

NO SURRENDER!

A TALE
OF THE RISING
IN
LA VENDÉE





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WESTERMANN'S CAVALRY CHARGE INTO THE STREETS OF DOL.

NO SURRENDER!

A TALE OF
THE RISING IN LA VENDÉE

BY

G. A. HENTY

Author of "In the Reign of Terror" "Through Russian Snows"
"The Bravest of the Brave" &c.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY STANLEY L. WOOD

LONDON

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PREFACE.

In the world's history there is no more striking example of heroic bravery and firmness than that afforded by the people of the province of Poitou, and more especially of that portion of it known as La Vendée, in the defence of their religion and their rights as free men. At the commencement of the struggle they were almost unarmed, and the subsequent battles were fought by the aid of muskets and cannon wrested from the enemy. With the exception of its forests, La Vendée offered no natural advantages for defence. It had no mountains such as those which enabled the Swiss to maintain their independence, no rivers which would bar the advance of an enemy, and although the woods and thickets of the Bocage, as it was called, favoured the action of the irregular troops, these do not seem to have been utilized as they might have been, the principal engagements of the war being fought on open ground. For eighteen months the peasants of La Vendée, in spite of the fact that they had no idea of submitting either to drill or discipline, repulsed the efforts of forces commanded by the best generals France could furnish, and which grew after every defeat until at length armies numbering in all over two hundred thousand men were collected to crush La Vendée. The losses on both sides were enormous. La Vendée was almost

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depopulated, and the Republicans paid dearly indeed for their triumph, no fewer than one hundred thousand men having fallen on their side. La Vendée was crushed, but never surrendered. Had the British government been properly informed by its agents of the desperate nature of the struggle that was going on, they might, by throwing twenty thousand troops with supplies of stores and money into La Vendée, have changed the whole course of events, have crushed the Republic, given France a monarch, and thus spared Europe over twenty years of devastating warfare, the expenditure of enormous sums of money, and the loss of millions of lives.

G. A. HENTY.

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CHAPTER I.

A FRENCH LUGGER.

SOME half a mile back from the sea, near the point where the low line of sandy hill is broken by the entrance into Poole Harbour, stood, in 1791, Netherstock, which with a small estate round was the property of Squire Stansfield. The view was an extensive one when the weather was clear. Away to the left lay the pine forests of Bournemouth and Christ Church, and still farther seaward the cliffs of the Isle of Wight from Totland Bay as far as St. Catherine Point. Close at hand to the south was Studland Bay, bounded by Handfast Point. Looking towards the right was a great sheet of shallow water, for the most part dry at low tide, known as Poole and Wareham Harbours, with its numerous creeks and bays.

Netherstock was an old house with many nooks and corners. The squire was a justice of the peace, but unless there was some special business on, he seldom took his place on the bench. He was a jovial man who took life easily. He was popular among his neighbours, especially among the poorer classes, for whom he had always a

pleasant word as he rode along, and who in case of illness knew that they could always be sure of a supply of soup or a gill of brandy at Netherstock. Among those of his own class it was often a matter of wonder how James Stansfield made both ends meet. The family had for two or three generations been of a similar temperament to that of the present holder, men who spent their money freely, and were sure to be present whenever there was a horse-race, or a main of cocks to be fought, or a prize-fight to come off, within a day's ride of Netherstock. Gradually farm after farm had been parted with, and the estate now was smaller by half than it had been at the beginning of the century.

James Stansfield had, however, done nothing further to diminish it. He had a large family, but they could hardly be said to be an expensive one, seeing that little was spent upon the fashion of their clothes; and beyond the fact that the curate in charge of the little church in the village of Netherstock came over every morning for two or three hours to give the boys and girls the elements of education, they went very much their own way. Mrs. Stansfield had died five years before this. Polly, the eldest girl, aged twenty, acted as mistress of the house. Next to her, at intervals of little more than a year, came Ralph and John, two strongly-built young fellows, both fearless riders and good at all rustic games. What supervision the farm work got was given by them.

Patsey, the second girl, was generally admitted to be the flower of the Stansfields. She was bright, pretty, and good-tempered. She was in charge of the dairy, and the Netherstock butter was famous through the country round, and always fetched top prices at the market. The youngest of the family was Leigh, who was now fourteen. He was less heavily built than his brothers, but their

tutor declared that he was the quickest and most intelligent of his pupils, and that if he had but a chance he would turn out a fine young fellow. The boys were all fond of boating and sailing, which was natural enough, as the sea washed two sides of the estate. They had two boats. One of these lay hauled up on the sands, a mile to the east of the entrance to the harbour. She was a good sea boat, and when work was slack about the place, which indeed was the normal state of things, they would often sail to Weymouth to the west, or eastward to Yarmouth or Lymington, sometimes even to Portsmouth. The other boat, which was also large, but of very shallow draught of water, lay inside the entrance to the harbour, and in her they could go either north or south of Brownsea Island, and shoot or fish in the many inlets and bays. There were few who knew every foot of the great sheet of water as they did, and they could tell the precise time of the tide at which the channels were deep enough for boats drawing from two to three feet of water.

The most frequent visitor to Netherstock was Lieutenant, or, as he was called in courtesy, Captain Whiffler, the officer in command of the coast-guard station between Poole and Christ Church, his principal station being opposite Brownsea Island, the narrowest point of the entrance to the harbour. He was a somewhat fussy little officer, with a great idea of the importance of his duties, mingled with a regret that these duties did not afford him full scope for proving his ability.

"Smuggling has almost ceased to exist along here," he would say. "I do not say that across the harbour something that way may not still be done, for the facilities there are very much greater than they are on this side. Still, my colleague there can have but little trouble, for I keep a

sharp look-out that no boat enters by the passage south of the island without being searched. Of course one hears all sorts of absurd reports about cargoes being run, but we know better, and I believe they are only set on foot to put our officers from Swanage westward, and beyond Christ Church down to Hurst Castle, off their guard."

"No doubt, captain; no doubt," James Stansfield would agree. "Still, I fancy that although times are not what they were, it is still possible to buy a keg of brandy occasionally, or a few yards of silk or lace, that have never paid duty."

"Yes, no doubt occasionally some small craft manages to run a few kegs or bales, and unfortunately the gentry, instead of aiding his majesty's representatives, keep the thing alive by purchasing spirits and so on from those who have been concerned in their landing."

"Well, you know, Captain Whiffler, human nature is pretty strong. If a pedlar comes along here with ribbons and fal-lals, and offers them to the girls at half the price at which they could buy them down at Poole, you can hardly expect them to take lofty ground and charge the man with having smuggled them."

"I do not think the young ladies are offenders that way," the officer said, "for I have never yet seen them in foreign gear of any sort. I should, if you will allow me to say so, be more inclined, were you not a justice of the peace, to suspect you of having dealings with these men, for your brandy is generally of the best."

"I don't set up to be better than my neighbours, captain," the squire said with a laugh, "and if the chance comes my way I will not say that I should refuse to buy a good article at the price I should pay for a bad one in the town."

"Your tobacco is good too, squire."

“Yes, I am particular about my tobacco, and I must say that I think government lays too high a duty on it. If I had the making of the laws, I would put a high duty on bad tobacco, and a low duty on a good article; that would encourage the importation of good wholesome stuff. I suppose you have heard no rumours of any suspicious-looking craft being heard of off the coast?”

“No, I think that they carry on their business a good deal farther to the west now, my post is becoming quite a sinecure. The *Henriette* came into Poole this morning, but we never trouble about her. She is a fair trader, and is well known at every port between Portsmouth and Plymouth as such. She always comes in at daylight, and lays her foresail a-back till we board her, and send a couple of men with her into Poole or Wareham. Her cargo is always consigned to well-known merchants at all the ports she enters, and consists of wines for the most part, though she does occasionally bring in brandy. He is a fine young fellow the skipper, Jean Martin. I believe his father is a large wine merchant at Nantes. I suppose you know him, squire?”

“Yes, I have met him several times down in the town, and indeed have bought many a barrel of wine of him. He has been up here more than once, for I have told him, whenever he has anything particularly good either in wine or spirits to let me know. He talks a little English, and my girls like to have a chat with him about what is going on on his side of the water. He offered the other day to give Leigh a trip across to Nantes if I was willing. Things seem to be going on very badly in Paris by what he says, but he does not anticipate any troubles in the west of France, where there seems to be none of that ill-feeling between the different classes that there is in other parts.”

The departure of Captain Whiffler was always followed by a broad smile on the faces of the elder boys, breaking occasionally into a hearty laugh, in which the squire joined.

"I call him an insufferable ass," Ralph said on this particular evening. "It would be difficult, as father says, to find an officer who is, as far as we are concerned, so admirably suited for his position.

"That is so, Ralph; there is scarcely a man, woman, or child in this part of Dorsetshire who does not know that there are more goods run on that piece of water over there than on the whole south coast of England. I sincerely trust that nothing will ever bring about his recall. Personally, I would pay two or three hundred a year out of my own pocket rather than lose him. There is no such place anywhere for the work; why, there are some fourteen or fifteen inlets where goods can be landed at high water, and once past the island, I don't care how sharp the revenue men may be, the betting is fifty to one against their being at the right spot at the right time.

"If the passage between our point and the island were but a bit wider it would be perfect, but unfortunately it is so narrow that it is only on the very darkest night one can hope to get through unnoticed. However, we can do very well with the southern channel, and, after all, it is safer. We can get any number of boats, and the *Henriette* has only to anchor half a mile outside the entrance. We know when she is coming, and have but to show a light directly she makes her signal and the boats will put out from Radhorn passage and Hamworth, while messengers start for Bushaw and Scopland and Creach and a dozen farmhouses, and the carts are sure to be at the spot where they have been warned to assemble by the time the boats come along with the kegs, and everything is miles

away in hiding before morning. If it is a dark night the *Henriette* makes off again and comes boldly in the next afternoon. If one of the revenue boats, either from here or Studland, happens to come across her before she gets up anchor, there she is—the crew are all asleep with the exception of a man on watch; she is simply waiting to come in when there is light enough to enable her to make her way up the passage.”

James Stansfield was in fact the organizer of the smuggling business carried on at Poole and the adjacent harbours. There was not a farmhouse among the hills to the south of the great sheet of water with which he was not in communication. Winter was the season at which the trade was most busy, for the short summer nights were altogether unsuited for the work; and when the cold weather drove the wild-fowl in for shelter there was splendid shooting, and Ralph and John were able to combine amusement with business and to keep the larder well stocked. The night signals were made from a cleft in the sand-hills half a mile from the house, the light being so arranged that it could not be seen from Brownsea Island, though visible to those on the south side from Studland right away over the hills to Corfe Castle, even to Wareham.

It was shown but for half a minute just as the bells of Poole Church struck nine. At that hour, when the lugger was expected, there was a look-out at the door of every farmhouse, and the moment the light was seen, preparations were made for the landing at the spot of which notice had been given by one or other of the boys on the previous day. Then from quiet little inlets the boats would put off noiselessly directly there was water to float them, for it was only at high tides that the shallows were covered. They would gather in the channel south of Brownsea, where the

boys, and often their father, would be in their boats in readiness, until a momentary glimmer of a light, so placed on board the lugger that it could only be seen from the spot where they were awaiting it, showed the position of the craft and their readiness to discharge cargo.

It was exciting work and profitable, and so well was it managed that, although it had been carried on for some years, no suspicion had ever entered the minds of any of the revenue officers. Sometimes many weeks would elapse between the visits of the lugger, for she was obliged to make her appearance frequently at other ports, to maintain her character as a trader, and was as such well known all along the coast. It was only a year since the *Henriette* had taken the place of another lugger that had previously carried on the work, but had been wrecked on the French coast. She had been the property of the same owner, or rather of the same firm, for Jean Martin, who had been first mate on board the other craft, had invested some of his own money in the *Henriette* and assumed the command. It was noticed at Poole that the *Henriette* used that port more frequently than her predecessor had done, and indeed she not infrequently came in in the daytime with her hold as full as when she had left Nantes. It was on one of these occasions that Jean Martin, on coming up to Netherstock, had a long talk with the squire.

“So you want my daughter Patsey?” the latter said when his visitor had told his story. “Well, it has certainly never entered my mind that any of my girls should marry a Frenchman. I don’t say that I have not heard my boys making a sly joke more than once when the *Henriette* was seen coming in, and I have seen the colour flying up into the girl’s face, but I only looked at it as boys’ nonsense. Still, I don’t say that I am averse to your suit. We may be said

to be partners in this trade of yours, and we both owe each other a good deal. During the last eight years you must have run something like forty cargoes and never lost a keg or a bale, and I doubt if as much could be said for any other craft in the trade. Still, one can't calculate on always being lucky. I don't think anyone would turn traitor when the whole countryside is interested in the matter, and I wouldn't give much for the life of anyone who whispered as much as a word to the revenue people. Still, accidents will take place sometimes. Your father must have done well with the trade, and so have I. At any rate I will leave it in Patsey's hands. I have enough of them and to spare. And, of course, you will be able to bring her over sometimes to pay us a visit here. I think, too, that your offer of taking Leigh over with you helps to decide me in your favour. They are all growing up, and if anything were to put a stop to our business this place would not keep them all; and it would be a great thing for Patsey to have her brother as a companion when you are away. The boy would learn French, and in your father's business would get such a knowledge of the trade with Nantes as should serve him in good stead. At any rate he will learn things that are a good deal more useful to him than those he gets from the curate. Well, you know you will find her in the dairy as usual, you had better go and see what she says to it."

It is probable that Jean Martin had already a shrewd idea of what Patsey's answer would be, and he presently returned to her father radiant. Patsey, indeed, had given her heart to the cheery young sailor, and although it seemed to her a terrible thing that she should go to settle in France, she had the less objection to it inasmuch as the fear that the smuggling would be sooner or later discovered,

and that ruin might fall upon Netherstock, was ever present in her mind and in that of her elder sister. To her brothers engaged in the perilous business, it was regarded as a pleasant excitement, without which their lives would be intolerably dull. It was not that she or they regarded the matter in the light of a crime, for almost everyone on that part of the coast looked upon smuggling as a game in which the wits of those concerned in it were pitted against those of the revenue men.

It brought profit to all concerned, and although many of the gentry found it convenient to express indignation at the damage done to the king's revenue by smuggling, there were none of them who thought it necessary to mention to the coast-guard when by some accident a keg of brandy or a parcel with a few pounds of prime tobacco was found in one of the outhouses. Patsey had suffered more than her sister, being of a more lively imagination, and being filled with alarm and anxiety whenever she knew that her father and the boys were away at night. Then, too, she was very fond of Leigh, and had built many castles in the air as to his future, and the thought that not only would he be with her, but would be in the way of making his road to fortune, was very pleasant to her. She knew that if he remained at Netherstock he would grow up like his brothers; his father might, from time to time, talk of putting him into some business, but she understood his ways, and was certain that nothing would come of it.

Martin had before expressed to her his doubt as to whether her father would consent to her going away with him, but she had no fear on the subject. In his quiet, easy-going way he was fond of his children, and would scarcely put himself out to oppose vehemently anything on

which they had set their hearts. He had, too, more than once said that he wished some of them could be settled elsewhere, for a time of trouble might come, and it would be well to have other homes where some of them could be received.

"Patsey has consented," Jean Martin said joyously as he rejoined the squire.

"Well, that is all right. I think myself that it is for the best. Of course it must be understood that in the matter of religion she is not to be forced or urged in any sort of way, but is to be allowed to follow the religion in which she has been brought up."

"I would in no way press her, sir. We have Protestants in France just as there are Catholics here, though I must admit that there are not many of them in La Vendée. Still, the days when people quarrelled about religion are long since past, and certainly at Nantes there is a Protestant congregation, though away in the country they would be difficult to find. However, I promise you solemnly that I will in no way try to influence her mind nor that of the boy; he will still, of course, look upon England as his home, and I should even oppose any attempt being made to induce him to join our church. You have plenty of Frenchmen in this country, and no question as to their religion arises. It will be just the same with us."

Six weeks later the *Henriette* returned. In her came Monsieur Martin, whose presence as a witness of the ceremony was considered advisable, if not absolutely necessary. He had, too, various documents to sign in presence of the French consul at Southampton, giving his formal consent. The marriage was solemnized there at a small Catholic chapel, and it was repeated at the parish church at Poole,

and the next day the party sailed for Nantes. It was two months before the lugger again came in to Poole. When it returned it took with it the squire and Polly, to whom Monsieur Martin had given a warm invitation to come over to see Patsey in her new home. They found her well and happy. Monsieur Martin's house was in the suburbs of Nantes. It had a large garden, at the end of which, facing another street, stood a pretty little house that had been generally used either as the abode of aged mothers or unmarried sisters of the family, or for an eldest son to take his wife to, but which had now been handed over to Jean and his wife.

This was very pleasant for Patsey, as it united the privacy of a separate abode with the cheerfulness of the family home. She had her own servant, whose excellent cooking, and, above all, whose scrupulous cleanliness and tidiness, astonished her after the rough meals and haphazard arrangements at Netherstock. Whenever she felt dull during Jean's absences, she could run across the garden for a talk with his mother and sister; at meals and in the evening she had Leigh, who spent most of his time at the cellars or in the counting-house of Monsieur Martin, learning for the first time habits of business, and applying himself eagerly to acquiring the language. The squire was put up at Monsieur Martin's, and Polly slept in the one spare room at her sister's, all the party from the pavilion going over to the house to the mid-day meal and supper.

The squire and Polly were much pleased with their visit. It was evident that Patsey had become a prime favourite with her husband's family. Jean's sister Louise was assiduous in teaching her French, and she had already begun to make some progress. Louise and her mother were constantly running across to the little pavilion on

some errand or other, and Patsey spent as much of her time with them as she did in her own house. Jean's absences seldom exceeded ten days, and he generally spent a week at home before sailing again. He had driven her over to stay for three or four days at a small estate of his own some forty miles to the south-east of Nantes, in the heart of what was called the Bocage—a wild country, with thick woods, narrow lanes, high hedges, and scattered villages and farms, much more English in appearance than the country round Nantes. The estate had come to him from an aunt. Everything here was very interesting to Patsey; the costumes of the women and children, the instruments of husbandry, the air of freedom and independence of the people, and the absence of all ceremony, interested and pleased her. She did not understand a single word of the patois spoken to her by the peasants, and which even Jean had some difficulty in following, although he had spent a good deal of his time at the little château during the lifetime of his aunt.

“Should you like to live here when not at sea, Jean?” asked Patsey.

“Yes, I would rather live here than at Nantes. Next to a life at sea I should like one quite in the country. There is plenty to do here; there is the work on the place to look after, there is shooting, there is visiting, and visiting here means something hearty, and not like the formal work in the town. Here no one troubles his head over politics. They may quarrel as they like in Paris, but it does not concern La Vendée. Here the peasants love their masters, and the masters do all in their power for the comfort and happiness of the peasants. It is not as in many other parts of France, where the peasants hate the nobles, and the nobles regard the peasants as dirt under their feet.

Here it is more like what I believe it was in England when you had your troubles, and the tenants followed their lords to battle. At any rate life here would be very preferable to being in business with my father in Nantes. I should never have settled down to that; and as my elder brother seems specially made for that sort of life, fortunately I was able to go my own way, to take to the sea in the lugger and become the carrier of the firm, while taking my share in the general profits."

"How is it that your brother does not live at home? it would seem natural that he should have had the pavilion when he married."

"He likes going his own way," Jean said shortly. "As far as business matters go he and my father are as one, but in other matters they differ widely. Jacques is always talking of reforms and changes, while my father is quite content with things as they are. Jacques has his own circle of friends, and would like to go to Paris as a deputy and to mix himself up in affairs. Though none of us cared for the lady that he chose as his wife, she had money, and there was nothing to say against her personally. None of us ever took to her, and there was a general feeling of relief when it was known that Jacques had taken a house in the business quarter. He looks after the carrying business. Of course my lugger does but a very small proportion of it. We send up large quantities of brandy to Tours, Orleans, and other towns on the Loire, and have dealings with Brittany and Normandy by sea, and with the Gironde. He looks after that part of the business; my father does the buying and directs the counting-house. Though my art is a very inferior one, I have no reason to complain of my share of the profits."

The first eighteen months of Patsey's married life passed

quietly and happily. She could now speak French fluently, and having made several stays at the country château could make herself understood in the patois. Leigh spoke French as well as English. Fortunately he had picked up a little before leaving home, partly from his tutor, partly from endeavouring to talk with French fishermen and sailors who came into Poole. He frequently made trips in the *Henriette*, sometimes to Havre and Rouen, at others to Bordeaux. He had grown much, and was now a very strong active lad. He got on very well with Monsieur Martin, but kept as much apart as he could from his eldest son, for whom he felt a deep personal dislike, and who had always disapproved of Jean's marriage to an Englishwoman. Jacques Martin was the strongest contrast to his brother. He was methodical and sententious, expressed his opinion on all subjects with the air of a man whose judgment was infallible, and was an ardent disciple of Voltaire and Rousseau. It was very seldom that he entered his father's house, where his opinions on religious subjects shocked and horrified his mother and sister. He lived with an entirely different set, and spent most of his time at the clubs, which, in imitation of those of Paris, had sprung up all over the country.

"What is all the excitement about, Jean?" Leigh asked his brother-in-law one evening. "There are always fellows standing on casks or bales of timber along the wharf shouting and waving their arms about, and sometimes reading letters or printed papers, and then those who listen to them shout and throw up their caps, and get into a tremendous state of excitement."

"They are telling the others what is being done at the Assembly."

"And what are they doing there, Jean?"

"They are turning things upside down."

“And is that good?”

“Well, there is no doubt that things are not as well managed as they might be, and that there is a great deal of distress and misery. In some parts of France the taxation has been very heavy, and the extravagance of the court has excited an immense deal of anger. It is not the fault of the present king, who is a quiet fellow, and does not care for show or pageants, but it is rather the fault of the kings who preceded him, especially of Louis XIV., who was a great monarch, no doubt, but a very expensive one to his subjects, and whose wars cost an enormous sum. You see, it is not in France as it is with you. The nobles here have great power. Their tenants and serfs—for they are still nothing but serfs—are at the mercy of their lords, who may flog them and throw them into prison almost at their pleasure, and will grind the last sou out of them that they may cut a good figure at court.

“In this part of France things are more as they are in England. The nobles and seigneurs are like your country gentlemen; they live in their châteaux, they mix with their people and take an interest in them, they go to their fêtes, and the ladies visit the sick, and in all respects they live as do your country squires; paying a visit for a few weeks each year to Paris, and spending the rest of their time on their estates. But it is not from the country that the members of the Assembly who are the most urgent for reforms and violent in their speech come, but from the towns. There were two writers, Voltaire and Rousseau, who have done enormous mischief. Both of them perceived that the state of things was wrong, but they went to extremes, made fun of the church, and attacked institutions of all sorts. Their writings are read by everyone, and have shaken people’s faith in God and in all things as they are.

