear Mariana," I answered, showing myself at the end of the little pier, "push out a boat and you can kiss me for it. My father says you may. Also send Jeanne quickly, for she and I can row so well together."

"It is that rascal of an English student, Monsieu' Aügoose from Gobelet. Well, I might have guessed. Yet it is not playtime at St. André that I have heard. I shall have you sent back and whipped. What, they do not whip at St. André? Ah, it is no wonder, then, that you young people wax so impertinent. If only you were *my* boy, I should not call upon Père Félix to help me. No, no – I would –" and the old lady, smacking one hard hand upon the other, conveyed her meaning exactly.

"Send Jeanne," I repeated, taking no notice of her pantomime.

"Send Jeanne," she imitated my college-trained voice, "Jeanne – Jeanne – it is always Jeanne!"

"Perhaps," I ventured, "when you were Jeanne's age it was always 'Mariana'! I'll wager that more people than Père Félix called you that in those days, *petite mère*!"

"Here comes Jeanne at last," she called, so that I could hear. "Do not put up with his insolence, Jeanne. He is a spoilt schoolboy, nothing more."

Jeanne stepped sagely into the skiff, with a foot so light and practised that the frail craft hardly quivered in the water. She was a tall, dark girl with a supple figure, both light and well-

rounded, remarkably Diana-ish in a land where the women, save a few, are inclined to shortness, and in addition are already overshadowed by the stoutness which inevitably overtakes them after marriage.

Jeanne Félix received us without the least embarrassment into her boat. When I mentioned my friend's name in introducing him, there was one rapid up-and-down flicker of the drooping eyelashes, a flash of velvet eyes, and then without a word or a salutation she handed me the bow oar as if we had parted only the night before.

When we landed on the neat little *embarcadère*, below the Restaurant Sambre-et-Meuse, Madame Félix had vanished. I knew her to be already busy with the *menu* of our dinner, a matter which, in spite of her abuse of me, she would entrust to nobody.

There was a great chestnut tree before the door, and though the month was January, my pocket thermometer registered 62° Fahrenheit in our shadowed nook.

Here we sat and waited, talking with Jeanne till her mother should call us in to lunch.

The reformer smoked innumerable cigarettes, but he said little. I fancy he had not much small talk, and at times he seemed so far away that I wondered whether he heard the light badinage in which Jeanne and I are fond of engaging. Jeanne is freed from all fear of her mother's reproof and I do as I like, because I am a choice favourite with that lady, being the only person in the world she permits herself to abuse grossly, except her goodman Père Félix – who, according to her, is still more *impayable* and gifted with a faculty of irritation not to be told.

As for me, I am younger and not her husband, but she has known me since I could really receive from her palm the manual chastisement she had so familiarly illustrated.

Still, I must admit that so far as Cremieux was concerned, interest in the Restaurant Sambre-et-Meuse awaked only when from the river-path along the Durance we heard the sound of voices, and presently Père Félix emerged talking eagerly with Pipe-en-Bois Soult, nicknamed the Marshal, and several of the Old Guard of the Commune. Then his eyes lit up suddenly. He rose as if throwing a weight from his shoulders. He had come to his own again. This man bore the weight of a bullet he had gained on the day of the *coup d'état*. Pipe-en-Bois had been in front of the battle about the Luxembourg that morning of 1848 when Cavaignac's fusillade proved the futility of moderate Republican promises.

In the kitchen was great rattling of dishes, the voice of Mère Félix calling on her daughter Jeanne, summoning from a great way off her "torchon" Babette, a kind of scullery-maid gathered chance-wise from among the numerous squatter families clustered along the river's edge.

Such long-limbed slatterns were plentiful as blackberries and of as rank a growth all along the Durance. Monsieur Brunet, horsemaster and former "Red of the Midi," owned the water meadows all about, and smilingly allowed the little street of wooden houses fringing the banks. A stray rabbit might be caught out of the pine knolls, but Monsieur's grazing rights must be respected, and his ponies and brood-mares left in peace.