"I do not say that much improvement could not be made, but it will never be made by sudden and great changes, nor by men such as those who are gradually gaining the upper hand in the Assembly. The people ought to have a much stronger voice than they have in their own taxation. They see that in England the ministers and parliament manage everything, and that the king—although his influence goes for a good deal, and he can change his ministers as often as he likes—must yet bow to the voice of parliament. I think that that is reasonable; but when it comes to a parliament, composed largely of mere agitators and spouters, I, for my part, would rather be ruled by a king."

"But what is it that these people want, Jean?"

"I do not think they know in the least themselves, beyond the fact that they want all the power; that they want to destroy the nobility, overthrow the church, and lay hands on the property of all who are more wealthy than themselves. Naturally the lowest classes of the towns, who are altogether ignorant, believe that by supporting these men, and by pulling down all above them, it would no longer be necessary to work. They want to divide the estates of the nobles, take a share of the wealth of the traders and of the better class of all sorts, in fact they would turn everything topsy-turvy, render the poor all-powerful, and tread all that is good and noble under their feet. The consequence is, that the king is virtually a prisoner in the hands of the mob of Paris, the nobles and better classes are leaving the country, thousands of these have already been massacred, and no one can say how matters will end.

"Here in Nantes there is, as you see, a feeling of excitement and unrest, and though as yet there has been no violence, no one could venture to predict what may take place if the moderate men in the Assembly are outvoted

by the extremists, and all power falls into the hands of the latter. But I still hope that common sense will prevail in the long run. I regard the present as a temporary madness, and trust that France will come to her senses, and that we shall have the satisfaction of seeing the scoundrels, who are now the leaders of the mob of Paris, receive the punishment they deserve. However, as far as we are concerned I have no uneasiness, for if troubles break out at Nantes we can retire to my château in the thickest and most wooded part of La Vendée, where there is no fear that the peasants will ever rise against their masters."

CHAPTER II.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLES.

THINGS are getting more and more serious, Patsey," said Jean one evening. "I don't know what will come of it, the excitement is spreading here, and there can be no doubt that there will be very serious troubles ere long. The greater portion of the people here are with the Assembly, and approve of all these decrees against the priests and the persecution of the better classes. You know what has taken place in Paris, and I fear that it will be repeated here. We are split up. My father, dear good man, thinks that he has only to attend to his business and to express no opinion whatever about public affairs, and that the storm will pass quietly over his head. My brother has thrown himself heart and soul—that is to say, as far as he has a heart to throw—into what he calls the cause of the people, and which I consider to be the cause of

revolution, of confiscation, of irreligion, and abomination generally.

“I am told that my name has freely been mentioned in his club as that of a dangerous man, with opinions contrary to the public good. I hear, too, that that brother of mine was there at the time, and that he got up and said that in a case like this his voice must be silent, that true patriots place their country before all things, and then affected to speak mildly in my favour, but at the same time doing me as much harm as he could. I believe the fellow is capable of denouncing his own father. From the Bocage I hear that the whole country is in confusion. The people, of course, side with their priests; the nobles and land-owners are naturally royalists, and are furious that the king should be held in what is practically subjection by men of low degree, and who, although they may have some virtuous men among them, have also sanguinary scoundrels who gradually gain in power and will soon be supreme.

“They, however, can do nothing at present. The peasants know nothing about the king, to them he is a mere name; but this persecution of their priests angers them greatly; and if, as is said, orders have been given to raise an army, and to drag men away from their homes whether they like to go or not, you may be sure that ere long there will be trouble there. Now you see, dear, I am a sort of double character. At sea I am Captain Jean Martin, a peaceful trader with, as you know, but little regard for the revenue laws of your country. On the other hand, in La Vendée I am Monsieur Jean Martin, a landed proprietor and on friendly terms with all the nobles and gentry in my neighbourhood. It is evident that I cannot continue to play this double part; already great numbers of arrests have been made here, and the prisons are half-full. I hear that a commissioner

from the Assembly is expected here shortly, to try these suspects, as they are called, and from what we know already we may be sure that there will be little mercy shown.

"They are almost all people of substance, and the people, as they call themselves, are on principle opposed to men of substance. Now, if I remain here I have no doubt that I shall be denounced in a very short time, and to be denounced is to be thrown into prison, and to be thrown into prison is equivalent to being murdered. I have no doubt, Patsey, that you would share my fate; the fact that you are an Englishwoman was among the accusations brought against me in the club, and although, so far as I can see, the majority of these scoundrels have no religion whatever, they venture to make it a matter of complaint that you are a Protestant. I have seen this coming on for some time, and must now make my choice: either I must take you and the child over to England and leave you there with your father until these troubles are over, while I must myself go down and look after my tenantry and bear my share in whatever comes, or you must go down there with me."

"Certainly I will go down with you, Jean. It is your home, and whatever dangers may come I will share them with you. It would be agony to be in England and to know nothing of what is passing here and what danger might be threatening you. We took each other for better or worse, Jean, and the greater danger you may be in, the more it will be my duty to be by your side. I should be very happy down at the château, more happy than I have been here with you for some time past, for one cannot but be very anxious when one sees one's friends thrown into prison and knows that you are opposed to all these things, and that it may be your turn next. Nothing would persuade me to leave you."

“Very well, wife, so be it. I am sure that there at least we shall be safe. It is only in the towns that these rascals are dangerous, and in a country like ours there is little fear that the knaves will venture to interfere when they see that they are stirring up a nest of hornets. They have plenty of work to satisfy even their taste for confiscation and murder in the large towns; there is an army gathering on the frontier, and they will have their hands full ere long. And now about Leigh. My brother has always shown a dislike for him, and as it is certain that he cannot remain here he must either return to England or go with us.”

“I am sure that he would choose to go with us, Jean. You say yourself that he talks French like a native now, and although he has often told me that he would never settle in France—for naturally he is as horrified as I am with the doings in Paris and the other great towns—still, I am sure that he would choose to remain with us now. You see he is strong and active, and has made so many trips with you that he is almost a sailor. He is within a few months of sixteen, and of late he has several times said to me that he would like to go some long voyages and have some adventures before settling down in business in England as an agent of your house.”

“I should like to have him with us,” Jean said heartily. “In the first place, he is a lad after my own heart, full of life and go, and already strong enough to take his own part; in the next place, although I hope for the best, a man can never say exactly what will take place. I may be away at times, and should be glad to know that you had a protector; and if he is willing to go, I shall be more than willing to have him. Then, too, it would be useful to have someone whom one could trust to carry messages. My idea is that I shall not leave the lugger here, for if I am denounced it

would certainly be seized. Pierre Lefaux, my mate, is a shrewd as well as a faithful fellow; I shall appoint him captain. I shall tell him to leave here at once and employ the lugger in coasting voyages, making Bordeaux his headquarters, and taking what freights he can get between that town and Rochelle, Brest, or other ports on this coast.

“So long as he does not return here he might even take wines across to England or brandy from Charente. He knows his business well, and as long as we are at peace with England, trade will still go on. The best thing would be for him to be at Bordeaux once every fortnight or three weeks, so that we shall know where to find him. I have a great friend at Bordeaux, and shall get him to have the lugger registered in his name, and give him a receipt for her purchase money, so that in case the people here learn that she is trading at Bordeaux, he will be able to prove that she is his own property. Then, if the very worst should come, which I cannot bring myself to believe, there will be a means of escape for us all to England. She will be sailing there in two or three days. I have fifty thousand francs lying in my father’s hands, I shall send that over by Lefaux, and instruct him to ask your father to go with him to the bank at Poole and pay the money in to my account. Then if we should have to leave France, we shall have that to fall back upon, and the lugger. I should, of course, transfer her to the English flag, and have no doubt that we should be able to get on very fairly. So you see I am preparing for all contingencies, Patsey.”

“It seems very dreadful that the country should be in such a state, Jean.”

“It is dreadful, and I am afraid that things have by no means got to the worst yet. Ah, here comes Leigh! After supper I shall go in and have a talk with my father. I have

very little hope of having much success with him, but at least, when he sees the steps that I am taking, it cannot but make him think seriously of his own position, and that of my mother and sisters."

Leigh was delighted when he heard Jean's proposal. His own position had been unpleasant of late. He had long since ceased to go to Jacques Martin, for the dislike between them was mutual, and do what he would, he failed to give satisfaction. And of late, even in Monsieur Martin's cellars and storehouses he had met with a good deal of unpleasantness, and would have met with more had it not been that he had on one occasion knocked down one of the chief clerks who had sworn at him for some trifling act of carelessness. As the clerk knew that the merchant would have been very angry at the insult he had offered to Leigh, he had not ventured to make a complaint, but in many ways he had been able to cause numberless petty annoyances. Many of the others were inclined to follow his lead, and would have done so more openly, were it not that they held in respect Leigh's strength, and readiness in the science they called *le boxe*.

The talk that there might be troubles in La Vendée heightened his satisfaction at leaving Nantes and going down to stay in the country. The thought of a life spent at Poole or Weymouth as a wine merchant and agent of the house of Martin had for some time past been unpleasant to him. The feeling of general unrest that prevailed in France had communicated itself to him, and he thought possibly that something might occur which would change the current of his life and lead to one more suited to his natural activity and energy.

"You had better pack up quietly to-morrow," Jean said to his wife after his return from his father's; "if there

were any suspicion that I was thinking of going away it might bring matters to a head. I will get the lugger's boat down to the wharf, and four sailors shall come up here and take the boxes down in one of the hand-carts with a tarpaulin thrown over them. I will arrange for a cart and a carriage to be waiting for us on the other side of the river.

"There is no moving my father; he cannot persuade himself that a man who takes no part in politics, and goes about his business quietly, can be in any danger. He has, however, at my mother's entreaty, agreed for the present to cease buying, and to diminish his stock as far as possible, and send the money, as fast as he realizes it, across to England. He says, too, that he will, if things get worse, send her and my sister to England. I promised him that your father would find them a house, and see that they were settled comfortably there for a time. He would not believe that Jacques could have been at the club when I was denounced, without defending me, for although himself greatly opposed to the doings in Paris, and annoyed at the line Jacques has taken up, he thought that there was at least this advantage in it, that in case of troubles coming here he would have sufficient influence to prevent our being in any way molested. However, there can be no question that I have to some extent alarmed him, and he agreed not only to draw to-morrow my fifty thousand francs from his caisse, but to send over with it a hundred thousand francs of his own. Fortunately he can do this without Jacques knowing anything about it, for although Jacques and I have both a share in the business he has always kept the management of the money matters in his own hands. So that is settled as far as it can be settled. Fortunately the club does not meet this evening, so there is no fear of a demand being

made by it for my arrest to-morrow. I have a friend who belongs to it—not, I think, because he at all agrees with its views, but because, like many others, he deems it prudent to appear to do so. It was from him that I heard what had passed there, and he promised to give me warning of anything that might be said or done against me. I shall go down to the lugger early, and remain on board all day seeing to the stowage of the cargo we are taking on board, so that no suspicion can arise that I am thinking of leaving for the country.”

The next evening the party started by unfrequented streets for the quay, the nurse carrying the child, now three months old. The boxes had gone half an hour before. It was nearly ten o'clock, and the quays were deserted. Monsieur Martin had himself gone down in the afternoon with the money to the lugger and handed it over to Jean, and had a long talk with him and Pierre Lefaux, to whom Jean had also intrusted letters from himself and Patsey to the squire.

As soon as the party had taken their seats in the boat it was rowed two miles up the river to a point where there was a ferry across to a road leading into the heart of La Vendée. Here a light waggon and a carriage were waiting. The luggage was transferred to the former, and, after a hearty farewell to Pierre Lefaux, who had himself come in charge of the boat, they started on their journey, and arrived at the château at nine o'clock in the morning, to the surprise of the man and woman in charge of it.

“Here we are safe,” Jean said as they alighted from the carriage. “It would take nothing short of an army to fight its way through these woods and lanes, and if the Assembly try to interfere with us they will find it a much easier thing to pull down the throne of France than to subdue La Vendée.”

The news that the master had come down, and that he was going for a time to live among them, spread rapidly, and in the course of the day some fifteen of the tenants came in to pay their respects, few of them arriving without some little offering in the way of game, poultry, butter, or other produce.

"Our larder is full enough for us to stand a siege," Patsey said, laughing, "and I know that we have a good stock of wine in the cellar, Jean."

"Yes, and of cider too. When the tenants are in any difficulty about paying their rents, I am always willing to take it out in wine or cider, for my father deals in both, and therefore it is as good as money; but I have not sent any to Nantes for the past two or three years, and, as you say, the cellars are as full as they can hold. To-morrow, Leigh, we will ride over and call upon some of our neighbours, to hear the last news, for the Bocage is as far away from Nantes as if it were on the other side of France, and we hear only vague rumours of what is going on here."

The ride was a delightful one to Leigh. He had only once visited the château before, and then only for a day or two. The wild country, with its deep lanes, its thick high hedges, its woods and copses, was all new to him, for the country round his English home was for the most part bare and open. Some of the peasants carried guns over their shoulders, and looked as if accustomed to use them.

"Very few of them possess guns," Jean Martin remarked, "and that they should carry them shows how disturbed a state of mind all these people are in. They know that their priests may be arrested and carried off at any moment; and no doubt the report that an order has been issued to raise thirty thousand men throughout France, and that

every town and village has to furnish its quota, has stirred them up even more effectually. I don't suppose that many of them think that the authorities will really try to drag men off against their will, but the possibility is quite enough to inflame their minds."

At the very first house they visited they received from the owner ample confirmation of Jean's views.

"There have been continual fracas between the peasants and the military," he said, "over the attempts of the latter to arrest the priests. They can scarcely be called fights, for it has not come to that; but as soon as the peasants hear that the gendarmes are coming, they send the priest into the wood, and gather in such force that the gendarmes are glad enough to ride away unharmed. Of course until we see that the peasants are really in earnest and intend to fight to the last, it would be madness for any of us to take any part in the matter, for we should be risking not only life but the fortunes of our families, and maybe their lives too. You must remember, moreover, that already a great number of the landed proprietors have either been murdered or imprisoned in Paris, or are fugitives beyond the frontier."

"If the peasants would fight," Jean Martin said, "it might not be a bad thing that there are so few whom they could regard as their natural leaders. If there are only a few leaders they may act together harmoniously, or each operate in his own district, but with a number of men of the same rank, or nearly of the same rank, each would have his own ideas as to what should be done, and there would be jealousy and discord."

"That is true," the other replied. "Of course if this were an open country it would be necessary, to give us a chance of success, that some sort of discipline should be

established, and none could persuade the peasants to submit to discipline except their own lords. But in a country like this, discipline is of comparatively little importance; and it is well that it is so, for though I believe that the peasants would fight to the death rather than submit to be dragged away by force from their homes, they will never keep together for any time."

"I am afraid that that will be the case. We must hope that it will not come to fighting, but if it does it will take a large force to conquer La Vendée."

"What has brought you down here, Monsieur Martin?"

"It was not safe for me to stay longer in Nantes. If I think a thing I say it, and as I don't think well of what is being done in Paris, I have not been in the habit of saying flattering things about the men there. In fact I have been denounced, and as there is still room for a few more in the prisons, I should have had a cell placed at my disposal if I had remained there many more hours, so I thought that I should be safer down here till there was some change in the state of affairs."

"And you brought madame down with you?"

"Assuredly; I had only the choice open to me of sending her across to England, and of making my home there, or of coming here. If there had been no prospect of trouble here I might have joined the army of our countrymen who are in exile; but as, from all I heard, La Vendée was ready to take up arms, I determined to come here, partly because, had I left the country, my estates here would have been confiscated, partly because I should like to strike a blow myself at these tyrants of Paris, who seem bent on destroying the whole of the aristocracy of France, of wiping out the middle classes, and dividing the land and all else among the scum of the towns."

Three or four months passed quietly. There were occasional skirmishes between the peasants and parties of troops in search of priests who refused to obey the orders of the Assembly. At Nantes, the work of carrying out mock trials, and executing those of the better classes who had been swept into the prisons, went on steadily. From time to time a message came to Jean from his father saying that he had carried out his determination to lessen his stocks, and that he had sent considerable sums of money across the Channel. So far he had not been molested, but he saw that the public madness was increasing, and the passion for blood ever growing. Then came the news of the execution of the king, which sent a thrill of horror through the loyal province. Shortly afterwards it was known that the decree for the raising of men was to be enforced, and that commissioners had already arrived at Saumur with a considerable force that would be employed if necessary, but that the process of drawing the names of those who were to go was to be carried out by the local authorities assisted by the national guards of the towns.

During the winter things had gone on quietly at the château. There had been but little visiting, for the terrible events passing in Paris and in all the large towns, and the uncertainty about the future, had cast so deep a gloom over the country that none thought of pleasure, or even of cheerful intercourse with their neighbours. Many of the gentry, too, had given up all hope, and had made their way down to the coast and succeeded in obtaining a passage in smuggling craft, or even in fishing-boats, to England. Jean Martin and Leigh had spent much of their time in shooting. Game was abundant, and as so many of the châteaux were shut up, they had a wide range of country open to them for sport. Once or twice they

succeeded in bringing home a wild boar. Wolves had multiplied in the forests, for during the last three years the regular hunts in which all the gentry took part had been abandoned, and the animals had grown fearless. One day, soon after the news of the king's death had been received, Jean, who had ridden over to Saumur on business, brought back the news that war had been declared with England.

"It would have made a good deal of difference to me," he said, "if I had still been on board the lugger, for of course there would be an end to all legitimate trade. However, no doubt I should have managed to run a cargo sometimes, for they will want brandy and tobacco all the more when regular trade is at an end, and prices, you may be sure, will go up. I have no doubt, too, that there will be a brisk business in carrying emigrants over. Still, of course the danger would be very much greater. Hitherto we have only had the revenue cutters and the coast-guards to be afraid of, now every vessel of war would be an enemy."

As during their expeditions they were generally accompanied by half a dozen peasants, who acted as beaters, Leigh had come to understand the patois, and to some extent to speak it, and he often paid visits to the houses of the principal tenants of the estate, who not only welcomed him as the brother of their mistress, but soon came to like him for himself, and were amused by his high spirits, his readiness to be pleased with everything, and his talk to them of the little-known country across the water.

It was evident from the manner in which the drawing for the conscription was spoken of that it would not be carried out without a strong resistance. Sunday, the tenth of March, had been fixed for the drawing, and as the day approached, the peasants became more and more determined

that they would not permit themselves to be dragged away from their homes. Three days before, a party of the tenants, together with some from adjoining estates, had come up to the château. Jean Martin at once came out to them.

"We have come, monsieur, to ask if you will lead us. We are determined that we will not be carried off like sheep."

"There you are right," Jean said; "but although I shall be ready to do my share of fighting, I do not wish to be a leader. In the first place, there are many gentlemen of far larger possessions and of higher rank than myself, who would naturally be your leaders. There is the Marquis de Lescure at Clisson, and with him are several other noble gentlemen, among them Henri de la Rochejaquelein—he is a cavalry officer. His family have emigrated, but he has remained here on his estates. Then, too, you have many other military officers who have served. There is Monsieur de Bonchamp, Monsieur d'Elbée, and Monsieur Dommaigne, all of whom have served in the army. If the insurrection becomes general, I shall head my own tenants and join the force under some chosen commander, but I shall not appear as a leader. Not only am I altogether ignorant of military affairs, but were it known in Nantes that I was prominent in the rising, they would undoubtedly avenge themselves upon my relations there."

It was known that artillery and gendarmes had been gathered in all the towns of La Vendée. Two days before that appointed for the drawing, Jean said to Leigh, "I shall ride to-morrow to the castle of Clisson. I know Monsieur de Lescure; he has wide influence, and is known to be a devoted royalist, and to have several royalist refugees now at his house. I shall be able to learn from

him whether his intention is to take part in the insurrection. It is a long ride, and I shall not return until to-morrow; if you like, you can ride north to St. Florent. If there should be any tumult, I charge you not to take any part in it; you had better leave your horse at some cabaret on this side of the town, and go in on foot. It is possible that there will be no trouble there, for they are sure to have made preparations against it, and it is more likely that there will be disturbances at smaller places. Still, it will be interesting to mark the attitude of the peasants.

"You see, if there is to be a war, it is their war. The gentlemen here would have fought for the king had there been a shadow of a prospect of success, and had he given the smallest encouragement to his friends to rally to his support. They might even have fought against the disturbance of the clergy, but they would have had no followers. The peasants cared but little for the king, and though they did care enough for the priests to aid them to escape, they did not care enough to give battle for them. They are now going to fight for their own cause, and for their own liberty. They have to show us that they are in earnest about it before we join them. If they are in earnest, we ought to be successful. We ought to be able to put a hundred thousand men in arms, and in such a country as this we should be able to defy any force that the Convention can send against us, and to maintain the right of La Vendée to hold itself aloof from the doings of the rest of France.

"But, as I said, until we know that they are really in earnest, we cannot afford to throw in our lot with them; so if you go to St. Florent keep well away from the point where the drawing is to take place. Watch affairs from a distance. I have little doubt that those who go will go

with the determination of defending themselves, but whether they will do so will depend upon whether there is one among them energetic enough to take the lead; that is always the difficulty in such matters. If there is a fight, we must, as I say, simply watch it; it is at present no affair of ours. If it begins, we shall all have our work before us, plenty of it, and plenty of danger and excitement, but for the present we have to act as spectators."

It was a ride of fifteen miles to St. Florent, and although Leigh had twice during the winter ridden there with Jean, he had some difficulty in finding his way through the winding roads and numerous lanes along which he had to pass. During the early part of the ride he met with but few people on the way; the church bells were ringing as usual, and there was nothing to show that any trouble was impending; but when he arrived within two or three miles of the town, he overtook little groups of peasants walking in that direction. Some of them, he saw, carried pitchforks, the rest had stout cudgels. St. Florent stood on the Loire, and in an open space in the centre of the town the authorities were gathered. Behind them was a force of gendarmes, and in the middle of their line stood a cannon.

Leigh had, as Jean had told him, left his horse outside the town, and now took up his place with a number of townspeople on one side of the square. As the peasants arrived, they clustered together at the end of the street, waiting for the hour to strike at which the drawing was to begin. A few minutes before the clock struck, some of the gendarmes left the group in the centre of the square and advanced to the peasants. They were headed by an officer, who, as he came up, exclaimed, "What do you mean by coming here with pitchforks? Lay them down at once!"

There was a low murmur among the peasants.

"Follow me!" he said to his men; and, walking up to one of the men carrying a pitchfork, he said, "I arrest you in the name of the Republic."

In an instant a young man standing next to the one he had seized sprang forward and struck the officer to the ground with his cudgel.

"Follow me!" he shouted. "Make for the gun!"

With a cheer the peasants rushed forward, overthrowing the gendarmes as they went. The municipal authorities, after hesitating for a moment, took to their heels in the most undignified manner. The gun had not been loaded, the gendarmes round it, seeing that they were greatly outnumbered, followed their example, and the peasants with exultant shouts seized the cannon, and then, scattering, chased the gendarmes out of the town. Never was a more speedy and bloodless victory. Headed by their leader, whose name was René Forêt, the peasants went to the municipality, broke open the doors, took possession of the arms stored there, collected all the papers they could find, and made a great bonfire with them in the centre of the square; then, without harming anyone or doing the slightest mischief, they left the town and scattered to their homes in the Bocage.

Leigh waited until all was over, returned to the cabaret where he had left his horse, and rode on. Passing through the little town of Pin, a powerful-looking man some thirty-five years old, with a quiet manner, broad forehead, and intelligent face, stepped up to him.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said, "but you have come from St. Florent?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Has aught happened there?"



M 572

"FOLLOW ME!" HE SHOUTED. "MAKE FOR THE GUN!"



"Yes, the peasants attacked the gendarmes, who fled, leaving their cannon behind them. The peasants took what arms there were in the municipality, and made a bonfire of the papers; they then, without doing any damage, dispersed to their homes."

"They have done well," the man said, "they have made a beginning. My name, monsieur, is Cathelineau, my business, so far, has been that of a hawker; I am well known in this part of the country. Maybe, sir, you will hear my name again, for henceforth I am an insurgent. We have borne this tyranny of the butchers in Paris too long, and the time has come when we must either free ourselves of it or die. You belong to another class, but methinks that when you see that we are in earnest, you will join us."

"I doubt not that we shall," Leigh said. "I am but a lad yet, but I hope that when the time comes I shall do my part."

The man lifted his hat and moved off, and Leigh rode forward again. He was struck with the earnest manner of the man. He had spoken calmly and without excitement, expressed himself well, and had the air of a man who, having determined upon a thing, would carry it through.

"I expect I shall hear of him again," he said to himself. "A man like that, travelling round the country, no doubt has a deal of influence; he is just the sort of man the peasants would follow, indeed, as it seems to me, that anyone might follow."

It was late in the afternoon when he arrived home and told his sister what he had witnessed.

"I am not surprised, Leigh," she said. "If I were a man I would take up arms too. There must be an end to what is going on. Thousands have been murdered in Paris, men and women, and at least as many more in the other

great towns. If this goes on, not only the nobles and gentry, but the middle class of France will all disappear, and these blood-stained monsters will, I suppose, set to to kill each other. I feel half French now, Leigh, and it is almost too awful to think of. It seems to me that the only hope is that the peasants, not only of the Bocage, but of all Poitou, Anjou, and Brittany, may rise, be joined by those of other parts, and march upon the towns, destroy them altogether, and kill all who have been concerned in these doings."

"That would be pretty sweeping, Patsey," Leigh laughed. "But you know I hate them as much as you do, and though I don't feel a bit French, I would certainly do all that I could against them, just as one would kill wild beasts who go about tearing people to pieces. It is no odds to me whether the men, women, and children they kill are French or English, one wants to put a stop to their killing."

"I wish now that I had not brought you out with me, Leigh."

"In the first place, Patsey, I deny altogether that you did bring me out, Jean brought me out; and in the next place, I don't see why you should be sorry. I would not miss all this excitement for anything. Besides, I have learned to talk French well, and something of the business of a wine merchant. I can't be taken in by having common spirit a year or two old passed off on me as the finest from Charente, or a common claret for a choice brand. All that is useful, even if I do not become a wine merchant. At any rate it is more useful than stopping at Netherstock, where I should have learned nothing except a little more Latin and Greek."

"Yes, but you may be killed, Leigh."

"Well, I suppose if I had stayed at home and got a

commission in the army or a midshipman's berth in the navy I might have been killed, and if I had my choice I would much rather be killed in fighting against people who murder women and children who have committed no crime whatever, than in fighting soldiers or sailors of another nation, who may be just as honest fellows as we are."

"I cannot argue with you, Leigh, but if anything happens to you I shall blame myself all my life."

"That would be foolish," Leigh said. "It is funny what foolish ideas women have. You could not have foreseen what was coming when you came over here, and you thought that it would be a good thing for me to accompany you for a time. You did what you thought was best, and which I think was best. Well, if it doesn't turn out just what we expected, you cannot blame yourself for that. Why, if you were to ask me to come for a walk, and a tree fell on me as we were going along and killed me, you would hardly blame yourself because you asked me to come; and this is just the same. At any rate, if I do get killed, which I don't mean to be if I can help it, there is no one else who will take it very much to heart except yourself. There are plenty of them at home, and now that I have been away nearly two years, they must almost have forgotten my existence."

"I consider you a very foolish boy," Patsey said gravely. "You talk a great deal too much nonsense."

"Very well, Patsey, abuse is not argument, and almost every word that you have said applies equally well to your folly in leaving a comfortable home in a quiet country to come to such a dangerous place as this. Now I hope that supper is ready, for I am as hungry as a hunter."

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST SUCCESSES.

THE next morning at twelve o'clock Jean Martin reached home.

"The war has begun," he said as he leaped from his horse. "Henri de la Rochejaquelein has accepted the leadership of the peasants at Clisson. Lescure would have joined also, but Henri pointed out to him that it would be better not to compromise his family until it was certain that the insurrection would become general. The young count was starting just as I got to the château. He is a splendid young fellow, full of enthusiasm, and burning to avenge the misfortunes that have fallen upon his family. A peasant had arrived the evening before with a message from his aunt, who lives farther to the south. He brought news that the chevalier de Charette, formerly a lieutenant in the navy, and a strong Royalist, who had escaped the massacres at Paris and was living quietly on his estate near Mache-coul, had been asked several times by the peasants in his neighbourhood to take the command, and had accepted it, and that the rising was so formidable there that it was certain the authorities in that part of Poitou would not succeed in enforcing the conscription.

"I have told Lescure that I shall be prepared to join as soon as there is a general movement here, but that I should attach myself to whoever took the direction of affairs in this part, for that in the first place I knew nothing of war, and in the second place I have resided here so small a portion of my time that I am scarcely known save to my own tenants. After our meal we will ride round and see how

they are off for arms and powder, that is our great weakness. I am afraid, taking the whole country round, that not one man in twenty possesses a gun."

This indeed was found to be the case as far as those on the estate were concerned; the men themselves, however, seemed to think little of this.

"We will take them from the Blues," several of them said confidently. "It does not matter a bit; they will only have time to fire one volley in these lanes of ours, and then we shall be among them, and a pike or pitchfork is just as good at close quarters as a bayonet."

That the whole country was astir was evident from the fact that the sound of the church bells rose from the woods in all directions. All work was suspended, and the peasants flocked into the little villages to hear the news that was brought in from several directions. Cathelineau had in the course of the night gathered a party of twenty-seven men, who at daybreak had started out from Pin, setting the church bells ringing in the villages through which they passed, until a hundred men, armed for the most part with pitchforks and stakes, had gathered round him. Then he boldly attacked the château of Tallais, garrisoned by a hundred and fifty soldiers, having with them a cannon. This was fired, but the shot passed over the peasants' heads, and with a shout they dashed forward, and the soldiers of the republic threw away their arms and fled. Thus Cathelineau's followers became possessed of firearms, some horses, and, to their great delight, a cannon.

Their leader did not waste a moment, but marched at once against Chemillé, his force increasing at every moment as the men flocked in from the villages. There were at Chemillé two hundred soldiers with three guns, but some

of the fugitives from Tallais had already arrived there bringing news of the desperate fury with which the peasants had attacked them, and at the sight of the throng approaching with their captured cannon the garrison lost heart altogether and bolted, leaving their three cannon, their ammunition, and the greater portion of their muskets behind them. The news spread with incredible rapidity. From each village they passed through boys were despatched as messengers, and their tidings were taken on by fresh relays. By the afternoon all the country for thirty miles round knew that Cathelineau had captured Tallais and Chemillé, and was in possession of a quantity of arms and four cannon.

From St. Florent came the news that early in the morning a party of Republican soldiers had endeavoured to arrest Forêt, who led the rising on the previous day, but that he had obtained word of their approach, and, setting the church bells ringing, had collected a force and had beaten back those who came in search of him. Close by a detachment of National Guards from Chollet had visited the château of Maulevrier. The proprietor was absent, but they carried off twelve cannon which had been kept as family relics. The gamekeeper, Nicholas Stofflet, who was in charge of the estate, had served sixteen years in the army. He was a man of great strength, courage, and sagacity, and, furious at the theft of his master's cannon, had gathered the peasantry round and was already at the head of two hundred men.

"Things go on apace, Patsey," Jean Martin said as they sat by the fire that evening. "We only know what is happening within some twenty or thirty miles of us, but if the spirit shown here exists throughout Poitou and Anjou, there can be no doubt that in a very short time the

insurrection will be general. This Cathelineau, by their description, must be a man of no ordinary ability, and he has lost no time in showing his energy. For myself, I care not in the least what is the rank of my leader. Here in La Vendée there is no broad line between the seigneurs, the tenants, and the peasantry; at all rustic fêtes they mix on equal terms. The seigneurs set the example by dancing with the peasant girls, and their wives and daughters do not disdain to do the same with tenants or peasantry; they attend the marriages and all holiday festivities, are foremost in giving aid, and in showing kindness in cases of distress or illness; and I feel sure that if they found in a man like Cathelineau a genius for command they would follow him as readily as one of their own rank."

On the fourteenth the news came that the bands of Stofflet and Forêt had with others joined that of Cathelineau. Jean Martin hesitated no longer.

"The war has fairly begun," he said. "I shall be off to-morrow morning. If Cathelineau is defeated we shall have the Republicans devastating the whole country, and massacring women and children as they did last August after a rising for the protection of the priests; therefore I shall be fighting now in defence of our lives and home, wife."

"I would not keep you at home, Jean; I think it is the duty of every man to join in the defence against these wretches. I know that no mercy will be shown by them if they conquer us. But you will not take Leigh with you, surely?"

Leigh uttered an exclamation.

"Leigh must choose for himself," Jean said quietly. "He is not French, and would have no concern in the matter beyond that of humanity were it not that you are here; but at present our home is his, your life and his also are

involved if we are beaten. He is young to fight, but there will doubtless be many others no older and probably much less strong than he is. Moreover, if I should be killed it is he who must bear you the news, and must arrange with you your plans and act as your protector. I do not say that I should advise your leaving the château directly, but if the Republicans come this way it will be no place for you, and I should say that it would be vastly better that you should at once endeavour to cross to England. There are five thousand francs in gold in my bureau, which are worth three or four times their value in assignats, and should, if you can gain the coast, be amply sufficient to procure a passage for you to England. Do not weep, dear, it is necessary to leave you, on an undertaking of this kind, prepared for whatever may happen. At present the risk is very small; as we have heard, the fury of the peasants has struck such consternation into the National Guards and newly-raised soldiers that they will not await their onslaught, and it will not be until the Convention becomes aware of the really serious nature of the storm they have raised that there will be any hard fighting. Still, even in a petty skirmish men fall, and it is right that before I go we should arrange as to what course you had best pursue in case of my death. From the first, when we came here we did so with our eyes open; if we had merely sought safety we should have gone to England. We came here partly because it is my home, and therefore my proper place, and partly because, in case La Vendée rose against these executioners of Paris, every man of honour and loyalty should aid in the good cause."

"I know, Jean, and I would not keep you back."

"The struggle has begun, and if the Republicans conquer La Vendée, we know how awful will be the persecutions,

what thousands of victims will be slaughtered. Our only hope is in victory; and at any rate those who die on the battle-field will be happy in comparison with those who fall into the hands of the Blues."

"You wish to go, Leigh?"

"Certainly I do," the lad said. "I think that everyone strong enough to carry arms in La Vendée ought to join and do his best. I can shoot better than most of the peasantry, not one in twenty of whom has ever had a gun in his hands, and I am sure that I am as strong as most of them. Besides, if I had been at home I should, now the war has begun, have tried to get a commission and to fight the French—I mean the people who govern France at present—and in fighting them here I am only doing what thousands of Englishmen will be doing elsewhere."

"Very well, Leigh, then you shall go with Jean. I shall certainly be glad to know you are together, so that if one is wounded or ill the other can look after him and bring him here. I shall do the best I can while you are away."

"I think that we shall soon be back again, and that we shall be constantly seeing you," Jean said. "You may be sure that the peasants will not keep the field. They will gather and fight, and, win or lose, they will then scatter to their homes again until the church bells call them out to repel a fresh attack of the enemy; that is our real weakness, there will never be any discipline, never any common aim. If all the peasants in the west would join in a great effort and march on Paris, I believe that the peasantry of the departments through which they pass would join us; it would only be the National Guards of the towns and the new levies that we should have to meet, and I believe that we might take Paris, crush the scum of the faubourgs, and hang every member of the Convention. But they will

never do it; it will be a war of defence only, and a war so carried out must in the long run be an unsuccessful one. However, the result will be that we shall never be very far away from home, and shall often return for a few days. You must always keep a change of clothes and your trinkets and so on packed up, so that at an hour's notice you and Marthe can start with the child, either on receiving a note from me telling you where to join us, or if you get news that a force from Nantes is marching rapidly in this direction. Two horses will always remain in the stables in readiness to put into the light cart. Henri will be your driver. François you must send off to find us, and tell us the road that you have taken. However, of course we shall make all these arrangements later on, when affairs become more serious. I don't think there is any chance whatever of the enemy making their way into the country for weeks, perhaps for months, to come."

The next morning Jean Martin and Leigh started early; each carried a rifle slung behind him, a brace of pistols in his holsters, and a sword in his belt. Patsey had recovered from her depression of the previous evening, and her natural good spirits enabled her to maintain a cheerful face at parting, especially as her husband's assurances that there would be no serious fighting for some time had somewhat calmed her fears for their safety.

"The horses are useful to us for carrying us about, Leigh," Jean Martin said as they rode along, "but unless there are enough mounted men to act as cavalry we shall have to do any fighting that has to be done on foot; the peasants would not follow a mounted officer as they would one who placed himself in front of them, and fought as they fought. I hope that later on we may manage to get them to adopt some sort of discipline, but I have great

doubts about it. The peasantry of La Vendée are an independent race; they are respectful to their seigneurs and are always ready to listen to their advice, but it is respect and not obedience. I fancy from what I have read of your Scottish Highlanders that the feeling here closely resembles that among the clans. They regard their seigneurs as their natural heads, and would probably die for them in the field, but in other matters each goes his own way, and the chiefs know better than to strain their power beyond a certain point. As you see, they have already their own leaders—Stofflet the gamekeeper, Forêt the wood-cutter, and Cathelineau a small peddling wool merchant. Doubtless many men of rank and family will join them, and will naturally, from their superior knowledge, take their place as officers; but I doubt whether they will displace the men who have from the beginning taken the matter in hand. I am glad that it should be so; the peasants understand men of their own class, and will, I believe, follow them better than they would men above them in rank. They will, at least, have no suspicion of them, and the strength of the insurrection lies in the fact that it is a peasant rising and not an insurrection stirred up by men of family.”

At ten o'clock they arrived at Cathelineau's camp. Just as they reached the spot they encountered Monsieur Sapinaud de la Verrie. He was riding at the head of about a hundred peasants, all of whom were armed with muskets. They had early that morning attacked the little town of Herbiers. It was defended by two companies of soldiers with four or five cannon, and the Republicans of the town had ranged themselves with the Blues. Nevertheless the peasants, led by their commander and his nephew, had fearlessly attacked them, and with a loss of only two or three wounded, defeated the enemy and captured the place, obtaining a

sufficient supply of muskets to arm themselves. As Jean Martin was known to Monsieur Sapinaud they saluted each other cordially.

"So you are coming willingly, Monsieur Martin. There you have the advantage of me, for these good fellows made me and my nephew come with them as their leaders, and would take no refusal. However, they but drew us into the matter a few days earlier than we had intended, for we had already made up our minds to join the movement."

"I come willingly enough, Monsieur Sapinaud. If I had remained in Nantes I should have been guillotined by this time, and I made up my mind when I left there that I would, on the first opportunity, do a little fighting before I was put an end to. This is my brother-in-law, he has been out here now nearly two years, and has seen enough of the doings of the murderers at Nantes to hate them as much as I do."

The streets of the little village which Cathelineau had made his head-quarters were thronged with men; through these the four mounted gentlemen made their way slowly until, when they came to the church, they saw three men standing apart from the others.

"That is Cathelineau, the one standing in the middle," Leigh said.

"We have come to place ourselves under your orders," Monsieur Sapinaud said as they rode up to him, and he named himself and his companions.

"I am glad indeed to see you, sirs," Cathelineau said. "You are the first gentlemen who have joined us here, though I hear that farther south some have already declared themselves; we want you badly. One of you I have seen already;" and he smiled at Leigh.

"I told you that you would hear of me, young sir, and

you see I have kept my word. These with me are Stofflet, who, as you may have heard, recaptured the cannon the Blues took at Clisson; and Forêt, who had the honour of striking the first blow at St. Florent."

"Your names are all widely known in this part," Monsieur Sapinaud said courteously. "Well, sirs, we have come to fight under your orders. I have brought a hundred men with me, and we have already done something on our own account, for we last night captured Herbiers, which was defended by two companies with four cannon. We have gained a sufficient number of muskets to arm all our party."

"If I do not offer to give up the leadership to you, Monsieur de la Verrie," Cathelineau said gravely, "it is from no desire on my part to be a commander; but I am widely known to the peasantry of many parishes round Pin, and, perhaps because I understand them better than most, they have confidence in me, and would, I think, follow me rather than a gentleman like yourself of whom they know but little."

"They are quite right," Monsieur Sapinaud said; "the peasantry commenced this war, it is right that they should choose their own leaders. You and your two companions have already their confidence, and it is far better that you should be their leaders. I believe all other gentlemen who join you will be as ready as we are to follow you, and I am sure that the only rivalry will be as to who shall most bravely expose himself when he faces the enemy."

"I thank you, sir," Cathelineau said. "I believe earnestly that in many respects it is best that the peasants should have their own leaders. We can associate ourselves with their feelings better than the gentry could do. We shall have more patience with their failings. You would want to make an army of them, we know that this cannot

be done. They will fight and die as bravely as men could do, but I know that they will never submit to discipline. After a battle they will want to hurry off to their homes. They will obey the order to fight, but that is the only order one can rely upon their obeying. We are on the point of starting for Chollet; it is a town where the people are devoted to the cause of the Convention. At the last drawing for the militia they killed, without any pretext, a number of young men who had come unarmed into the town. Many inhabitants of adjoining parishes have been seized and thrown in prison charged only with being hostile to the Convention, and expressing horror at the murder of the king. The capture will produce an impression throughout the country. They have three or four hundred dragoons there, and yesterday, we hear, they called in the National Guard from the villages round, though scarce believing that we should venture to attack them. Your reinforcement of a hundred men all armed with muskets will be a very welcome one, for they will hardly suspect that many of us have firearms. However, we had before your arrival three hundred who have so armed themselves through captures at St. Florent and Chemillé."

He now ordered the bell to be rung, and, as soon as its notes peeled out, started, followed at once by the crowd in the village, without any sort of order or regularity. Jean and Leigh continued to ride with Monsieur de la Verrie and his nephew. After some hours' marching, at two o'clock in the afternoon they approached Chollet. On the way they received considerable reinforcements from the villages they passed through. As soon as they approached the town they saw the dragoons pouring out, followed by three or four hundred National Guards. The Vendéans now fell into some sort of order. A short council of war was held.



M 572

"AT THE FIRST VOLLEY THE COLONEL OF THE DRAGOONS
AND MANY OF HIS MEN FELL."



It was arranged that Monsieur de la Verrie with his hundred musketeers, and Forêt with as many more, should advance against the dragoons, while Cathelineau and Stofflet, with a hundred musketeers and the main body of peasants with their pitchforks, should attack the National Guards.

The dragoons had expected that the mere sight of them would be sufficient to send the peasants flying, and they were amazed that they should continue to advance. As soon as they were within easy range the peasants opened fire. At the first volley the colonel of the dragoons and many of his men fell. Reloading, the peasants advanced at a run, poured in a volley at close quarters, and then with loud cheers charged the dragoons. These, being but newly-raised troops, were seized with a panic, turned, and galloped off at full speed. Astounded at the defeat of the cavalry, in whom they had confidently trusted, the National Guard at once lost heart, and, as with loud shouts Cathelineau with his peasants flung themselves upon them, they, too, broke and fled in all directions. The peasants pursued them for a league, and then returned exultant to Chollet.

Here the leading revolutionists were thrown in prison, but with the exception of the National Guards who attempted resistance after reaching the town, no lives were taken. A large quantity of arms, money, and ammunition fell into the hands of the victors. Scarcely had the peasants gathered in Chollet, than the news arrived that the National Guard of Saumur were marching against them, and Cathelineau requested Monsieur de la Verrie and Forêt with their following to go out to meet them. They marched away at once, and met the enemy at Vihiers. Unprepared for an attack the National Guard at once broke and fled, throwing away their arms and abandoning their cannon. Among these was one taken from the Château de Richelieu. It

had been given by Louis XIII. to the cardinal. On the engraving, with which it was nearly covered, the peasants thought that they could make out an image of the Virgin, and so called it by her name. With these trophies the party returned to Chollet.

The next day being Saturday the little army dispersed, the peasants making their way to their homes in order to spend Easter there, while Cathelineau with only a small body remained at Chollet. From here messengers were sent to Messieurs Bonchamp, d'Elbée, and Dommaigne, all officers who had served in the army, but had retired when the revolution broke out. Cathelineau offered to share the command with them, and entreated them to give their military knowledge and experience to the cause. All assented. Thus the force had the advantage from this time forward of being commanded by men who knew the business of war. Leigh had started for home as soon as the National Guards of Saumur were defeated, Jean Martin, at Cathelineau's request, remaining with him in order to join some other gentlemen who had that day arrived, in calling upon the three officers, and inviting them to join Cathelineau in the command.

Leigh's sister ran out as he rode up to the house. The news of the capture of Chollet, almost without loss, had already spread, and although surprised she felt no alarm at seeing Leigh alone. "I hear that you have taken Chollet and defeated the dragoons and National Guards."

"Yes; and this morning we put to flight the guards of Saumur without the loss of a single man. I don't know what it may come to presently, but just now it can hardly be called fighting. The sight of peasants rushing on seems to strike these heroes with a panic at once, and they are off helter-skelter, throwing away their guns and ammunition."

"Have you come home only to tell me the news, Leigh?"