Probably none except the family Félix all along that riverine sweep of reed-bed paid a penny of rent or a tax to the Government. The rural guard with his sash and his great brass plate of office must, of course, have known of the colony. But for some reason or another he said nothing, and all the time the huts of the "zoniers" tailed out at both ends into more and more ramshackle sheds and *bicoques*.

Here arose the danger of the community. They could only exist by attracting no attention, and many of the ancient inhabitants, in good odour with the Sieur Brunet, were compelled to replace the fences which had been torn down to burn, or used as building material by their less scrupulous neighbours.

Hence came quarrels, sharp words, and occasionally the breaking of heads. The chief penalty was that no offenders against the unwritten law of the settlement were allowed to drink under the cool shade of Mère Félix's vine trellises.

The men who had come back with the proprietor of the Restaurant Sambre-et-Meuse were, of course, the fine flower of this scattering Faubourg Durance. They were full of admiration for their host, but every man of them knew that Père Félix would occupy a very different position at the Sambre-et-Meuse from what had been his in the late great meeting of citizens at the riding-school of Aramon. They seemed to be wishing to make up to him all the way for the coming loss of prestige.

At the journey's end he would have to submit to his wife's inevitable dictatorship, and support in his own proper person the reproach of the whole company. He became responsible (among other things) for the misdeeds of the half-wild cook-maid, for the uncertainties of the weather, for the lack of fuel, and for the vicissitudes of the lady's culinary apparatus. Like many a high officer, colonel, or commandant, whose word is law to a thousand men in barracks, the Père Félix came home to do pack-drill and practise the goose-step under the eye of a severe drill-sergeant armed with a broomstick.

But the good woman allowed no one except herself to treat her husband lightly, so that in a measure his self-esteem was re-established before company. The more guests there were at the Sambre-et-Meuse, the more consideration was it necessary to show for the proprietor.

A chicken had been set aside for me, and of that I was not to be deprived, or at least of as great a portion as could be piled on my plate within her inviolable kitchen, by Mariana of the liberal hand. Gaston Cremieux, though she looked upon him as a perverter of youth, and the worst of examples for her husband, was still a guest of honour, and he had come there in my company. Therefore he should have a share in the chicken. Roast mutton, soup, and boiled beef out of the soup-pot which had simmered all day by the fire were good enough for the others. There was plenty of good bread, better than rich men could buy in Paris at that moment – let the newcomers "bank up" with that and be thankful. These, with regard to food supply, were the conclusions of Mariana of the Restaurant of Sambre-et-Meuse among the reed-beds of the Durance.



## CHAPTER XI

### HOW MEN SEE RED

I need not tell at length of the wonderful talk, so new and strange to me, in which men and things were judged wholly from a revolutionary point of view. But all the same I began to perceive that the men before me were really and fundamentally simple souls, to whom the future state of Liberty and Equality appeared as a kind of fairy godmother. Out of some inexhaustible bag she would pay each man according to his family needs, money sufficient for his wants and pleasures. He would labour just long enough to place an equivalent in the Fairy Godmother's hands, but no longer. Their wives would keep in order the wardrobes of the bachelor leaders and orators. They would at certain hours also set their houses in order. Others would clean the schools and public-buildings, and for such services additional monies would accrue.

The immediate settlement with the Small Arms Company and its manager was considered purely a temporary matter. Oh, yes, Monsieur Deventer was a good man, and no one could find any fault with him so far as the work was concerned. But, of course, there would be no real peace till they themselves owned the mines and factories, the rolling-mills, the assembling sheds and the hard-stone quarries. Then, indeed, a golden flood would flow directly into their pockets, and in a year or two they might be busily building houses "like proprietors." It was their own word, and even then they did see the delightful incongruity of the proposal. I did not think it worth while to point out that if they disinherited the mill-owners, a younger and still more advanced generation would very hastily expropriate any villas they might build.