"I have come home because at present our army has evaporated into thin air. To-morrow being Easter Sunday, the peasants have all scattered to their homes, so that it was of no use my staying at Chollet. Cathelineau is there and the other leaders, among them Monsieur de la Verrie, a nephew of his, Jean, and several other gentlemen, who have just arrived there. They are going as a sort of deputation to-morrow to Bonchamp, d'Elbée, and another officer whose name I forget, to ask them to join Cathelineau in the command. I think that he will still remain as leader, and that they will act as his councillors and in command of columns."

"Then your impression of this man is confirmed?"

"More than confirmed. Jean said this morning that he was a born leader of men. While all round him there is excitement and confusion, he is as calm and serene as if he were alone. He is evidently a man who has read a good deal and thought a good deal, and I can quite understand the influence he has gained over the peasantry in his neighbourhood, and that it has long been their custom to refer all disputes to him. Stofflet is a different sort of man. He is tall and powerful in frame, stern and almost morose in manner; he has been sixteen years a soldier, and was, I hear, distinguished for his bravery."

"And Forêt?"

"He is an active young woodman, evidently a determined fellow, and as he was the first to lead the peasants against the Blues he is sure to have a following. They are three very different characters, but all of them well fitted to act as peasant leaders."

"And will Jean be a leader?"

"Not a leader, Patsey, that is to say certainly not a

general, he does not want it himself; but he will no doubt lead the peasants on the estate, and perhaps those in the neighbourhood. You know that he would not have the church bell rung when he started, because he did not wish the tenants to join until he had seen the result of the first fight, but when he comes home he will summon those who like to go with him."

"Yes, I have had to explain that over and over again. Yesterday and to-day almost all the men have been up here to ask why Jean did not take them. I told them that that was one reason, and another was that had they started on foot when you did, they would not have arrived in time to take part in the fight at Chollet."

The conversation, begun as Leigh dismounted, had been continued in the house, the groom having taken the horse round to the stable.

"So the peasants fought well, Leigh?"

"They would have fought well if the Blues had given them a chance, but these would not stop till they came up to them; if they had done so, I am convinced that the peasants would have beaten them. There was no mistaking the way they rushed forward, and upon my word, I am not surprised that the enemy gave way; although well armed and not far inferior in numbers, they would have had no chance with them."

"And did you rush forward, Leigh?"

"We were with the party that attacked the cavalry. Jean and I fired our rifles twice, and after that we only saw the backs of the cavalry. If they had been well-drilled troops they ought to have scattered us like sheep, for everything must have gone down before them had they charged. There was no sort of order among us; the men were not formed into companies, there was no attempt to direct

them. Each simply joined the leader he fancied, and when the word was given, charged forward at the top of his speed. It is all very well against the National Guards and these young troops, but, as Jean said, it would be a different affair altogether if we were to meet trained soldiers. But the peasants seem to be quick, and I expect they will adopt tactics better suited to the country when they come to fighting in these lanes and woods. You see, so far a very small proportion have been armed with guns, and their only chance was to rush at once to close quarters; but we have captured so many muskets at Chollet and Vihiers, that in future a considerable proportion of the peasants will have guns, and when they once learn to use the hedges, they will be just as good as trained troops."

"Then I suppose Jean is more hopeful about the future than he was?"

"I don't say that, Patsey. He thinks that we shall make a hard fight of it, but that the end must depend upon whether the people in Paris, rather than keep fifty thousand men engaged in a desperate conflict here when they are badly wanted on the frontier, decide to suspend the conscription in La Vendée, and to leave us to ourselves. There can be no doubt that that would be their best plan. But as they care nothing for human life, even if it cost them a hundred thousand men to crush us, they are likely to raise any number of troops and send them against us rather than allow their authority to be set at defiance. Do you know, Patsey, when I used to read about Guy Fawkes wanting to blow up the Houses of Parliament, I thought that he must be a villain indeed to try to destroy so many lives; but I have changed my opinion now, for if I had a chance I would certainly blow up the place where the Convention meets, and destroy every soul within its walls,

including the spectators who fill the galleries and howl for blood."

"Well, you see, Leigh, as Guy Fawkes and the other conspirators failed in their attempt, I am afraid there is very small chance of your being able to carry out the plan more successfully."

"I am afraid there is not," Leigh said regretfully. "I should never be able to dig a way into the vaults, and certainly I should not be able to get enough powder to blow a big building up if I could. No; I was only saying that if Guy Fawkes hated the Parliament as much as I hate the Convention, there is some excuse to be made for him. Now, Patsey, I am as hungry as a hunter."

"I have a good supper ready for you," she said. "I thought it was quite possible that you and Jean would both come home this evening, for I felt sure that most of the peasants would be coming back if possible for Easter Sunday, and I had no doubt that if you did come you would both be hungry."

"Have you any news from other districts?" he asked, after he had finished his supper.

"There is a report that Captain Charette has gathered nearly twenty thousand peasants in lower Poitou, and that he has already gained a success over the Blues. There are reports, too, of risings in Brittany."

"There is no doubt that things are going on well at present, Patsey. You see, we are fighting on our own ground, and fifty thousand men can be called to arms in the course of a few hours by the ringing of the church bells. We have no baggage, no waggons, no train of provisions; we are ready to fight at once. On the other hand, the Blues have been taken completely by surprise; they have no large force nearer than the frontier, or at any rate nearer than

Paris, and it will be weeks before they can gather an army such as even they must see will be required for the conquest of La Vendée. Up to that time it can be only a war of skirmishes, unless our leaders can persuade the peasants to march against Paris, and that I fear they will never be able to do. When the enemy are really ready, the fighting will be desperate. 'Tis true that the Vendéans have a good cause—they fight for their religion and their freedom; while the enemy will only fight because they are ordered to do so. There is another thing,—every victory we win will give us more arms, ammunition, and cannon; while a defeat will mean simply that the peasants will scatter to their homes and be ready to answer the next call for their services. On the other hand, if the Blues are defeated, they will lose so heavily both in arms and stores, and will suffer such loss of life from their ignorance of our roads and lanes, that it will be a long time before they will again be able to advance against us.”

The next morning after the service at the church was over, the peasants came down in numbers to the château to hear from Leigh a full account of the fighting at Chollet and Vihiers, a report of the latter event having arrived that morning. There were exclamations of lively pleasure at the recital, mingled with regret that they had not borne their share in the fighting.

“You will have plenty of opportunities,” Leigh said. “Monsieur Martin has told me that when he next leaves home all who are willing to do so can go with him. But it may be some little time before anything of importance takes place, and as at present what fighting there is is a considerable distance away, he thinks it best that you should reserve yourselves for some great occasion; unless, indeed, the Blues endeavour to penetrate the Bocage, when,

I have no doubt, you will know how to deal with them when they are entangled in your lanes and woods."

"We will go, every man of us!" one of the peasants shouted, and the cry was re-echoed with enthusiasm by the whole of the men. It was nearly an hour before Leigh and his sister were able to withdraw from the crowd and make their way homeward.

"It is difficult to believe that men so ready and eager to fight can be beaten," she said. "Did you notice, too, that their wives all looked on approvingly? I believe that even if any of the men wished to stay away they would be hounded to the front by the women. I think that with them it would be regarded as a war for their religion, while with the men it is the conscription that has chiefly driven them to take up arms."

CHAPTER IV.

CATHELINEAU'S SCOUTS.

FOR some days nothing happened. The insurrection spread like wildfire in Poitou and Anjou, and everywhere the peasants were successful, the authorities, soldiers, and gendarmes for the most part flying without waiting for an attack. The news that all La Vendée was in insurrection astonished and infuriated the Convention, which at once took steps to suppress it. On the second of April a military commission was appointed, with power to execute all peasants taken with arms in their hands, and all who should be denounced as suspicious persons. General Berruyer was sent down to take the command. The large army that had been raised, principally from the mob

of Paris for the defence of that city, marched down, and Berruyer at the head of this force entered the Bocage on the tenth of April.

The time had passed quietly at the château. The peasants had dispersed at once, and except that the principal leaders and a small body of men remained together watching the course of events, all was as quiet as if profound peace reigned. Jean Martin had returned home. Two days after arriving he had called all the tenants on the estate together, and had endeavoured to rouse them to the necessity of acquiring a certain amount of discipline. He had brought with him a waggon-load of muskets and ammunition, which had been discovered at Chollet after the main bulk of the peasants had departed, and Cathelineau had allowed him to carry them off, in order that the peasantry in the neighbourhood of the château should be provided with a proportion of guns when the day of action arrived. The peasants gladly received the firearms, but could not be persuaded to endeavour to fight in any sort of order.

"They did not do it at Chollet or elsewhere," they exclaimed, "and yet they beat the Blues easily. What good did discipline do to the enemy? None. Why, then, should we bother ourselves about it? When the enemy comes we will rush upon them when they are tangled in our thickets."

Leigh was somewhat more successful. The fact that he had fought at Chollet, and was their seigneur's brother-in-law, had established a position for him in the eyes of peasants of his own age, and as he went from house to house talking with them, he succeeded in getting some twenty boys to agree to follow him. He had been nominated an officer by the three generals, who had picked out, without reference to rank or age, those who they thought would, either from

position, energy, or determination, fill the posts well. Thus one company was commanded by a noble, the next by a peasant, and each would on the day of battle fight equally well. Leigh's arguments were such as were suited to the lads he addressed.

"You see, if you go with the bands of men you will be lost in the crowd. The men will rush forward in front, you will all be in the rear. You want to serve your country. Well, you can serve it much better by watching the movements of the enemy and carrying word of it to the commander. Then sometimes we can have a little enterprise of our own—cut off a post of the enemy, or manage to decoy them into lanes where we know their guns will stick fast. It is not size and strength that are most necessary in war, but quickness, alertness, and watchfulness. You know that already the leaders have found that nothing can persuade the men to keep guard or to carry out outpost duty. If we do this, even if we do nothing else, we shall be serving the cause much better than if we were to join in a general rush upon the enemy."

"But we shall have no musquets with us," one of the boys objected.

"Nor would you want them. You would have to move about quickly, and guns would be terribly inconvenient if you had to push your way through a hedge or a close thicket. And besides, if you had guns they would not be of much use to you, for none of you are accustomed to their use, and it needs a great deal of training to learn to shoot straight. I am quite sure that if I were to march with twenty of you to Cathelineau's head-quarters, and were to say to him, 'We have come here, sir, to act as scouts for you, to bring you in news of the movements of the enemy, and to do anything in our power to prevent you from

being surprised', he would be more pleased than if I had brought him a hundred men armed with muskets."

When twenty had expressed their willingness to go, Leigh asked Jean, who had warmly entered into the plan, to speak to the fathers of the lads and get them to consent to their going with him.

He accordingly called them together for that purpose.

"But do you mean that they will be away altogether, master?"

"Yes, while this goes on."

"But we shall lose their labour in the fields?"

"There will not be much labour in the fields till this is over, and by having scouts watching the enemy you will get early news of their coming and have time to drive off your beasts before they arrive."

"But how will they live?"

"When they are in this neighbourhood, one or two can come back and fetch bread; if they are too far off for that, my brother will buy bread for them. In cases where they cannot well be spared, I will remit a portion of your dues as long as they are away; but this will not be for long, for I can see that ere many weeks are past the Blues will be swarming round in such numbers that there will be little time for work on your land, and you will all have to make great sacrifices. You must remember that the less there is in your barns the more difficult it will be for an enemy to invade you, for if they can find nothing here, they will have to bring everything with them, and every waggon will add to their difficulties. My brother tells me that one of the things he means to do is to break up the roads when he finds out by which line the Blues are advancing, and for that purpose I shall serve out from my store either a pick or an axe to each of the band."

At last all difficulties were got over, and twenty lads were enrolled. Another three weeks passed; the peasants of Poitou and Anjou thought but little of the storm that was gathering round them. General Berruyer had arrived from Paris with his army. A portion of the army from Brest moved down to Nantes, and were in concert with the army of La Rochelle to sweep that part of La Vendée bordering on the coast. General Canclaus was at Nantes with two thousand troops. General Dayat was sent to Niort with six thousand men, and was to defend the line between Sables and St. Gilles. Bressuire was occupied by General Quetineau with three thousand men. Leigonyer, with from four to five thousand men, occupied Vihiers, while St. Lambert was held by Ladouce with two thousand five hundred. The right bank of the Loire between Nantes and Angers was held by fifteen hundred men of the National Guard. Thus that part of upper Poitou where the rising had been most successful was surrounded by a cordon of troops, which the Convention hoped, and believed, would easily stamp out the insurrection and take a terrible vengeance for what had passed.

When the storm would burst none knew, but Jean one day said to Leigh that it was certain that it must come soon, and that if he was still resolved to carry out his plan it was time that he set out.

"I am quite ready to carry out my plans, Jean, as you know; but dangers seem to threaten from so many quarters that I don't like going away from home. While my company are scattered near Chollet, for instance, the Blues may be burning down your château."

"I don't think there is much danger of that, Leigh. It is quite certain that as soon as these divisions begin to move they will have their hands full. We may

hope that in some cases they will be defeated; in others they may drive off the peasants and march to the town that they intend to occupy, but they will only hold the ground they stand upon, they will not be able to send out detached parties to attack châteaux or destroy villages. For the present I have no fear whatever of their coming here, we are well away from any of the roads that they are likely to march by. I don't say that any of the roads are good, but they will assuredly keep on the principal lines and not venture to entangle themselves in our country lanes. There are no villages of any size within miles of us, and this is one of the most thickly wooded parts of the Bocage—which, as you know, means the thicket—therefore I shall, when the time comes, leave your sister without uneasiness. We may be quite sure that if, contrary to my anticipation, any column should try to make its way through this neighbourhood, it would be hotly opposed, and she will have ample time to take to the woods, where she and the child will find shelter in any of the foresters' cottages.

“She is going to have peasant dresses made for her and Marthe. She will, of course, drive as we intended, and the two men will take the horse and vehicle to some place in the woods at a considerable distance from here, and keep it there until we join her and carry out our original plan of making for the coast. Directly you are gone I shall make it my business to find out the most out-of-the-way spot among the woods, and ride over and make an arrangement with some woodman with a wife and family living there, to receive her if necessary, and I will let you know the spot fixed on and give you directions how to find it.”

In order to add to Leigh's influence and authority, Martin persuaded the village curé, who was a man of much intelligence and perceived that real good might be done by

this party of lads, to have a farewell service in the church. Accordingly, on the morning on which they were to start all attended the church, which was filled by their friends, and here he addressed the boys, telling them that the service in which they were about to engage was one that would be of great importance to their country, and that it would demand all their energy and strength. He then asked them to take an oath to carry out all orders they might receive from their leader, the seigneur's brother, who would himself share in their work and the many hardships they might have to undergo.

"Here", he said, "is a gentleman who is by birth a foreigner, but who has come to love the land that his sister adopted as her own, and to hate its enemies, these godless murderers of women and children, these executioners of their king, these enemies of the church, so much that he is ready to leave his home and all his comforts and to risk his life in its cause. Remember that you have voluntarily joined him and accepted him as your leader. The work once begun there must be no drawing back; there is not a man in La Vendée who is not prepared to give his life if need be to the cause, and you in your way can do as much or more."

He then administered an oath to each lad, and, as had been arranged, Leigh also took an oath to care for them in every respect and to share their risks and dangers. Then the curé pronounced his blessing upon them, and the service ended. Very greatly impressed with what had taken place, the little band marched out from the church surrounded by their friends. Jean Martin then presented hatchets or light picks to each, and a waist-belt in which the tools should be carried. As a rule the peasants carried leathern belts over the shoulders, in which a sword, hatchet, or other

weapon was slung; but Jean thought the waist-belt would be much more convenient for getting rapidly through hedges or thickets, and it had also the advantage that a long knife, constituting in itself a formidable weapon, could also be carried in it.

Patsey presented them each with a hat, of which a supply had been obtained from St. Florent. These were of the kind ordinarily worn by the peasants, in shape like the modern broad-brimmed wide-awake, but made of much stiffer material. She had bought these to give a certain uniformity to the band, of whom some already wore hats of this kind, others long knitted stocking caps, while others again were bareheaded. She added a piece of green ribbon round each hat; Leigh objected to this on the ground that they might sometimes have to enter towns, and that any badge of this sort would be speedily noticed; but, as she said, they would only have to take them off when engaged in such service. A quarter of an hour after leaving the church they marched away amid the acclamations of their friends, each boy feeling a sensation of pride in the work that he had undertaken and in the ceremony of which he had been the centre.

"Now, lads," Leigh said as soon as they were fairly away from the village, "instead of walking along as a loose body, you had better form four abreast and endeavour to keep step. It is no more difficult to walk that way than in a clump; and, indeed, by keeping step it makes the walking easy, and it has the advantage that you can act much more quickly. If we heard an enemy approaching, and I gave the order, 'Ten go to the right and ten go to the left!' you would not know which were to go. Now each four of you will form a section, and the order into which you fall now you will always observe. Then if I say, 'First two sections

to the right, the other three sections to the left!' every one of you knows what to do, instead of having to wait until I mention all your names. This is nearly all the drill you will have to learn. You can choose your places now, but afterwards you will have to keep to them, so those of you who are brothers and special friends will naturally fall in next to each other."

In a minute or two the arrangements were made, and the party proceeded four abreast, with Leigh marching at their head. For the first hour or so he had some difficulty in getting them to keep step, but they presently fell into it, time being kept by breaking into one of the canticles of the church. After a long day's march they arrived at the village which Cathelineau now occupied as his head-quarters, as it had been necessary, in view of the threatening circle of the various columns of the enemy, to remove the headquarters from Chollet to a central point, from which he could advance at once against whichever of these columns might first move forward into the heart of the country. The lads all straightened themselves up as they marched through the streets, the unwonted spectacle of twenty peasant lads marching in order exciting considerable surprise. Cathelineau was standing at the door of the house he occupied, conversing with MM. Bonchamp and d'Elbée.

"Ah, Monsieur Stansfield," he said, "is it you?" as Leigh halted his party and raised his hat. "You are the most military-looking party I have yet seen. They are young, but none the worse for that."

"There is nothing military about them except that they march four abreast," he said with a smile, "but for the work we have come to do drill will not be necessary. I have raised this band on Jean Martin's estate, sir, and with your permission I propose to call them 'Cathelineau's scouts'.

It seemed to my brother and myself that you sorely need scouts to inform you of the movements of the enemy, the roads by which they are approaching, their force and order. I have therefore raised this little body of lads of my own age. They will remain with me permanently as long as the occasion needs. They will go on any special mission with which you may charge them, and will at other times watch all the roads by which an enemy would be likely to advance."

"If they will do that, Monsieur Stansfield, they will be valuable indeed; that is just what I cannot get the peasants to do. When it comes to fighting, they will obey orders, but at all other times they regard themselves as their own masters, and neither entreaties nor the offer of pay suffices to persuade them to undertake such work as you are proposing to carry out, consequently it is only by chance that we obtain any news of the enemy's movements. I wish we had fifty such parties."

"They would be valuable indeed," Monsieur d'Elbée said. "The obstinacy of the peasantry is maddening. How do you propose to feed your men?"

"When we are within reach of their homes, two will go back to fetch bread for the whole; when we are too far away, I shall buy it in one of the villages."

"When you are within reach of my head-quarters, wherever that may be, you have only to send in and they shall have the loaves served out to them the same as the band who remain here. We are not short of money, thanks to the captures we have made. I see that none of your band have firearms."

"No, sir; Jean Martin would have let me have some of the muskets he brought from here, but it seemed to me that they would be an encumbrance. We may have to

trust to our swiftness of foot to escape, and at any rate we shall want to carry messages to you as quickly as possible. The weight of a gun and ammunition would make a good deal of difference, and would, moreover, be in our way in getting through the woods and hedges."

"But for all that you ought to have some defence," Cathelineau said; "and if you came upon a patrol of cavalry, though only three or four in number, you would be in a bad case with only those knives to defend yourselves. Do you know whether there are any pistols in the storehouse, Monsieur Bonchamp?"

"Yes, there are some that were picked up from the cavalymen we killed, they have not been given out yet."

"Then I think we had better serve out a pistol, with a score of cartridges, to each of these lads. If you let them fire three or four rounds at the trunk of a tree, or some mark of that sort, Monsieur Stansfield, they will get to know something about the use of the weapons."

"Thank you, sir, that would be excellent, and would certainly enable us to face a small party of the enemy if we happen to encounter them."

"Please form the boys up two deep," Cathelineau said; "I will say a word or two to them."

The manœuvre was not executed in military style, but the boys were presently arranged in order.

"I congratulate you, lads," Cathelineau went on, "in having devoted yourselves to your country, and that in a direction that will be most useful. I trust that you will strictly obey the orders of your commander, and will remember that you will be of far more use in carrying them out than in merely helping to swell the number in a pitched battle. I have every confidence in Monsieur Stansfield. He has set a noble example to the youths of this country in thus

undertaking arduous and fatiguing work which is not without its dangers. I was glad to see that you marched in here in order. I hope that you will go a little further and learn to form line quickly, and to gather at his call. These things may seem to you to make very little difference, but in fact will make a great deal. You saw that you were at least a couple of minutes forming in line just now. Supposing the enemy's cavalry had been charging down upon you, that two minutes lost would have made all the difference between your receiving them in order, or being in helpless confusion when they came up. I have no doubt that one of my generals here has among his followers someone who served in the army, and who will teach you within the course of an hour, if you pay attention to his instructions, how to form into line and back again into fours."

"I will give them an hour myself," Monsieur Bonchamp said. "I have nothing particular to do, and should be glad to instruct young fellows who are so willing and well-disposed. Are you too tired to drill now? You have had a long march."

A general negative was the reply.

"Well, then, march to the open space just outside the town and we will begin at once."

Feeling very proud of the honour of being drilled by a general, the boys fell into their formation and followed Monsieur Bonchamp and Leigh. They were at a loss at first to comprehend the instructions given them, but by the end of an hour they had fairly mastered the very simple movement.

"That will do," Monsieur Bonchamp said. "Of course you are not perfect yet, but with a quarter of an hour's drill by your commander every day, at the end of a week

you will be able to do it quickly and neatly, and you will certainly find it a great advantage if you come upon the enemy."

A large empty room was allotted to them, and as they sat down on the floor and munched the bread that they had brought with them, they felt quite enthusiastic over their work. It was a high honour indeed to have been praised by Monsieur Cathelineau, and been taught by one of his generals; they even felt the advantage that the drill had given them, contrasting the quickness with which they had finally formed into line with their trouble in arranging themselves before Monsieur Cathelineau. The fact, too, that they were next morning to be furnished with pistols was a great gratification to them, and over and over again they said to each other, "What will the people at home say when they hear that Monsieur Cathelineau has praised us, that Monsieur Bonchamp himself has drilled us, and that we are to be provided with pistols?"

In the morning the pistols and ammunition were served out. Leigh had during the previous evening seen Cathelineau and asked for orders.

"I cannot say exactly the line the Blues are likely to take. I should say that you had better make Chemillé your head-quarters. Berruyer, who is their new commander, has arrived at St. Lambert. There is a strong force at Thouars, being a portion of the army from St. Lambert. The enemy are also in force at Vihiers and at Parthenay. It is from the forces at Thouars and Vihiers that danger is most likely to come. Doubtless other columns will come from the north, but we shall hear of their having crossed the Loire in time to oppose them, and with so small a band as yours, you will be amply employed in watching Thouars. There are many roads, all more or less bad, by

which they may march; as soon as you ascertain that they are moving, and by which route, you will send a messenger to me. Any others of your band that you may have with you send off to all the villages round; give them warning, set the bells ringing, promise that aid will soon arrive, and urge them to harass the enemy, to fell trees across the road, and to impede their advance in every possible way.

"I will give you half a dozen papers for the use of yourself and your messengers, saying that you are acting under my orders, and are charged with raising the country directly the enemy advance. But above all it is important that I should get the earliest possible information as to the route by which they are moving, as it will take us thirty-six hours before we can gather in anything like our full strength. It will be useful that you should spread false news as to our whereabouts. Your boys can say in one village that we are marching towards Tours, in another that we are massed in the neighbourhood of St. Florent, in a third that they hear that the order is that all able-bodied men are to go west to oppose the force coming from Nantes, which has already taken Clisson, and carried Monsieur de Lescure and his family prisoners to Bressuire."

"We shall have to tell the villagers, sir, that we wish this news to be given to the Blues if they should come there, or if questioned they would tell them something else. I am sure that even the women would suffer themselves to be killed rather than give any news that they thought would be useful to the enemy."

"You are right. Yes, you must tell them that this is what we want the Blues to believe, and that it is my wish that these are the answers to be given to any of them who may enter the village."

"The only thing, sir, is that they may find the villages

empty as they come along. The women and children will no doubt take to the woods; the men will perhaps offer some resistance, but when they find how strong the Blues are, will probably hurry to join you."

"There will probably be a few old people remaining in each village; however, we must trust much to chance. The great thing is for you to let me know as soon as their main body is in motion. Whichever way they come we must meet and attack them. It is in the woods and lanes that we must defend ourselves."

"I will endeavour to carry out your orders, sir, and shall start to-morrow morning as soon as we get our pistols."

As soon as the little band was well away from the town the pistols were loaded, and each of the lads in turn fired three shots at the trunk of a tree at a distance of ten yards, under Leigh's directions. The shooting was quite as good as he had expected, and the boys themselves were well satisfied. Then, the pistols being reloaded and placed in their belts, they resumed their march. They halted at a tiny hamlet consisting of half a dozen houses, four miles from Thouars. The inhabitants were greatly surprised at their appearance, and an old man, who was the head of the little community, came out and asked Leigh who they were.

"We are Cathelineau's scouts," he replied. "We have orders to watch the movements of the enemy. We wish to be of no trouble. If there is an empty shed we should be glad of it, still more so if there is a truss or two of straw."

"These you can have," the old man said. "If Cathelineau's orders had been that we were to turn out of our houses for you we should have done so willingly."

"A shed will do excellently for us. We shall be here

but little, half our number will always be away. If you can supply us with bread I will pay you for it. If you cannot do so, I shall have to send two of my party away every day to fetch bread from Cathelineau's camp."

"I will see what can be done; it will not be for long?"

"No, it may possibly be only two or three days, and it may be a week."

"Then I think that we can manage. If we have not flour enough here to spare I can take my horse and fetch half a sackful from some other village."

"Thank you very much. However, I think that we shall only occasionally want bread, for I shall be sending messengers every day to Monsieur Cathelineau, and these can always bring bread back with them."

The old man led them to a building which had served as a stable, but which was then untenanted.

"I will get some straw taken in presently, lads. As for you, sir, I shall be glad if you will be my guest."

"I thank you," Leigh said, "but I prefer to be with my followers. They come by my persuasion, and I wish to share their lot in all things; besides, my being with them will keep up their spirits."

There was half an hour's drill, and then Leigh led the party to the shed, to which four or five bundles of straw had by this time been brought.

"Now," he said, "before we do anything else we must choose two sub-officers. At times we may divide into two parties, and therefore it is necessary that one should be responsible to me for what is done in my absence. I will leave it to you to choose them. Remember it is not size and strength that are of most importance, it is quickness and intelligence. You know your comrades better than I do, and I shall be quite content to abide by your choice. I

will go outside for a quarter of an hour while you talk it over. I don't want to influence you at all."

In ten minutes two of the lads came out.

"We have chosen André Favras, and Pierre Landrin."

"I think that you have done very wisely," Leigh said.

"Those are the two whom I myself should have selected."

He had indeed noticed them as the two most intelligent of the party. They had been his first recruits, and it was in no small degree owing to their influence that the others had joined him. He returned to the shed.

"I approve of your choice, lads," he said. "No doubt André and Pierre will make very good sub-officers. When I am not present you must obey their orders as readily as you do mine, and I shall be able to trust them to carry out my directions implicitly. Now you will divide in two parties: the first two sections and two of the third section will form one party, and will be under André's command when acting in two parties; the other two of the third section and the fourth and fifth will form the second division, under Pierre. You will take it in turns to be on duty. We shall not need to watch by night, for there is no chance of the enemy venturing to enter our lanes and thickets after dark. The party not out on scouting duty will remain here, and will furnish messengers to carry news to Cathelineau, to fetch bread, or to perform other duties."

The next morning Leigh set out with the whole band except two. He had gathered from the people of the village the position of the various roads and lanes by which troops going westward from Thouars would be likely to travel. When within two miles of the town he placed two boys on each of these roads. They were not to show themselves, but were to lie behind the hedges, and if they

saw any body of troops coming along, were at once to bring news to him, his own point being on the principal road. André and Pierre were to leave their arms and belts behind them, to make a long detour, and to enter the town from the other side. They were to saunter about the place, listen to what was being said, and gather as much news as possible. Each was provided with two francs, and if questioned they were to say that they had come in from some village near to buy an axe.

"I should have gone in myself, André, but although I can get on fairly enough in your patois, I cannot speak it well enough to pass as a native. However, you are not likely to be questioned; in a town crowded with troops, two lads can move about without attracting the smallest attention from the military. It would be only the civilian authorities that you would have to fear, but these will be so much occupied in attending to the wants of the soldiers that they will not have any time on their hands for asking questions. Be sure before you enter the town that you find out the name of some village three or four miles on the other side, so as to have an answer ready if you are asked where you come from. It is probable that you will find troops quartered in all the villages beyond the town, which could hardly accommodate so large a number as are there. Remember you must try to look absolutely unconcerned as you go through them, and as you walk about the streets of the town. The great object is to find out how many men there are in and around Thouars, whether they are looking for more troops to join them from Saumur, and when they are expecting to move forward."

As soon as they had left he repeated to the six lads who remained with him the orders that he had given to those posted on the other roads. "You are to remain in hiding,"

he said, "whatever the force may be. It is likely enough that patrols of four or five men may come along to see that the roads are clear, and that there are no signs of any bodies being gathered to oppose their advance. It is quite true that we might shoot down and overpower any such patrols, but we must not attempt to do so; if one of them escaped he would carry the news to Thouars that the roads were beset. This would put them on their guard—doubtless they imagine that with such a force as they have gathered they will march through La Vendée without opposition—and they would adopt such precautions as to render it far more difficult than it otherwise would be to check their advance when it begins in earnest. We are here only to watch, we shall have opportunities for fighting later on. This is a good spot for watching, for we have a thick wood behind us, and plenty of undergrowth along its edge by the road, where we can hide so closely that there will not be the slightest chance of our being discovered if we do but keep absolutely quiet."

Three or four times during the day, indeed, cavalry parties passed along the road. They did not appear to have any fear of an attack, but laughed and jested at the work they had come to do, scoffed at the idea of the peasants venturing to oppose such forces as had gathered against them, and discussed the chances of booty. One party of four men and an old sergeant pulled up and dismounted close to the spot where the lads were hidden.

"It is all very well, comrades," their leader said, "but for my part I would rather be on the frontier fighting the Austrians; that is work for soldiers. Here we are to fight Frenchmen like ourselves, poor chaps who have done no harm, except that they stick to their clergy, and object to be dragged away from their homes. I am no politician,

and I don't care a snap for the doings of the Assembly in Paris—I am a soldier, and have learned to obey orders whatever they are—but I don't like this job we have in hand, which, mind you, is bound to be a good deal harder than most of you expect. It is true that they say there are twenty thousand troops round the province—but what sort of troops? There are not five thousand soldiers among them, the others are either National Guards or newly-raised levies, or those blackguards from the slums of Paris. Of the National Guards I should say half would desert if they only had the chance, and the new levies can't be counted on."

CHAPTER V.

CHECKING THE ENEMY.

YOU see," Leigh said when the patrol had ridden on, "the real soldiers do not like the work they are called upon to do, and they have no belief in the National Guards or in the new levies. It will make all the difference in their own fighting when they know that they cannot rely upon some of the troops working with them. I have no doubt that what they say of the National Guards is true; they have had to come out because they are summoned, but they can have no interest in the war against us, and doubtless many of them hate the government in Paris just as much as we do, and would give a great deal to be back again with their homes and families. It is just as hard for them to be obliged to fight us as it is for us to be obliged to fight them."

It was late in the afternoon before André and Pierre returned. By the time they did so the various cavalry

patrols had all gone back to Thouars. From time to time boys had come in from the other roads. One or two patrols only had gone out by each of the lanes on which they were posted. It was evident that the main road was considered of the most importance, and it was probable that the greater portion of the enemy's force would move by it.

"Well, what is your news?" Leigh asked as his two lieutenants came down from the wood behind. "I hope all has gone well with you."

"Yes, captain," André replied; "we have had no difficulty. The troops in the villages on the other side of the town did not even glance at us as we went through, supposing, no doubt, that we belonged to the place. Thouars was crowded with soldiers, and we heard that two thousand more are to arrive from Saumur this evening. We heard one of the officers say that orders were expected for a forward movement to-morrow, and that all the other columns were to move at the same time, and three of them were to meet at Chemillé."

"That is enough for the present, André. You have both done very well to pick up so much news as that. We will be off at once."

Messengers were at once sent off to order in the other parties, and as soon as these joined they returned to the village, where they passed the night. On arriving there Leigh wrote a report of the news that he had gathered, and sent off one of the band, who had remained all day in the village, to Cathelineau, and the other to Monsieur d'Elbée at Chollet.

The next day's watch passed like the first. Two or three officers, however, trotted along the main road with a squadron of cavalry and rode to within a few miles of Chemillé, and then returned to Thouars. The next morning Leigh and

his band were out before daybreak, and, making their way to within a short distance of Thouars, heard drums beating and trumpets sounding. There was no doubt that the force there was getting into motion. The band at once dispersed, carrying the news not only to every village along the road, warning the women and children to take to the woods, and the men to prepare for the passage of the enemy, but to all the villages within two or three miles of the road, ordering the church bells to be sounded to call the peasants to arms; while two lads started to carry the news to Cathelineau and d'Elbée.

When once the bells of the churches near the road were set ringing, they were speedily echoed by those of the villages beyond, until the entire district knew that the enemy were advancing. On the way from Chemillé Leigh had kept a sharp look-out for points where an enemy might be checked, and had fixed upon one about half-way between the two towns. A stream some four feet in depth passed under a bridge where the road dipped into a hollow; beyond this the ground rose steeply and was covered with a thick wood of very considerable extent. As soon as he reached this point, he set his band to work to destroy the bridge. As groups of peasants came flocking along, and saw what was intended, they at once joined in the work. As soon as it was done, Leigh led them to the spot where the forest began, some thirty yards up the hill, and set them to to fell trees.

This was work to which all were accustomed, and as many of them carried axes, the trees nearest to the road were felled to fall across it; while on each side facing the stream they were cut so as to fall down the slope, and so form an abattis. Before the work was finished to a distance of two or three hundred yards on each side of

the road, several hundred peasants had come up; of these about a third were armed with muskets. Seeing the advantage of the position, and that in case it was forced the forest offered them a means of retreat, all prepared for a desperate resistance. The men with firearms were placed in the front rank, those with pitchforks and other rural weapons were to keep at work till the last moment cutting underwood, and filling the interstices between the boughs of the fallen trees so as to make it extremely difficult to force. They were ordered to withdraw, when the fight began, to a distance of two or three hundred yards, and then to lie down in any inequalities of the ground so as to be safe from cannon-shot. Only when the defenders of the abattis were forced back were they to prepare to charge.

A young fellow with a cow-horn took his place by Leigh's side; when he blew his horn the front rank were to run back and the reserve to come forward to meet them, and then they were to rush down again upon their assailants who had passed the abattis, and to hurl them into the stream. The peasants all recognized the advantages of these arrangements. Those who had come first had found Leigh in command, and by the readiness with which he was obeyed by his own followers saw at once that he was in authority. As others came up he showed them Cathelineau's circular; these recognized its order, and informed the later arrivals that the young officer who was giving orders was specially empowered by Cathelineau to take command, and Leigh was as promptly obeyed as if he had been their favourite leader himself. They saw, too, that he knew exactly what he wanted done, and gave every order with firmness and decision, and their confidence in him became profound.



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"A SCATTERED FIRE BROKE OUT FROM THE DEFENDERS."



It was three hours after he arrived at the river when a party of horse came down the opposite slope. Leigh had ordered that not a shot was to be fired until he gave the signal. He waited until the enemy came to the severed bridge, when they halted suddenly, and as they did so he gave the word, and from the long line of greenery fifty muskets flashed out. More than half the troop of horse fell, and the rest, turning tail, galloped up the hill again, while a shout of derision rose from the peasants. Half an hour passed, then the head of the column was seen descending the road. It opened out as it came, forming into a thick line of skirmishers some two hundred yards wide. Moving along, Leigh spread the musketeers to a similar length of front. At first the enemy were half-hidden by the wood at the other side of the slope, but as they issued from this some twenty yards from the stream a scattered fire broke out from the defenders.

The Blues replied with a general discharge at their invisible foes, but these were crouching behind the stumps or trunks of the felled trees, and the fire was ineffectual. Leigh's own band were lying in a little hollow twenty yards behind the abattis; their pistols would have been useless until the enemy won their way up to the trees, and until then they were to remain as a first reserve. Exposed as they were to the steady fire of the peasants, the assailants suffered heavily, and at the edge of the stream paused irresolutely. It was some fifteen yards wide, but they were ignorant of the depth, and hesitated to enter it; urged, however, by the shouts of their officers, who set the example by at once entering the stream, and by seeing that the water did not rise above their shoulders, the men followed; but as they gained the opposite bank they fell fast. At so short a distance every shot of the peasants

told, and it was some time before a sufficient number had crossed to make an assault against the wall of foliage in their front.

Fresh troops were constantly arriving from behind, and, encouraged by this, they at last rushed forward. As they did so, Leigh called up his own band, and these, crawling forward through the tangle as far as they could, opened fire on the enemy as they strove to push their way through the obstacle.

For a quarter of an hour the fight went on; then the assailants, having with great loss succeeded in passing over or pulling aside the brushwood, began to pour through. The moment they did so, Leigh's horn sounded, and at once the defenders rushed up the hill, pursued by the Blues with exulting shouts. But few shots were fired, for the assailants had emptied their muskets before striving to pass through the obstacle.

Leigh and his men had run but a hundred yards into the wood when they met the main body of the peasants rushing down at full speed. Turning at once, his party joined them and fell upon the advancing enemy. Taken wholly by surprise when they believed that victory was won, the two or three hundred men who had passed the abattis were swept before the crowd of peasants like chaff; the latter, pressing close upon their heels, followed them through the gaps that had been made.

The panic of the fugitives spread at once to those who had crossed the river, and were clustered round the openings, jostling in their eagerness to get through and join, as they believed, in the slaughter of those who had caused them such heavy loss, and all fled together. The peasants were at their heels, making deadly use of their pitchforks, axes, and knives, and drove the survivors headlong into the

river. The horn again sounded, and in accordance with the strict orders that they had received they ran back again to their shelter, a few dropping from the scattered fire that the troops on the other side of the stream opened against them, as soon as the fugitives had cleared away from their front. Scarcely had the peasants gained the shelter when six pieces of cannon, that had been placed on the opposite slope while the fight was going on, opened against them.

Leigh at once ordered the main body back to their former position, scattering his hundred men with guns along the whole line of abattis, whence they again opened fire on the troops on the opposite side of the river. These replied with volleys of musketry, but the defenders, stationed as they were five or six yards apart, and sheltering behind the trees, suffered but little either from the artillery or musketry fire, while men dropped fast in the ranks of the Blues. The cannon were principally directed against the trees blocking the road. Gradually these were torn to pieces, and after an hour's firing were so far destroyed that a passage through them was comparatively easy. Then the enemy again began to cross the stream. As soon as they commenced to do so, Leigh called up the men with muskets from each flank, and sent word to the main body to descend the hill again, as the cannonade would cease as soon as the attack began.

Three times the assault was made and repulsed, the peasants fighting with a fury that the Blues, already disheartened with their heavy losses, could not withstand. As they fell back for the third time, Leigh thought that enough had been done, and ordered the peasants at once to make through the woods and to proceed by lanes and by-ways to join Cathelineau, who, he doubted not, would by this time have gathered a considerable force at Chemillé. By

the time that the Blues were ready to advance again, this time in overwhelming force, the peasants were well away. The wounded, as fast as they fell, had been carried off to distant villages, and when the enemy advanced they found, to their surprise, that their foes had disappeared, and that only some thirty dead bodies remained on the scene of battle. Their own loss had exceeded three hundred, a large proportion of whom were regular soldiers, and the National Guards and the new levies were profoundly depressed at the result of the action.

"If," they said to themselves, "what must have been but a comparatively small number of peasants have caused this loss, what will it be when we meet Cathelineau's main body?"

There was no thought of pursuit. A regiment was thrown out in skirmishing order and advanced through the wood, the rest following in column along the road. General Berruyer had joined General Menou the evening before with the force from Saumur, and as they moved forward the two generals rode together.

"This is a much more serious business than I had expected," Berruyer said. "I certainly imagined that, with such forces as we have gathered round La Vendée, the campaign would be little more than a military promenade. I see, however, that I was entirely mistaken. These men have to-day shown themselves capable of taking advantage of the wild character of their country, and as to their courage there can be no question whatever. If this is a fair sample of the resistance that we have to expect throughout the whole country, we shall need at least fifty thousand men to subdue them."

"Fully that," Menou said shortly. "There is no doubt that we blame the National Guards, who were so easily

routed by the peasants on the tenth of March, more severely than they deserve. I rode forward to encourage the men at their last attack. I never saw soldiers fight with such fury as did these peasants. They threw themselves on the troops like tigers, in many cases wresting their arms from them and braining them with their own muskets. Even our best soldiers seemed cowed by the fierceness with which they were attacked, and as for the men of the new levies, they were worse than useless, and their efforts to force their way to the rear blocked the way of the reinforcements, who were trying, though I must own not very vigorously, to get to the front. The peasants were well led, too, and acting on an excellent plan of defence; they must have been sheltered altogether from our fire, for among the dead I did not see one who had been killed by a cannon-ball. The country must possess hundreds of points equally well adapted for defence, and if these are as well and obstinately held as this has been, it will take even more than fifty thousand men to suppress the insurrection."

"The Convention is going to work the wrong way," Berruyer said. "The commissioners have orders to hang every peasant found in arms and every suspect, that is to say virtually every one in La Vendée. It would have been infinitely better for them to have issued a general amnesty, to acknowledge that they themselves have made a mistake, that the curés of Poitou and Brittany should be excepted from the general law and allowed to continue their work in their respective parishes without interruption, and that for a year at least this part of France should be exempt from conscription. Why, if this campaign goes on, a far larger force will be employed here than the number of troops which the district was called upon to contribute, to say nothing of the enormous expense and loss of men.

It is a hideous business altogether, to my mind. I would give all I possess to be recalled and sent to fight on the frontier."

Two hours after the fight, Leigh with his band, of whom none had been killed, although several had received wounds more or less serious, arrived at Chemillé. They had been preceded by many of the peasants, who had already carried the news of the fight, and that the column from Thouars had been delayed for three hours and had suffered very heavy losses.

"It was all owing, Monsieur Cathelineau," the head of one of the peasant bands said, "to the officer you sent to command us. He was splendid; it was to him that everything was due. He was cutting down the bridge when we came up, and it was by his orders that we felled the trees and blocked the road and made a sort of hedge that took them so long to get through. We should have been greatly damaged by the fire of their guns and muskets, but he kept us all lying down out of reach till we were wanted, while the men with the guns defended the line of fallen trees. When we were wanted, he called us up by blowing a cowhorn, and then we drove the Blues back into the stream, and returned to our shelter until we were wanted again. We did not lose more than thirty men altogether, while more than ten times that number of the Blues have fallen. We thought at first that you had chosen rather a strange leader for us, but, as always, you were right, for if you had been there yourself things could not have gone better."

"But I sent no one as your commander," Cathelineau said in surprise.

"He had a paper that he read out saying that he was acting on your orders. As I cannot read, I cannot say that

it was written down as he read it; but if you did not send him God must have done so."

"It is strange, Bonchamp," Cathelineau said to that officer, "for I certainly did not send anyone. I never thought of defending the passage of that stream. However, whoever it is who has commanded, has done us great service, for that three hours which have been gained will make all the difference; they cannot arrive now until after dark, and will not attack before morning, and by that time our force will have doubled."

"Here comes our officer, monsieur!" the peasant exclaimed as Leigh with his party came down the street, loudly cheered by the peasants who had fought under him.

"Why, it is Jean Martin's young brother-in-law!" Monsieur Bonchamp exclaimed; and, raising his voice, he called to Jean, who was talking to a group of other officers near.

Jean ran up.

"Monsieur Martin, it is your young Englishman who has held Berruyer in check for three hours; see how the peasants are cheering him!"

Cathelineau advanced to meet Leigh, who halted his band and saluted the general. The latter stepped forward and returned the salute by lifting his hat.

"Monsieur Stansfield," he said, "I salute you as the saviour of our position here. Had Berruyer arrived this afternoon we must have retired, for we are not yet in sufficient force to withstand his attack. To-morrow we shall, I hope, be strong enough to beat him. I have been wondering who this officer could be who with but three or four hundred men held the principal force of our foes, led by their commander-in-chief, in check for three hours, and, as I hear, killed three hundred of his best troops, with a loss of but thirty of ours. I ought to have thought of

you when they said that you read them an order saying that you were acting in my name."