But one question I did put to them. "Supposing," I said, "that you take possession of the Arms Factories and carry them on dividing the proceeds among you in proper ratio, after all machinery such as you use is delicate. It wears out quickly. Who is to replace it? Will you keep back so much each week from your wages? Whom will you entrust with the money? How do you know that he will not escape to Switzerland or Italy, carrying your new machinery with him in his breeches pocket?"

This they could not answer themselves. They had not thought of it. Of course, they were accustomed to seeing Deventer and his gang installing a new machine, but where it came from or who paid for it never crossed their minds. With one accord they looked to Gaston Cremieux. He would know what to reply, for he had taught them all they knew. Only by his teaching did they understand even so much. His answer was ready.

"The Commune will lay aside so much of the factory profits each week or month for repairs, the renewal of machinery, the introduction of new types, and so on. This deduction shall be made before wages can be paid."

Such was the oracle's decision, which to me seemed just and natural, but it was wonderful to see the swiftly darkening brows of those who listened.

"What, the Commune would keep back a part of our earnings!" cried Pipe-en-Bois. "Then I say that we will only have exchanged one master for another, and it is not worth the trouble."

Nor could he be moved from his position. Gaston Cremieux could silence him, telling him that doubtless he would himself be a member of the Commune of Aramon. But the man's dark mask as of a gargoyle only took on a deeper scowl, and he looked from one to the other of his companions, sure of their sympathy as he repeated, "What is the use of changing when the Commune will steal from us the earnings of our hands even as the masters do now?"

These were early days and militant theorists (as at present) found construction as difficult as destruction was easy.

Marvelling I sat, and viewed about me these grave men, the elect of the factories and mills, accomplished artisans, yet even now incapable of leadership, or even of submitting to the guiding brain which would give them a chance of success. This thoughtful young advocate of Marseilles was their idol, yet for a mere difference of opinion they were ready to cast him down from the throne they had just set for him. I conceived a new opinion as to the value of popular favour, and I noted that the head of an iconoclast had no easier a resting-pillow than that of the king whose crown he threatened.

We waited till the feast had begun to degenerate a little. Sundry jests and snatches of song seemed to offend the austere thoughtfulness of Cremieux. So I made a signal to Jeanne, previously agreed upon, and she hastened away to get ready the boat, while Gaston and I regulated the expenses with the good hostess, her face still shining from her culinary labours.

While she was changing a ten-franc piece from an immense pocket which swung from her side under her blue rep petticoat, she seemed suddenly to become aware of the noise within. She stepped to the door of the dining-room, listened a moment, and then opening it sharply, said, "Père Félix, if you continue as you are doing, I shall ask you to leave my house!"

"Pardon, Madame," said her husband instantly, rising to his feet and bowing, and the company, feeling themselves somehow vaguely in the wrong, rose to their feet and bowed also in the direction of the door at which appeared the heated face of Madame la Ménagère.

There was no doubt about it that Mère Félix intended to be both master and mistress in her own house, and behind her back the men rubbed their hands and thought how differently *they* could manage a woman.

We stepped outside into the clean well-aired vault of the twilight. The breeze was from the east, which in Provence of the South has not the terrors of our wind of that name, but is soft and perfumed with the early blossoms along the Gulf of Genoa. The Coast of Azure was sending us up an evening blessing.

We strolled a long way in silence, taking the river road which leads towards Aramon. Then Cremieux broke the silence by asking me brusquely if I had known Rhoda Polly long. I did not think the question ought to have been asked in that tone, but he had done a good deal for me that day and I most certainly owed him a civil answer.

"I have known Rhoda Polly," I said, "ever since I can remember. We used to fight in the garden for pig-nuts and in the woods for acorns. Rhoda Polly scratched my face with long sharp nails, and I thumped her back with little attention to chivalry. She could run faster than I, scratch more savagely, and when trapped she would sometimes bite like a little squirrel taken in the hand – yes, bite till the blood came."

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