"It was great presumption on my part, general," Leigh said, "and I know that I had no right to use it for such a purpose; but I felt how important it was that you should have time to prepare for defence, and I thought it my duty, as there was no one else to take the matter in hand, to do so myself."

"You have done magnificently, sir, and the thanks of all La Vendée are due to you. I see that several of your lads are wounded," for five of them wore bandages, and a sixth was carried on a rough litter by four of his companions. "Lads," he said, "I salute you; you have done well indeed, and there is not a boy of your age in La Vendée but will envy you when he hears how you, under your brave young commander, have to-day played the chief part in checking the advance of an army of five thousand men. I shall publish an order to-day saying that my scouts have rendered an inestimable service to their country."

"Well, Leigh," Jean Martin said after the little band had fallen out and one of the surgeons had taken charge of the wounded, "you have indeed distinguished yourself. I certainly did not think, when I persuaded your sister to let you go, that you were going to match yourself against the French general, and to command a force which should inflict a heavy check upon him. Cathelineau has asked me to bring you round to his quarters presently so that you can give him the full details of the affair, saying that a plan that had succeeded so well might be tried again with equal effect. I cannot stay with you now, for I am going with Bonchamp to see to the work of loopholing and fortifying the church."

"I am going to look after my boys, Jean; they have had

nothing to eat this morning except a mouthful or two of bread each, and they have been up since two hours before daylight. Do you feel sure that the Blues will not attack to-night?"

"Yes, I think so; after the lesson you have given Berruyer of the fighting qualities of the peasants, it is pretty certain that he will not venture to attack us after a hard day's march and a fight that must have sorely discouraged his men."

That evening news came in from several quarters. Leigonyer had marched from Vihiers by three roads, directing his course towards Coron. Two of the columns had been attacked by the peasants, and being largely composed of new levies had at once lost heart and retreated, the central column, in which were the regular troops, being obliged in consequence also to fall back; another column had crossed the Loire and taken St. Florent without any very heavy fighting, and Quetineau had advanced from Bressuire to Aubiers without meeting with resistance. The news was on the whole satisfactory. It had been feared that the force at Vihiers would march north and join that of Berruyer, and that they would make a joint attack upon the town. The disaster that had befallen them rendered this no longer possible.

There was disappointment that St. Florent had been recaptured, but none that Quetineau had advanced without opposition to Aubiers, for the whole of the peasantry from that locality were with Cathelineau. In point of fact, Berruyer had not ordered the force at Vihiers to march to join him; on the contrary, he had intended, after capturing Chemillé, which he expected to do without serious trouble, to march south and effect a junction with Leigonyer at Coron. He halted four miles from Chemillé, harangued

the new levies, reproaching those who had shown cowardice during the day's fighting, and exhorting them to behave with courage on the following day. No inconsiderable portion of them belonged to the force that had marched down from Paris, and these heroes of the slums, who had been foremost in the massacres in the prisons, and in their demand for the blood of all hostile to them, behaved throughout with abject cowardice whenever they met a foe with arms in their hands.

After having had an interview with Cathelineau, and relating to him full particulars of the fight, Leigh, having nothing to do, strolled about the town. Presently he came upon a group of three or four peasants who had been drinking more than was good for them. One of them, whose bearing and appearance showed that he had served in the army, was talking noisily to the others.

"You will see that I, Jacques Bruno, artilleryman, will be a great man yet," he said. "I shall soon be rich. I have had enough of poverty since I left the army, but I shall have plenty of gold yet. You will see what you will see."

"How can you be rich?" one of the others said with an air of drunken wisdom. "You are lazy, Jacques Bruno, we all know you; you are too fond of the wine-cup; it is seldom that you do a day's work."

"Never mind how I shall get rich, I tell you that it will be so, and the word of Jacques Bruno is not to be doubted;" and he turned away saying, "I shall go for a few hours' sleep now to be in readiness for to-morrow."

"Who is that man?" Leigh asked sharply, going up to the others. The scarf that he wore showed him to be an officer, and the peasants removed their hats.

"It is Jacques Bruno, monsieur. He is in charge of

our guns; he is an old artilleryman. Cathelineau has appointed him to the post, as it needs an artilleryman to load and point the guns."

Leigh moved away. This fellow was half-drunk, but not too drunk to know what he was saying. What did he mean by declaring that he would soon be rich? The peasants had said that he was lazy and fond of the wine-cup. He could hardly be likely to acquire wealth by honest labour. Perhaps he might be intending an act of treachery. Putting aside other considerations, he, as an old soldier, would scarcely care to mow down his former comrades, and his sympathies must be rather with the army than with the peasants. He had no personal interest in this revolt against conscription, nor was it likely that the cause of the curés concerned him greatly. He might, however, meditate some act of treachery, by which he would benefit his former comrades and gain a rich reward. At any rate it would be worth while watching. He returned to the room where his band were quartered.

"André," he said, "I want you and two others to keep watch with me until midnight, then Pierre and two of his party will relieve you. At that hour you will send one of your party to guide Pierre to the place where I shall be. You will bring your pistols and knives with you, and if I come down and tell you to move forward, you will do so as noiselessly as possible."

"Shall we come at once, captain?" André asked.

"No, you had better lie down with the two who are to come with you, and sleep till nine o'clock. I will come at that hour. We will say one o'clock instead of twelve for the watch to be changed, that will make a more even division for the night."

Going out again, Leigh inquired where the cannon had

been placed. They were on an eminence outside the town, and commanded the road by which Berruyer's column would advance. Strolling up there, he saw Bruno lying asleep between two of the guns, of which there were five.

"It seems all right," he said to himself, "and as he cannot walk off with them, I don't see what his plan can be—that is, if he has a plan. However, there is no harm in keeping watch. The guns are against the sky-line, and lying down fifty yards away, we shall be able to see if he does anything with them. Of course he might spike them, but I don't suppose that he would risk that, for the spikes might be noticed the first thing in the morning. I don't think that it would do for him to try that. It seemed a stupid thing even to doubt him, but, half-drunk as he was, he certainly was in earnest in what he said, and does believe that he is going to be a rich man, and I don't see how that can possibly come about except by some act of treachery. At any rate we will keep an eye upon the fellow to-night, and if we are not posted in any particular spot to-morrow, I will be up here with my band when the firing begins and keep my eye on him."

He spent three or four hours with Jean Martin, and then went back to his quarters. André and two of the lads were in readiness. They moved out quietly, for the street was thick with sleeping peasants. There were no sentries to be seen.

"If the enemy did but know," he muttered to himself, "they might take the place without firing a shot." Presently, however, he came upon an officer.

"Where are you going?" he asked sharply.

"I am Leigh Stansfield, and am going with three of my party to keep watch near the guns."

"That is good," the officer said. "I am on duty here,

and Jean Martin has just ridden out; he is going a couple of miles along the road, and will give the alarm if he hears any movement of the enemy. When he gets within half a mile he is to fire off his pistols, and I shall have time to get the men up long before their infantry can arrive. We have tried in vain to get some of the peasants to do outpost duty; they all say that they will be ready to fight when the enemy comes, but they want a good sleep first, and even Cathelineau could not move them. It is heart-breaking to have to do with such men."

"I do not think that it is laziness, it is that they have a fixed objection to doing what they consider any kind of soldier work. Their idea of war is to wait till the enemy comes, and then to make a rush upon them, and when they have done that they think their duty is ended. Some day, when the Blues have a sharp commander, and have gained a little discipline, we shall suffer some terrible disaster from the obstinacy of the peasantry."

With a word of adieu Leigh turned off the road, and made his way half-way up the eminence. Here the guns could be plainly made out. Leaving André and his two followers he went quietly up the slope to assure himself that the artilleryman was still there. Had he missed him he was determined to go at once to Cathelineau and state his suspicions, and his belief that Bruno had gone off to inform Berruyer that if he advanced he would find the place wholly unguarded, and would have it at his mercy. He found, however, that the artilleryman was still asleep, and returned to André.

"Now," he said, "there is no occasion for us all to watch. I with one of the others will keep a look-out for the next two hours, and at the end of that time will rouse you and the others."

Leigh's watch had passed off quietly, there was no movement among the guns, and from the position in which Bruno was lying his figure would have been seen at once had he risen to his feet. "If the man up there stands up you are to awaken me at once, André," he said. Overcome by the excitement and the heat of the day, Leigh dropped off to sleep almost immediately. An hour later he was roused by being shaken by André.

"The man has got up, sir."

The artilleryman, after stretching himself two or three times, took up something from the ground beside him, and then went some distance down the side of the hill, but still in sight of the watchers.

"He has got something on his shoulder, sir, I think it is a shovel, and he has either a cloak or a sack on his arm."

"He is evidently up to something," Leigh replied, "but what it can be I cannot imagine."

Presently the man stopped and began to work.

"He is digging," André said in surprise.

"It looks like it certainly, but what he can be digging for I have no idea." Presently the man was seen to raise a heavy weight on to his shoulders.

"It was a sack he had with him," André said, "and he has filled it with earth and stones."

Leigh did not reply, the mystery seemed to thicken, and he was unable to form any supposition whatever that would account for the man's proceedings. The latter carried his burden up to the cannon, then he laid it down, and took up some long tool and thrust it into the mouth of one of the cannon. A light suddenly burst upon Leigh. "The scoundrel is going to draw the charges," he said, "and fill up the cannon with the earth that he has brought up." André



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"LEIGH GAVE THE WORD, AND LEAPING UP THEY THREW
THEMSELVES ON THE TRAITOR."



would have leapt to his feet as he uttered an exclamation of rage.

"Keep quiet!" Leigh said authoritatively; "we have no evidence against him yet; we must watch him a bit longer before we interrupt him."

After two or three movements the man was seen to draw something from the gun. This he laid on the ground and then inserted the tool again.

"That is the powder," Leigh whispered, as something else was withdrawn from the gun; "there, you see he is taking handfuls of earth from the sack and shoving it into the mouth."

This was continued for some time, and then a rammer was inserted and pushed home several times. Then he moved to the next cannon.

"Now follow very quietly, André; busy as he is, we may get quite close up to him before he notices us. Mind, you are not to use your knife; we can master him easily enough, and must then take him down to Cathelineau for his fate to be decided on."

Noiselessly they crept up the hill; when within five or six paces of the gun at which Bruno was at work, Leigh gave the word, and, leaping up, they threw themselves on the traitor, who was taken so completely by surprise that they were able to throw him at once to the ground. Snatching up a rope that had been used for drawing the guns, Leigh bound his arms securely to his side, and then, putting a pistol to his head, ordered him to rise to his feet.

"Shoot me if you like," the man growled; "I will not move."

"I will not shoot you," Leigh replied; "you must be tried and condemned. Now, André, we must carry him."

The four boys had no difficulty in carrying the man

down. As they passed the officer on sentry, he said, "Whom have you there, Monsieur Stansfield?"

"It is Bruno, the artilleryman. We have caught him drawing the charges from the guns, and filling them with earth. We must take him to the general."

"The villain!" the officer exclaimed. "Who would have thought of a Vendéan turning traitor?"

Cathelineau was still up talking with some of his officers as to the preparations for the battle. There was no sentry at his door; Leigh entered, and, tapping at the door of the room in which he saw a light, went in. Cathelineau looked up in surprise as the door opened.

"I thought you were asleep hours ago, monsieur," he said.

"It is well that I have not been, sir." And he related the conversation that he had overheard, and his own suspicions that the man Bruno meditated treachery, the steps they had taken to watch him, and the discovery they had made. Exclamations of indignation and fury broke from the officers.

"Gentlemen," Cathelineau said, "we will at once proceed to try this traitor; he shall be judged by men of his own class. Monsieur Pourcet, do you go out and awaken the first twelve peasants you come to."

In a minute or two the officer returned with the peasants, who looked surprised at having been thus roused from their sleep.

"My friends, do you take your places along that side of the room. You are a jury, and are to decide upon the guilt or innocence of a man who is accused of being a traitor."

The word roused them at once, and all repeated indignantly the word "traitor!"

"Monsieur Stansfield," he said to Leigh, "will you order your men to bring in the prisoner?"

The man was brought in and placed at the head of the table opposite to Cathelineau.

"Now, Monsieur Stansfield, will you tell the jury the story that you have just told me?"

Leigh repeated his tale, interrupted occasionally by exclamations of fury from the peasants. André and the other lads stepped forward one after the other and confirmed Leigh's statement.

"Before you return a verdict, my friends," Cathelineau said quietly, "it is but right that we should go up to the battery and examine the cannon ourselves; not, of course, that we doubt the statement of Monsieur Stansfield and the other witnesses, but because it is well that each of you should be able to see for himself, and report to others that you have been eye-witnesses of the traitor's plot."

Accordingly the whole party ascended to the battery. There lay the spade and the sack of earth; the tool with which the work had been done was still in the mouth of the second cannon, and on pulling it out, the powder-cartridge came with it. Then Leigh led them to the next gun, and a man who had a bayonet thrust it in and soon brought some earth and stones to the mouth of the gun.

"We have now had the evidence of Monsieur Stansfield and those with him tested by ourselves examining the guns. What do you say, my friends, has this man been proved a traitor or not?"

"He has!" the peasants exclaimed in chorus.

"And what is your sentence?"

"Death!" was the unanimous reply.

"I approve of that sentence. March him down to the side of the river and shoot him."

Three minutes later four musket-shots rang out.

"Thus die all traitors!" Cathelineau said.

Bruno, however, was the sole Vendéan who during the course of the war turned traitor to his comrades and his country.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ASSAULT OF CHEMILLÉ.

FEW words were spoken as the group of officers returned to the town. When they reached Cathelineau's quarters, Leigh would have gone on, but the general said, "Come in, if you please, Monsieur Stansfield;" and he followed the party in.

"This has been a trial, gentlemen, a heavy trial," the general said. "When I entered upon this work I knew that there were many things that I should have to endure. I knew the trouble of forming soldiers from men who, like ours, prize their freedom and independence above all other things; that we might have to suffer defeat; that we must meet with hardships and probably death; and that in the long run all our efforts might be futile. But I had not reckoned on having to deal with treachery. I had never dreamed that one of my first acts would have been to try and to sentence a Vendéan to death for an act of the grossest treachery. However, let us put that aside; it was perhaps in the nature of things. In every community there must be a few scoundrels, and if this turns out to be a solitary instance, we may congratulate ourselves, especially as we have escaped without injury.

"That we have done so, gentlemen, is due solely to Monsieur Stansfield, who thus twice in the course of a

single day has performed an inestimable service to the cause. There are few indeed who, on hearing the braggadocio of a drunken man, would have given the matter a moment's thought, still less have undertaken a night of watchfulness after a day of the heaviest work merely to test the truth of a slightly-founded suspicion that might have occurred to them. It is not too much to say that had not this act of treachery been discovered our defeat to-morrow would have been well-nigh certain. You know how much our people think of their guns, and if, when the fight began, the cannon had been silent instead of pouring their contents into the ranks of the enemy, they would have lost heart at once, and would have been beaten almost before the fight began. We have no honours to bestow on you, Monsieur Stansfield, but in the name of La Vendée I thank you with all my heart. I shall add to my order respecting your fight of yesterday a statement of what has taken place to-night, and I shall beg that all officers read it aloud to the parties that follow them."

"I agree most cordially with the general's words," M. Bonchamp said. "Your defence yesterday would have been a credit to any military man, and this discovery has saved us from ruin to-morrow, or rather to-day. I will venture to say that not one man in five hundred would have taken the trouble to go out of his way to ascertain whether the words of a drunken man rested on any foundation."

There was then a short conversation as to the approaching fight. The number of men who had arrived was much smaller than had been anticipated, owing to the fact that the simultaneous invasion at so many points had the effect of retaining the peasants of the various localities for the defence of their own homes. Leigh learned that a

mounted messenger had been despatched shortly before he brought the prisoner down, to beg Monsieur d'Elbée to bring the force he commanded at Chollet with all speed to aid in the defence of Chemillé, for if that town fell he would be exposed to the attack of the united forces of Generals Berruyer and Leigonyer.

"Now, gentlemen, I think we had better get a few hours' sleep," Cathelineau said. "They will not be here very early, probably not until noon, for they may wait for a time before starting, in hopes of being joined either by Leigonyer or one of the other columns, and it is not likely that any news of the sharp reverse that Leigonyer has met with has reached them."

It was now two o'clock in the morning, and Leigh slept heavily till roused at eight.

"You should have called me before, André," he said reproachfully when he learnt how late it was.

"I thought it was better that you should have a good sleep, captain. Of course, if there had been any message to say that you were wanted I should have woke you, but as no one came, and there is still no news of the enemy, I thought that it was better to let you sleep till now."

Pierre had started with his party at five to scout on the road by which the enemy was advancing. Leigh first hurried down to the river and had a bathe, and then felt ready for any work that he might have to do. He then went to the house where Jean was lodged. The latter, who had not returned from his outpost work till day broke, was just getting up.

"Well, Leigh," he said, "I called in at Cathelineau's quarters to report. I found him already up. He told me the work that you had been doing, and praised you up to the skies. It seems to me that you are getting all the

credit of the campaign. Really I feel quite proud of you, and we shall be having you starting as a rival leader to Cathelineau."

Leigh laughed.

"One does not often have two such opportunities in the course of a day, and I don't suppose I am likely to have such luck again if the war goes on for a year. Where are you going to be to-day?"

"I am going to act as aide-de-camp to Bonchamp."

"And what shall we do, do you think?"

"Well, I should say you had best keep out of it altogether, Leigh. You and your band did much more than your share of fighting yesterday, and your pistols will be of no use in a fight such as this will be. Seriously, unless Cathelineau assigns you some post I should keep out of it. Your little corps is specially formed to act as scouts, and as we are so extremely badly off in that respect, it will be far better for you to keep to your proper duties than to risk your lives."

"How do you think the fight is likely to go, Jean?"

"It depends in the first place upon how the Blues fight; if they do well they ought to beat us. In the next place, it depends on whether d'Elbée comes up in time. If he does, I think that we shall hold the place, but it will be stiff fighting."

It was not until noon that Berruyer's force was seen approaching. As soon as it was in sight the Vendéans poured out and took up their station by the hill on which the guns were placed. In spite of what Jean had said, Leigh would have placed his band with the rest, had not Cathelineau sent for him half an hour before and given him orders which were almost identical with the advice of Jean.

"I wish you and your band to keep out of this battle,

Monsieur Stansfield. Your force is so small that it can make no possible difference in the fortunes of the day, and whether we win or lose, your lads may be wanted as messengers after it is over. They have done extremely well at present, and need no further credit than they have gained. I beg, therefore, that you will take post with them somewhat in rear of the village, away on the right. I shall then know where to find you if I have any messages to send; and moreover, I want you at once to send off one of your most active lads with this note to d'Elbée urging him to come on at full speed, for the fight is likely to go hard with us unless he comes in time to our assistance, and telling him I wish him to know that, even if I have to fall back, the church will be held till the last, and that as soon as he arrives I shall, if possible, again take the offensive, and beg that he will attack the enemy in flank or in rear as he sees an opportunity. Upon the belfry of the church, half a mile on our right, you will be able to see how the battle goes, and can send off news to d'Elbée from time to time."

"Very well, sir. I will despatch your letter at once and then march out to the church, which I noticed yesterday."

"Here is a telescope," Cathelineau said. "We are well provided with them, as we took all that we could find at Chollet and Vihiers. I think that with its aid you will be able to have a good view of what is going on."

In twenty minutes Leigh had taken up his post in the belfry of the village church that Cathelineau had indicated. André and Pierre, whose party had returned an hour before, were with him. The rest of the band were in the story below them, from which a view was also obtainable. The three most severely wounded had started for their homes early that morning, the others were fit for duty. The fight began by a discharge of the guns of the assailants.

Leigh could see that the defenders' guns had been somewhat withdrawn from their position on the top of the rising ground, where they would have been too much exposed to the enemy's fire, and their muzzles now only showed over the brow. During the course of the morning an earthwork had been thrown up to afford protection to the men serving them. They did not return the fire until the enemy were within a distance of a quarter of a mile, then they commenced with deadly effect.

The Blues halted, and Leigh could make out that a considerable number of men in the rear at once turned and ran. In order to encourage them, they had been informed just before they marched of the plot that had been arranged to silence the guns, and this unexpected discharge caused the greatest consternation among the young levies. A body of cavalry were at once sent off in pursuit, and drove the fugitives back to their ranks, the troopers using the flats of their swords unstintingly. Then the advance was resumed, covered by the fire of the guns and by volleys of musketry. These were answered but feebly by the fire-arms in the peasants' hands, and the Blues pressed on until, just before they reached the foot of the slope, the peasants charged them with fury. The regular troops and a regiment of gendarmes had been placed in front. These stood firm, poured heavy volleys into the peasants as they approached, and then received them with levelled bayonets.

In vain the Vendéans strove to break through the hedge of steel. Cathelineau and his officers on one side, and the French generals on the other, encouraged their men, and for a quarter of an hour a desperate conflict reigned, then the peasants fell back, and the Blues resumed their advance. Three times Cathelineau induced his followers to renew the attack, but each time it was unsuccessful. The Blues

mounted the hill, the cannon were captured, and the Vendéans fell back into the town. Here the ends of the streets had been barricaded, and in spite of the artillery and the captured guns now turned against their former owners, the assailants tried in vain to force their way into the town. From every window that commanded the approaches the men with muskets kept up an incessant fire. The mass of the peasants lay in shelter behind the barricades or in the houses until the enemy's infantry approached to within striking distance, and then, leaping up from these barricades, and fighting with an absolute disregard of their lives, they again and again repulsed the attacks of the enemy.

Berruyer, seeing that in spite of his heavy losses he made no way, called his troops from the assault, and forming them into two columns, moved to the right and left, and attacked the town on both sides. Here no barricades had been erected, and in spite of the efforts of the peasants an entrance was forced into the town. Every street, lane, and house was defended with desperate energy, but discipline gradually triumphed, and the Blues won their way into the square in the centre of the town where the principal church stood. As they entered the open space they were assailed with a rain of bullets from the roof, tower, and windows. As soon as the flanking movement began, Monsieur Bonchamp, seeing that the town was now certain to be taken, had hurried with the greater portion of the men armed with muskets to the church, which had already been prepared by him on the previous day for the defence.

A great number of paving stones had been got up from the roadway and piled inside the church, and as soon as he arrived there with his men the doors were closed and blocked behind with a deep wall of stones. Berruyer saw that the position was a formidable one, and, ignorant of the

number of the defenders, sent back for his guns and contented himself for the time by clearing the rest of the town of its defenders. These, however, as they issued out were rallied by Cathelineau and his officers. They assured the peasants that the day was not yet lost, that the church would hold out for hours, and that d'Elbée would soon arrive with his force from Chollet to their assistance. Leigh, anxiously watching the progress of the fight, had sent messenger after messenger along the road by which d'Elbée would come. His heart sank as he heard the guns open in the centre of the town and knew that they were directed against the church. Still there was no abatement of the fire of the defenders, an incessant fire of musketry was maintained, not only from the church itself, but from every window in the houses around it. At last he heard that d'Elbée's force was but a quarter of a mile away, and, running down from his look-out, he started to meet it. It was coming at a run, the men panting and breathless, but holding on desperately, half-maddened with the sound of battle.

"All is not lost yet, then?" d'Elbée said, as he came up.

"No, sir, the church holds out, and I could see that the peasants who have been driven out of the town have rallied but a few hundred yards away, and are evidently only waiting for your arrival to renew the attack. I think, sir, that if you will run up to the belfry of the church with this glass you will be able to understand the exact situation."

The officer ran up the tower and returned in two or three minutes. Then he led his men down towards the south-eastern corner of the town.

Leigh, on hearing that d'Elbée was close at hand, sent off two messengers to Cathelineau to inform him of the

fact, and he now sent off another stating the direction in which the reinforcement was marching.

"I am going to attack at that corner instead of in the rear," Monsieur d'Elbée said to him; for, now that the duty assigned to him had been performed, Leigh thought that he would be justified in joining in the attack with what remained of his band. "If I were to get directly in their rear they would, on finding their retreat cut off, fight so fiercely that I might be overpowered—even the most cowardly troops will fight under these circumstances; therefore, while threatening their line of retreat, I still leave it open to them. It is a maxim in war, you know, always to leave a bridge open for a flying foe."

In a few minutes they reached the town. None had observed their approach, the troops being assembled round the church. These were at once thrown into confusion when they found themselves attacked with fury by a large force, of whose existence they had no previous thought.

The Vendéans fought with desperate valour. The new levies for the most part lost heart at once, and, in spite of the efforts of Berruyer and his officers, began to make for the line of retreat. The movement was accelerated by an outburst of shouts from the other side of the town, where Cathelineau's force poured in, burning to avenge their former losses; and as they fell upon the enemy, Bonchamp led out the defenders of the church by a side door and joined in the fray. Berruyer saw that all was lost. By great efforts he kept together the gendarmes and regular troops to cover the retreat, and fell back fighting fiercely. Bonchamp and his musketeers pressed hotly upon them. The peasants made charge after charge, and as soon as the force issued from the town many of the peasantry set off at full speed in pursuit of the fugitives, great numbers of

whom were overtaken and killed. Berruyer continued his retreat all night, and entered St. Lambert before morning, having lost the whole of his cannon and three thousand men in this disastrous fight.

The joy of the Vendéans was unbounded. The stones were speedily removed from the shattered doors of the church, mass was celebrated, and the peasants returned thanks for their great victory. The gains were indeed considerable, three thousand muskets had fallen into their hands. They had recaptured the guns that they had lost and taken twelve others. Their own losses had been heavy—eighteen hundred men had been killed, and a great number wounded. But of this at the time they thought but little; those who had died had died for their country and their God, as all of them were ready to do, and how could men do more?

On the Republican side General Duhaus had been very dangerously wounded, and most of Berruyer's principal officers killed. A council of war was held the next morning at Chemillé. For the moment the victory had secured their safety; but while the peasants believed and hoped that the war was over, their leaders saw that the position was scarcely improved. They had, indeed, captured guns and muskets, but these were useless without ammunition, and their stock of powder and ball was quite exhausted. Already the peasantry were leaving in large numbers for their homes. Berruyer might return reinforced at any time and effect a junction with Leigonyer, while the column that had captured St. Florent would doubtless advance. It was therefore decided that Chemillé must be abandoned, and that the officers should retire to Tiffauges until, at any rate, the peasants were ready to leave their homes again. By evening that day the greater portion of the army had melted away, and on the following morning the leaders.

also left the town they had so bravely defended. On the following day, indeed, Berruyer, having learned the position of Leigonyer, returned to Chemillé, and, two days later, was in communication with Leigonyer's force. The latter had occupied Chollet, which had been left devoid of defenders since the day they marched away.

On the other hand, Quetineau had, on the thirteenth, been attacked at Aubiers, and had been forced to evacuate the place, leaving three guns behind him, retiring to Bressuire. The capture of Aubiers was the work of Henri de la Rochejaquelein. He had ridden to join Cathelineau, and met him and the other leaders retiring from Chemillé. They were gloomy and depressed. They had won a battle, but they were without an army, without ammunition. Almost all the towns were in the possession of the Blues. It seemed to them that the struggle could not be much longer maintained. The young count was too energetic and too enthusiastic to be seriously moved, and rode back to the residence of an aunt at St. Aubin. There he learned that Aubiers had been taken by the enemy. The peasantry around were in a state of extreme excitement. They had hoisted the white flag on their churches, and were ready to fight, but they had no leader.

Hearing that Rochejaquelein was at his aunt's house, they came to him, and begged him to take the command, promising him that in twenty-four hours ten thousand men should be ready to follow him. He agreed to the request. The church bells were set ringing, and before morning almost that number were assembled. Of these only two hundred had guns. With this force he attacked Aubiers. The resistance of the enemy was feeble, and they were chased almost to Bressuire. Rochejaquelein was very anxious to capture this town, as his friends, the Lescures,

had been brought from Clisson and imprisoned there, but he saw that it was of primary importance to carry assistance to Cathelineau, and he accordingly marched to Tiffauges. The church bells again rang out their summons, and Cathelineau in twenty-four hours found himself at the head of an army of twenty thousand men.

"I told you at Clisson that I should soon meet you again, Monsieur Martin," La Rochejaquelein said when, as he rode into Tiffauges at the head of his newly raised force, he met Jean in the street, "and here I am, you see. I am only sorry that I am too late to take part in the brave fight at Chemillé."

"Right glad are we to see you, count," Jean replied. "This is my wife's brother of whom I was speaking to you at Clisson. Cathelineau will tell you that he has been distinguishing himself rarely."

Henri held out his hand to Leigh and said warmly, "I am glad to know you; it would be a shame indeed were any Vendéans to remain at home when a young Englishman is fighting for their country. I hope that we shall be great friends."

"I shall be glad indeed to be so," Leigh replied with equal warmth, for he was greatly struck with the appearance of the young soldier.

Henri de la Rochejaquelein was but twenty-one years old, tall, and remarkably handsome. He had fair hair and a noble bearing. His father had been a colonel in the army, and he himself was a cavalry officer in the king's guard. He was the beau ideal of a dashing hussar, and his appearance was far more English than French. He was immensely popular, his manner frank and pleasant, and he was greatly beloved by the peasantry on his family estates.

At this moment Cathelineau with his two generals came

up, and Leigh retired from the circle. The arrival of the young count with his strong reinforcement at once altered the position. The leaders, who had, since they fell back from Chemillé, been depressed and almost hopeless, beamed with satisfaction as they talked with Henri, whose enthusiasm was infectious.

La Rochejaquelein accompanied them to his quarters. Hitherto he had only heard rumours of the fighting at Chemillé, and Cathelineau now gave him a full account of the affair. Jean Martin had, at his invitation, accompanied him, and when Cathelineau had finished, Henri turned to him and said:

“Indeed you did not exaggerate, Monsieur Martin, when you said that your brother-in-law had already distinguished himself; in fact, there can be no doubt that the splendid defence he made at that little river, where he held Berruyer’s whole force in check for upwards of three hours, and so forced him to halt for the night on the way instead of pushing forward and attacking Chemillé at once, saved the town, for it gave time to Monsieur d’Elbée to come up. Scarcely less important was his detection of the treachery of the man in charge of the artillery. I cannot but regret that so gallant a young fellow is not my countryman, for I should have felt proud of one so daring and so thoughtful. When you do not want him for scouting work, Monsieur Cathelineau, I shall get you to lend him to me. I should be really glad to have him by my side. His face pleased me much, there was something so frank and honest about it, and after what he has done I am sure that I shall always respect his opinion.”

There was another consultation as to what should be their first operation, and it was resolved that Leigonyer should be attacked at once before he could make a complete

junction with Berruyer. The next morning at daybreak the whole force moved off. They were only just in time, for Berruyer had already ordered General Gauvillier, who commanded the force that had captured St. Florent, to advance to Beaupréau. Berruyer was to march to Vezins, and he himself to Jallais, and to join Leigonyer at May. On the previous evening Henri had, after the termination of the council, requested Jean Martin to take him to the house where Leigh and his little party were quartered.

"I have been hearing of your doings," he said, "and feel quite jealous that you, who are, I hear, four years younger than myself, should have done so much, while I, with all my family influence and connection, should as yet have done nothing but chase the enemy out of Aubiers. How is it that you, who have had no training as a soldier, should have conceived the idea of arresting the march of Berruyer's army with a force of only two or three hundred peasants?"

"It was a mere matter of common sense," Leigh said with a smile. "I knew that it was of the utmost importance that Chemillé should not be attacked until Cathelineau received reinforcements. At first I had no thought of doing more than breaking down the bridge, and of perhaps checking the advanced cavalry, but when I found that the peasants who came along were quite willing to aid, it seemed to me that by cutting down the trees, so as to block the road and make a shelter for us, we might be able to cause the enemy considerable delay. I hardly hoped to succeed in holding out so long, or in inflicting such loss upon him as we were able to do. It did not require any military knowledge whatever, and I should not have attempted it had I not seen that, thanks to the forest, we should be able to retreat when we could no longer hold the barricade of felled trees."

“Well, you could not have done better if you had been a general. I have Cathelineau’s permission to ask you to ride with me when you are not engaged in scouting.”

“I should be delighted to do so, but at present I have no horse. However, I can send one of my lads back to the château to fetch the one that I generally ride.”

“I have brought a spare animal with me,” the young count said. “I brought it in case the other should be shot, and I shall be glad if you will ride it to-morrow, and until yours arrives; but I would not send for one until after to-morrow, for likely enough we may make some captures before nightfall. We are to march at three in the morning and to attack Leigonyer. The great thing that we need is powder. Cathelineau says that there is scarcely a charge left among his men. Mine are not much better off. We should have had none with which to attack Aubiers, but I sent off during the night to a quarry a few miles from my aunt’s, and succeeded in getting forty pounds of blasting-powder. It would not have been of much use for the muskets, but the fact of its being powder was sufficient to encourage the peasants; and the Blues made such a feeble resistance that its quality made no difference to us; it enabled those who had muskets to make a noise with them, and was just as effectual in raising their spirits in attacking the Blues as if it had been the finest quality. We got a few hundred cartridges when we took the place, but that will not go very far, and I hope that to-morrow we shall be able to obtain a supply from the enemy.”

Before the hour for starting the force had swelled considerably. The news that Monsieur de la Rochejaquelein had retaken Aubiers, and had come with twelve thousand men to assist Cathelineau, spread like wildfire. The peasants

from all the country round flocked in, and when they started in the morning the united force had swollen to over twenty thousand men. As soon as the young count left him, Leigh sent off all his band, under his lieutenants, with orders to proceed towards Vezins, to ascertain the progress Leigonyer had made, and the position of his forces, and to send back news to him. Just as the army was starting, one of the boys returned, and said that a party of twelve cavalry and a detachment of infantry had just entered the château of Crilloire. Leigh at once informed Cathelineau, who sent off a hundred and fifty men to capture the place. They were ordered to travel at the top of their speed, and Jean Martin was in command of them.

The expedition was crowned with success. The infantry, who had been stationed outside the château, fled at once. Their commandant, Villemet, Leigonyer's best officer, charged the Vendéans with his little body of cavalry. He was received with a volley. Two of his men were killed, and he himself and nine of his men were wounded. He managed, however, to burst through the Vendéans and to overtake his flying infantry. These he rallied and led back to the château, which he found deserted, for Martin, as soon as he captured the place and cleared it of the enemy, had gone off with his men to join the main body. Berruyer had also started early, and sent five hundred men to May, where he expected Leigonyer to arrive in a few hours; but before he reached the town the Vendéans attacked the advanced-guard of the latter general, which consisted of two companies of grenadiers. These old soldiers fought well, and threw themselves into the château of Bois-Groleau. Leaving fifteen hundred men to surround and attack the château, the main army pressed forward. Leigonyer, hearing of the disaster, sent forward two thousand men to succour

the besieged force, but the Vendéans fell upon them, and after a short resistance they broke and fled into Vezins.

The arrival of the fugitives caused a panic among the whole of Leigonyer's force assembled there, and they fled precipitately, two hundred and fifty men of the regiment of Finisterre alone remaining steady, and these, maintaining good order, covered the retreat of the guns, repulsing the attacks of the peasantry who pursued them. Fortunately for the Vendéans, a waggon laden with barrels of powder was left behind in the confusion caused by their approach, and proved of inestimable value to them. Had the Vendéans pursued the fugitives with vigour the force would have been almost annihilated, but Cathelineau, learning from Leigh's scouts that Berruyer was already approaching Vezins, feared to be taken in the rear by him, and therefore fell back to May and Beaupréau. The garrison that defended the château of Bois-Groleau, repulsed the repeated attacks made upon them, but surrendered on the approach of the main army, their ammunition and the food they had brought with them in their haversacks being entirely exhausted.

Berruyer, on his arrival at Jallais, heard of the defeat of Leigonyer, and marched back in all haste to Chemillé, where he had left his magazines. On hearing, however, that Leigonyer on his arrival at Vihiers had been deserted during the night by the whole of his troops, and finding himself in the morning with but a hundred and fifty men of the Finisterre regiment, had evacuated the town and retreated to Doué, Berruyer wrote to him to endeavour to gather his forces together again and to return to Chemillé. But the news of another disaster convinced him that he could not maintain himself there. The Vendéans had marched without delay against Beaupréau and attacked

Gauvillier. That general had already heard of the defeat of Leigonyer and the retreat of Berruyer. His force was greatly dispirited at the news, and offered but a feeble resistance to the fierce assault. The Blues were driven out of the town with the loss of their five cannon, and were hotly pursued to St. Florent, losing a large proportion of their numbers on the way.

The news of this fresh disaster convinced Berruyer that he must fall back without delay, and he accordingly retreated with his whole force to St. Lambert, whence he wrote to the Convention to declare the impossibility of doing anything without large reinforcements of regular troops, as no dependence whatever could be placed upon the National Guards and volunteers, and if the insurgents marched against him, he would be obliged to march to Ponts-de-Cé in order to cover Angers, where the alarm of the inhabitants was intense.

Thus the invasion that was to crush the Vendéans failed altogether, except that some advantages had been gained by the Blues along the line of coast, the troops being assisted by the fleet; at all other points misfortune had attended them. Quetineau had been driven from Aubiers, and, a great proportion of his force having deserted, he held Bressuire with so feeble a grasp that he could not maintain himself if attacked. Leigonyer's army had practically ceased to exist, as had that which had advanced from St. Florent. Berruyer had lost three thousand men, and was back again at the point from which he had started. Chollet and Vihiers had been recovered without a blow.

As the result of his failures, Berruyer was recalled to Paris, tried for his conduct, and narrowly escaped the guillotine.

As soon as Berruyer retired, Cathelineau advanced

against Bressuire. News of his coming at once scared the Blues from the town, and they retreated to Thouars. They did not even wait to take their prisoners with them, and as soon as they had gone the Marquis de la Lescure with his family rode off to their château at Clisson. They had scarcely arrived there when la Rochejaquelein arrived and acquainted them with the general facts of the insurrection.

“Cathelineau’s army,” he said, “consists of twenty thousand men, and on any emergency it would swell to nearly twice that number. Twelve thousand Bretons had crossed the Loire, and were on their way to join him. In lower Poitou, Charette had an army of twenty thousand, and besides these, there were many scattered bands.”

Lescure at once agreed to accompany la Rochejaquelein to Bressuire, and the Marquis of Donnissan, Madame Lescure’s father, arranged to follow them as soon as he had seen his wife and daughter safely placed in the château of de la Boulais.

CHAPTER VII.

A SHORT REST.

LEIGH STANSFIELD had ridden with Rochejaquelein during the march of the army to Vezins, and from there to Bressuire. He was charmed with his companion, who had been the first to dash with a few other mounted gentlemen into the streets of Vezins, and who had thrown himself with reckless bravery upon the retreating infantry, and as the peasants came up, had led them to the attack several

times, until Cathelineau's orders, that the pursuit should be pushed no farther, reached him.

"That sort of order is very hard to obey," he said to Leigh. "However, I need not regret that these brave fellows should escape us; we have won the battle, if one can call it a battle, and I honour the men who, when all the others have fled like sheep, still cling together and defend their guns. At least a hundred of them have fallen since they left the town, and we have lost double that number, and should lose at least as many more before we finally overcame their opposition. If all the armies of the Republic were composed of such stuff as this regiment, I fear that our chance of defending La Vendée successfully would be small indeed."

On rejoining Cathelineau, and hearing his reason for calling off the pursuit, Henri at once admitted its wisdom.

"After the defeat of Leigonyer, you will see that Berruyer will not long be able to maintain himself at Chemillé," he said; "and when he hears the news, I fancy that he will retire at once, for he will know well enough that it will be useless for him to pursue us. Still, if he were to come down on our rear as we advanced, it would have a bad effect upon the peasants, and it is much better to avoid fighting unless under circumstances that are almost sure to give us victory. We can almost always choose our own ground, which is an enormous advantage in a country like this. It is very fortunate that it is so, for we certainly could not raise a body of cavalry that could stand against those of the line; but in these lanes and thickets they have no superiority in that respect, for no general would be fool enough to send cavalry into places where they would be at the mercy of an unseen foe. At the same time, I must own that I regretted to-day that we had

no mounted force. With but a squadron or two of my old regiment, not a man of Leigonyer's force would have escaped, for the country here is open enough to use them, and I should certainly have had no compunction in cutting down the rascals who are always shouting for blood, and yet are such arrant cowards that they fly without firing a shot."

The day after the capture of Bressuire the Vendéans marched against Thouars, to which town Quetineau had retreated with his force. Thouars was the only town in La Vendée which was still walled. The fortifications were in a dilapidated condition, but nevertheless offered a considerable advantage to a force determined upon a desperate resistance. With the fugitives from Bressuire, and the garrison already in Thouars, Quetineau was at the head of three thousand five hundred troops; of these, however, comparatively few could be depended upon. The successive defeats that had been inflicted on the troops of the Republic by the Vendéans had entirely destroyed their moral, they no longer felt any confidence in their power to resist the onslaught of the peasants.

Quetineau himself had no hope of making a successful resistance. He had repeatedly written urgent letters to the authorities at Paris saying that nothing could be done without large reinforcements of disciplined troops, and that the National Guard and volunteers were worse than useless, as they frequently ran at the first shot, and excited the hostility of the people generally by their habits of plundering. Nevertheless, the old soldier determined to resist to the last, however hopeless the conflict; and when the Vendéans approached at six o'clock in the morning they found that the bridge of Viennes was barricaded and guarded. As soon as they attacked, the general re-

inforced the defenders of the bridge by his most trustworthy troops, a battalion three hundred and twenty-five strong, of Marseillais, and a battalion of the National Guard of Nièvre. So stoutly was the post held that the Vendéan general saw that the bridge could not be taken without terrible loss. He therefore contented himself with keeping up a heavy fire all day while preparing an attack from other quarters.

The first step was to destroy the bridge behind the castle, and to make a breach in the wall near the Paris gate, thereby cutting off the garrison's means of retreat. At five o'clock a large body of peasantry was massed for an attack on the bridge at Viennes, and its defenders, seeing the storm that was preparing, retired into the town. The Vendéans crossed the bridge, but as they approached the walls, they were attacked by a battalion of the National Guard of Deux Sèvres and a body of gendarmes, and, taken by surprise, were driven back some distance. Their leaders, however, speedily rallied them, and in the meantime other bodies forced their way into the town at several points. To avoid a massacre of his troops, Quétineau hoisted the white flag. On this, as on all other occasions in the northern portion of La Vendée, the prisoners were well treated. They were offered their freedom on condition of promising not to serve against La Vendée again, and to ensure that this oath should be kept for some time at least, their heads were shaved before their release, a step that was afterwards taken throughout the war.

Quétineau was treated with all honour, and was given his freedom without conditions. Although he knew well that neither his long services nor the efforts that he had made would save him from the fury of the Convention, he returned to Paris, where, after the mockery of a trial, he

was sent to the guillotine, a fate which awaited all those who failed, in the face of impossibilities, to carry out the plans of the mob leaders. Instead of blame, the general deserved a high amount of praise for the manner in which he had defended the town against a force six times as strong as his own. Three thousand muskets, ten pieces of cannon, and a considerable amount of ammunition fell into the hands of the victors. This success left it open to the Vendéans either to march against Leigonyer—the remnant of whose army was in a state of insubordination at Doué, and could have offered no opposition, but must have retreated to Saumur—or to clear the country south and west.

The former would unquestionably have been the wiser course, for the capture of Saumur would have been a heavy blow indeed to the Republicans; but the peasants, whose villages and property were threatened by the presence of the Blues at Fontenay, Parthenay, and Chataigneraie, were so strongly in favour of the other alternative that it was adopted, and the force broke into two divisions, one moving towards Chataigneraie, and the other against Fontenay. Parthenay was evacuated at once by the Republicans as soon as news reached the authorities of the approach of the Vendéans. The latter, however, made no stay, but continued their march towards Chataigneraie. The town was held by General Chalbos with three thousand men. After two hours' fighting, Chalbos, seeing that his retreat was menaced, fell back.

He took up a position at Fontenay, where he was joined by General Sandoz from Niort. The country around the town was unfavourable for the Vendéans, being a large plain, and the result was disastrous to them. The Republicans were strong in cavalry, and a portion of these fell on the flank of the Vendéans, while the remainder charged

them in rear. They fell into disorder at once, and the cavalry captured a portion of their artillery. The Republican infantry, seeing the success of their cavalry, advanced stoutly and in good order. In vain the leaders of the Vendéans strove to reanimate their men and induce them to charge the enemy. The panic that had begun, spread rapidly, and in a few minutes they became a mob of fugitives scattering in all directions, and leaving behind them sixteen cannon and all the munitions of war they had captured.

La Rochejaquelein, who, after he had visited Lescure at Clisson, had rejoined the army with a party of gentlemen, covered the retreat with desperate valour, charging the enemy's cavalry again and again, and, before falling back, allowing time for the fugitives to gain the shelter of the woods. The loss of men was therefore small, but the fact that the peasants, who had come to be regarded as almost irresistible by the troops, should have been so easily defeated, raised the Blues from the depth of depression into which they had fallen, while the blow inflicted upon the Vendéans was correspondingly great. It was some little time before the peasants could be aroused again.

Small bodies, indeed, kept the field, and under their leaders showed so bold a face whenever reconnoitring parties of the Blues went out from Fontenay, that the troops were not long before they again began to lose heart, while the generals, who had thought that the victory at Fontenay would bring the war to a conclusion, again began to pour in letters to the authorities at Paris calling for reinforcements.

On the side of the Vendéans, the priests everywhere exerted themselves to impress upon their flocks the necessity of again joining the army. Cathelineau himself made a

tour through the Bocage, and the peasants, persuaded that the defeat was a punishment for having committed some excesses at the capture of Chataigneraie, responded to the call. In nine days after the reverse they were again in force near Fontenay, and in much greater numbers than before; for very many of them had returned to their homes as soon as Thouars had been captured, and their strength in the first battle was but little greater than that of the Republicans.

Burning with ardour to avenge their defeat, and rendered furious by the pillage of all the houses of the patriots at Chataigneraie, to which town Chalbos with seven thousand troops had marched, it was against him that the Vendéans first moved. Chalbos, who had occupied his time in issuing vainglorious proclamations, and in writing assurances to the Convention that the Vendéans were so panic-stricken that the war was virtually over, only saved his army by a long and painful night march back to Fontenay. Here the troops lay down to sleep, feeling certain that there could be no attack that day by the enemy. At one o'clock, however, the Vendéans issued from the woods on to the plain, and the troops were hastily called to arms.

The Royal Catholic Army, as it now called itself, advanced in three columns. It was without cannon, but its enthusiasm more than counterbalanced this deficiency. The Vendéans received unshaken the discharge of the artillery of the Blues, pursuing their usual tactics of throwing themselves to the ground when they saw the flash of the cannon, and then leaping up again and rushing forward with loud shouts. The cavalry were ordered to charge, but only twenty men obeyed, the rest turned and fled. The infantry offered but a feeble resistance, and in ten minutes after the first gun was fired the Republican army

was a mob of fugitives. Fontenay was taken, and, what pleased the peasants even more, their beloved cannon, Marie Jeanne, was recaptured, having been recovered by young Forêt, who with a handful of peasants charged the cavalry that were covering the retreat and snatched it from their hands. After this victory the peasants as usual returned for the most part to their homes.

As there was no probability of further fighting at the moment, Jean Martin and Leigh started for the château. They had first asked Cathelineau if they could be spared.

“For the moment, yes. I hope that we shall be joined by the Count de Lescure in a day or two; he will, of course, be one of our generals. He has great influence with the peasantry, and if he can but persuade them to remain under arms for a time we will attack the enemy. Messieurs d’Elbée and Bonchamp, and I may say several of the gentlemen with me, are of opinion that if we are to be successful in the end it can only be by taking the offensive and marching against Paris. They urge that we should get Monsieur Charette to go with us with his army, cross the Loire, rouse all Brittany, and then march a hundred thousand strong against Paris.

“They say that although we have been most successful this time, and repulsed the invaders everywhere except on the coast, they will come again and again with larger forces till they overpower us. Possibly, if Monsieur de Lescure and Henri de la Rochejaquelein aid us with their influence and authority, we might persuade the peasants that it is better to make one great effort, and then to have done with it, than to be constantly called from their homes whenever the Blues are in sufficient strength to invade us. We shall tell them, too, that after the two repulses they have suffered, the Blues will grow more and more savage, and that already

orders have been sent for all villages to be destroyed, and all hedges and woods to be cut down—a business that, by the way, would employ the whole French army for some years. However, as soon as our plans are decided upon I will send a messenger to you. At present there is nothing requiring either you or your scouts, Monsieur Stansfield, and after the good service that they have rendered it is but fair that they should have a short rest.”

Patsey was delighted when her husband and Leigh arrived. She was under no uneasiness as to their safety, as, after the repulse of Berruyer’s army at Chemillé, and the rout of Leigonyer, Leigh had sent one of the boys home with the assurance that they were unhurt.

“I don’t quite know how much to believe,” she said, as they sat down to a meal, “of the reports that the boys have brought home. The first came and told me that on your arrival at Cathelineau’s, he himself praised them all, and that Monsieur Bonchamp drilled them for an hour; then came home two wounded lads with a story about the great fight, in which they insisted that Leigh commanded, and that they kept the army of the Blues at bay for three hours and killed hundreds of them. The next messenger told us a tale about Leigh’s having discovered some treachery upon the part of the man who was in charge of the artillery, and that he was in consequence shot. He insisted that Cathelineau had declared that Leigh had saved Chemillé, because the enemy were so long delayed that Monsieur d’Elbée with his band had time to come up from Chollet and rout the Blues.

“Of course I did not believe anything like all they said, but I suppose there must be something in it, for I questioned the boys myself; and though I had no doubt they would make as much as they could of their own doings among

their neighbours and friends, they would hardly venture to lie, though they might exaggerate greatly to me."

"Strange as it may appear, Patsey," Jean said, "they told you the simple truth, and as soon as we have finished supper I will tell you the whole story of what has taken place since we left, and you will see that this brother of yours has cut a very conspicuous figure in our affairs."

"You are not joking, Jean?"

"Not in the smallest degree. I can assure you that if Leigh chose to set up as leader on his own account a large proportion of the peasants would follow him."

"Ridiculous, Jean!" Leigh exclaimed hotly.

"It may seem ridiculous, but it is a real fact. The peasants, you must know, Patsey, choose their own leaders. There is no dividing or sorting them, no getting them to keep in regular companies; they simply follow the leader in whom they have the most confidence, or who appears to them the most fortunate. If he does anything that they don't like, or they do not approve of his plan, they tell him so. Leigh's defence of the stream against Berruyer's army created a feeling of enthusiasm among them, and I verily believe that his discovery of the plot to render the cannon useless was regarded by them as almost supernatural. Superstitious and ignorant as they are, they are, as you know, always ready to consider anything they can't understand, and which acts greatly in their favour, as a special interposition of Providence. I am bound to say that Leigh acted upon such very slender grounds, that even Cathelineau, who is enormously in advance of the peasantry in general, was staggered by it, and told me he could not have believed it possible that anyone should, on such a slight clue, have followed the matter up unless by a special inspiration."

"The thing was as simple as A B C," Leigh broke in.

"You will have to remain a silent listener, Leigh," his sister said, "when Jean is telling me the story. I cannot have him interrupted."

"Very well," Leigh said. "Then I will put on my hat, take a fresh horse from the stable, and ride off to see how the two wounded boys are going on."

"I can tell you that they are almost well; but still, if you don't want to hear Jean's story of all your adventures, by all means go round. I am sure that the tenants will be gratified at hearing that you rode over to see them the very first evening you came home."

The Vendéan leaders had for some time felt the necessity of having a generally recognized authority, and after the battle of Fontenay they decided to appoint a council, who were to reside permanently at some central place and administer the affairs of the whole district, provide supplies for the armies, and make all other civil arrangements, so that the generals would be able to attend only to the actual fighting. A body of eighteen men was chosen to administer affairs under the title of the Superior Council, and a priest who had joined them at Thouars, and who called himself, though without a shadow of right, the Bishop of Agra, was appointed president. He was an eloquent man of commanding presence, and the leaders had not thought it worth while to inquire too minutely into his claim to the title of bishop, for the peasants had been full of enthusiasm at having a prelate among them, and his influence and exhortations had been largely instrumental in gathering the army which had won the battle of Fontenay.

But although he was appointed president, the leading spirit of the council was the Abbé Bernier, a man of great energy and intellect, with a commanding person, ready

pen, and a splendid voice, but who was altogether without principle, and threw himself into the cause for purely selfish and ambitious motives.

It was on the sixteenth of May that Fontenay was won, and on the third of June the church bells again called the peasantry to arms. The disaster at Fontenay had done more than all the representations of their generals to rouse the Convention. Seven battalions of regular troops arrived, and Biron, who had been appointed commander-in-chief, reached Niort and assumed the command. He wrote at once to the minister of war to say that he found the confusion impossible to describe; there was an absence of any organization whatever, the town was crowded with fugitives, who, having distinguished themselves by the violence of their opinions and the severity of their measures before the insurrection broke out, were forced to take refuge in the cities. The general reported that he had caused the assembly to be sounded again and again, without more than a tenth part of the troops paying the slightest heed to the summons.

The army was without cavalry, without waggons for carrying supplies, without an ambulance train—in fact, it was nothing but a half-armed mob. Biron himself was at heart a Royalist, and when he in turn had to meet his fate by the guillotine, openly declared himself to be one; and the repugnance which he felt on assuming the command against the Vendéans—which he had only accepted after a long delay, and after petitioning in vain to be allowed to remain at his former post—was heightened when he discovered the state of affairs, and the utter confusion that prevailed everywhere.

When sending the order for the bells to ring on the first of June, the superior council of the Vendéans issued a pro-

clamation, which was to be read in all the churches, to the effect that provisional councils should be formed in each parish to provide for the subsistence of the women and children of men with the army.

Receipts were to be given for all supplies of grain used for this purpose, which were to be paid for by the superior council. Those men who did not remain permanently with the army as long as necessary, would be called upon to pay the taxes to which they were subject prior to the rising. The sales of the land belonging to the churches—which had been sequestered on the refusal of the clergy to comply with the orders of the Convention—were declared null and void. As these had been bought by the upholders of the Revolution, for no devout Vendéan would have taken part in the robbery of the church, the blow was a heavy one to those who had so long been dominant in La Vendée. These lands were for the time to be administered for the good of the cause by the parish council. It was hoped that this proclamation would act beneficially in keeping the peasants in the field, as they would know that their families were cared for; and that if they only went out at times, they would subject themselves to taxation, and be regarded by the families of those who remained with the army as being wanting in zeal.

Upon rejoining the army, Leigh and his party of scouts learned to their satisfaction that it was intended to march against Saumur. They were now double their former strength, as the story of what they had done had roused the spirit of emulation among lads in the surrounding parishes, and Leigh could have had a hundred had he chosen. He was this time mounted, in order that he might at times ride with la Rochejaquelein, while at others he went out scouting with his party.

"I am heartily glad to see you back again, my friend," the young count said, shaking him warmly by the hand. "To be with you does me good, for the generals, and even Lescure, are so serious and solemn that I feel afraid to make a joke. You see, in the cavalry we have little responsibility except in an actual battle. In an open country we should scout ahead and have affairs with the enemy's outposts, but in this land of woods, where one can seldom see more than twenty yards ahead, there is little use for us. Besides, with the exception of a score or two of gentlemen, I have no troops to command, and having health and good spirits, and enjoying life, I cannot go about as if the cares of life were on my shoulders. Your brother-in-law Martin is a capital fellow, but, with a wife and child, he cannot feel so light-hearted as I do, though next to yourself he is the most ready to join me in a laugh. Sailors seem always to be light-hearted, and he certainly is no exception."

"He is a splendid fellow, count."

"Yes, he is a fine fellow; but you see he is seven or eight years older than I am, while I feel with you that you are about my own age. By the way, it is high time that we dropped calling each other by our surnames, especially as mine is such a long one, so in future let us be 'Henri' and 'Leigh' to each other. Most of the peasants call me Henri."

"They generally speak of you as 'our Henri'," Leigh said, "and would follow you through fire and water. I think the Vendéans are, as a whole, serious people, and they admire you all the more because you are so unlike themselves. If you do not mind my saying so, you remind me much more of the young English officers I used to meet at Poole than of Frenchmen."

"Yes, I have often been told that I am more English than French in appearance, and perhaps in manner; for in France

most men have forgotten for the past four years what it is to smile, and I question whether a laugh would not be considered in itself sufficient to ensure a man's condemnation as an enemy of the Republic. Well, so we are going to Saumur! That is an enterprise worth undertaking; it may be considered as the head-quarters of the Blues in these parts. There is a considerable body of troops there. If we capture it we shall give a rare fright to Poitiers, Tours, and the other towns, and cause a scare even in Paris."

Leigh was requested to go forward at daybreak with his band to discover the situation of the enemy who might come out from their situation to give battle before Doué. Leigonyer, who commanded here, had with him four good regiments, and occupied several strong positions on the right bank of the river Layon, and also a post called Rochette on the left bank. The fact that the Vendéans were advancing against them was already known to Leigonyer, for, confident as they now felt, the Vendéans made no secret of their destination, and the news was speedily carried by the adherents of the Convention, who everywhere acted as spies. Three such men were captured by Leigh's party making their way to Leigonyer, and, being unable to give any account of themselves, were immediately shot. Leigh had no difficulty in ascertaining the position of the enemy, and, as the army was but two hours' march in the rear, he himself rode back to carry the news.

At ten o'clock the Vendéans arrived, and at once attacked the Blues, their main column throwing itself upon the centre of the position, which it speedily forced. Leigonyer's troops at Rochette and Verches were thereby threatened in flank, and Leigonyer, who was himself present, ordered the whole force to fall back to a position which he had before chosen as being favourable for giving battle behind Doué.

But the Vendéans pressed forward with such eagerness that the retreat speedily degenerated into a rout, and the troops, for the most part throwing away their arms, fled precipitately, carrying the reserve with them to Bourlan, a strong position in front of Saumur, where General Menou was stationed, and where he succeeded in rallying them. Leigonyer, having from his previous experience great doubts as to whether he should be successful in his stand against the Vendéans, had taken the precaution to send back the waggons with the munitions and stores together with the artillery.

As his men had fled too rapidly to be overtaken, the numerical loss was not great. He himself, in his report of the fight, ascribed it to a cause that has been frequently used by the French to excuse their defeats, namely, that it was due to treachery; for many of the men broke and fled directly the action began, and these, he avowed, could have been none other than Vendéans who had disguised themselves, and enlisted for the purpose of causing discontent among the men, and confusion in their ranks the first time they met the enemy. Since the commencement of the campaign he had several times begged to be relieved of his command, and to return to the post that he occupied previously. He now repeated the demand, saying that he had lost the confidence of his men, and that a new commander would be far more likely to succeed with them. This time the request was granted, and General Menou was appointed to succeed him.

Fortunately for Leigonyer, the commissioners of the Convention reported most favourably of the activity and energy that he had personally shown, and although he was accused of treachery in the Assembly, this report saved him from the guillotine.

As soon as the fight was over, Cathelineau sent for Leigh.

"It is of the greatest importance that we should know what is passing at Saumur. We have learned from one of the officers who is a prisoner in our hands that Biron is at Tours, and is endeavouring to persuade the Paris battalions that have arrived there to march at once to Saumur. They have absolutely refused to do so until the arrival of the cannon that were promised to them before they left Paris. They may, by this time, be marching towards Saumur, with or without their cannon. General Salomon is at Thouars with a considerable force, and it is possible that he also may march to aid in the defence of Saumur, and as he has, in addition to the new levies, a fine battalion of gendarmes, his arrival at Saumur would greatly increase the strength of the defence. I should say that half your scouts had better go to Thouars, and should there be any considerable movement of troops there, they should bring me word at the greatest possible speed. We shall to-morrow march forward and take post facing the enemy's positions, and on the ninth shall attack. I tell you this in order that your scouts may know where to find me. To you, with the other half of your party, I give the charge of watching Saumur. If one or two of them could cross the Loire and watch the road between Tours and Saumur, and bring me speedy word if they see a large body of troops coming along, we should know what force we have to encounter, and act accordingly."

"You shall have news, general," Leigh said, and, saluting, at once joined his band.

Jean, who had been talking with him when the message from Cathelineau arrived, and had waited to hear what his orders were, said as he came up, "You and your regiment are off on an adventure again, Leigh?"

"Yes, we are going to watch Thouars and Saumur, and to find out, if possible, if the battalions from Paris are on their way from Tours."

"The first will be easy enough, but unless you swim the Loire I don't see how the second is to be managed."

"I should think that a boat might be obtained at one of the villages on the river bank. Anyhow, I shall get across somehow."

André was ordered to take his party to Thouars.

"Remember," Leigh said, "there is to be no fighting; not a shot must be fired. I want you and another to enter the town, if possible, from the other side, to see whether there is any unusual excitement, and especially whether there is any stir among the troops that would seem to show that they are on the point of marching away. You are to remain there until you see some such movement. The lad that you are taking in with you must go out every hour to the spot where you have left the rest, and one of these must at once start with your report to the general, who will to-morrow be on his way to Saumur, and will halt not far from its works of defence. Having delivered his message, he is to return to you, for you must continue to send off messengers until you hear that there is fighting at Saumur. If the commander of the Blues at Thouars has not moved by that time, you need remain no longer, but return with your party and join the army."

After André had left, Leigh marched with Pierre and the others to a spot up the river ten miles above Saumur.

"Can any of you swim?" he asked.

Three only of the party were able to reply in the affirmative.

"Do you think that you could swim across the Loire?"

All of them expressed great doubt of being able to do so.

"Well, at any rate I must take you with me," he said. "To be able to swim a little is a good deal better than not to be able to swim at all, for by making a faggot you will gain such support as will enable you to get across. Now, Pierre, you must for the present remain here. To-morrow morning you can go into the village whose church tower you can see over there, and find out whether the people there are for us or for the Blues. If they are for us you can show them Cathelineau's order, of which you have a copy, and they will certainly provide you with a boat. In that case, cross the river with your party and take post on the opposite bank, keeping the boat with you, and a man who can row. Then as soon as one of my messengers arrives there, you will send on my report to the general, who to-morrow evening will be not far from Saumur. Do the same with each messenger that arrives.

"If, on reaching the bank opposite the village, they do not find you there, they will follow the opposite bank down until they are opposite to you. Then they will call, and you, unless anything has happened to drive you away, will reply. The messenger will then swim across with my report as in the other case. You will send it forward at once, and he will return to the spot I shall appoint. I see there is another village a mile below us. I shall go there with my three followers to-night, we will manage to steal a boat and row across. I shall go to that village instead of the other because the loss of a boat may cause anger, and even if well disposed to the cause, they might not receive you well. However, I shall tie the boat up on the opposite bank when I leave it, so that it will not drift away down the river, and when they see it in the morning they will only have to send another boat across to fetch it over."

"I understand, captain, and will do my best to carry out

your instructions. Even if I find that at the village above they are divided in opinion, I shall surely be able to discover from their talk some who are on our side, and who will arrange to bring a boat down to this spot, in which case your messenger, when he does not find us opposite the village, will follow the bank down till he does so."

"At any rate, Pierre, here are a couple of crowns, so that you can arrange with a man for the hire of the boat and his services for twenty-four hours if necessary."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTURE OF SAUMUR.

THE arrangements being now completed, Leigh and his band lay down in a thicket near the bank of the river and slept for some hours. At one o'clock in the morning Leigh rose, and with his three followers started for the village. It was but twenty minutes' walk. Not a soul was stirring, not a light visible in any window. They found that three or four boats were lying by the bank. Leigh chose the smallest of these, and, loosening the head-rope from a post to which it was fastened, took his place in her with the others. Accustomed as he was to rowing from his childhood, he soon reached the opposite bank. Here he fastened the boat up, and struck across country until he reached the road. Then he sent one of his followers westward.

"You will follow the road," he said, "until within a mile of Tours; then you will conceal yourself and watch who passes along. If you see a large body of troops coming, you will at once strike across country and make

your way down to the village above that at which we crossed. You heard the instructions that I gave to Pierre. If you find him and the others there with the boat, you will report what you have seen. He will send another messenger on with the news to Cathelineau, and you will remain with him until I arrive. If he is not there, you will follow the bank of the river down to the other village. You will give a shout as you pass the spot where we halted. If no answer comes, you will probably find Pierre and the boat somewhere below. You will not miss him, for I have ordered him to post two of your comrades on the bank so that you cannot pass them unseen. As in the first case, you will remain with him until I arrive, and your message will be carried to the general by another of his party. In case you do not find him at all, you will know that I have returned before you, and have taken him and the others on with me. In that case, you must make a faggot sufficiently large to support you in the water and swim across. The river is low, and it will not be many yards out of your depth."

"I could swim that without the faggot, sir."

"Yes; but it is better to have it. I don't suppose that you have ever swum in your clothes, and you would find it heavy work; therefore you had better rely upon the faggot to keep you up, and with its aid you will have no difficulty in crossing."

The morning now was breaking, for in June the nights are short, and after waiting for an hour, Leigh and his two companions—all of whom had divested themselves of their weapons and belts, which they had left in Pierre's charge—started for Saumur. In the presence of so large a number of troops with scarcely any training and discipline, and with the excitement that would have been caused by the defeat of

Leigonyer and the prospect of an attack by the Vendéans, Leigh felt confident that three country lads ran no risk of being questioned. However, he took the precaution of learning the name of the village he passed through six miles from the town, so that if any one should happen to ask where they came from and what they were doing, he could give the name of a village, and say that they had merely come in from curiosity, hearing that there was likely to be a battle; assuredly many country people would be coming for the same purpose.

They entered the town at six o'clock. It was already astir. The citizens, with anxious faces, were talking together in little groups, soldiers were loitering about in the streets, totally regardless of the bugles and drums that were sounding in the market-place and at various points outside the town, the civil functionaries in their scarves of office hurried fussily about, but for once they were unheeded. But a week before, a denunciation by any of these men would have been sufficient to ensure the arrest and imprisonment, and probably the death, of anyone against whom they had a grudge; now they were in greater danger than those who had dreaded and hated them. At present there was no talk of politics among the groups of townspeople. Men who were the chief upholders of the régime of confiscation and murder, and others who in their heart loathed and hated it, were discussing the probabilities of an attack by the Vendéans, and what would happen were that attack to be successful.

Would the town be given over to sack? Would there be a massacre and slaughter such as Chalbos and other commanders of the Blues had inflicted in the Vendéan villages through which they had passed? The Vendéans in arms were called by the Blues "the brigands". Would they

behave like brigands, or would they conduct themselves as Royal and Catholic soldiers, as they called themselves? As the hours passed the streets became more crowded. Numbers of the country people came in to learn the news. Spies from Doué had already brought in word that orders had been issued by Cathelineau that the army should march at eight o'clock for Saumur, and all doubt that it was their intention either to attack the town, or to accept battle in the plain before it, was at an end. The assembly was sounded in all quarters of the town, and presently parties of the mounted gendarmes rode through the streets and drove the soldiers to their rendezvous. Presently Leigh saw General Menou and some other officers of rank enter a large house.

"Who lives there?" he asked a woman who was standing near him.

"General Duhoux; he is in command, you know, but he has not recovered from a wound he got at Chemillé, and is unable to ride."

Leigh had no doubt that a council of war was about to be held, and, bidding his companions wait for him at the end of the street, he sauntered across the road, and sat down on the pavement by the side of the entrance. Leaning against the wall, he took from his pocket a hunch of the peasants' black bread, and, cutting it up with his knife, proceeded to munch it unconcernedly. An officer and two or three troopers were standing by their horses' heads in the road opposite the door, evidently awaiting orders. In half an hour General Menou himself came out, and said to the officer, "Sir, you will ride at once to Thouars by way of Loudun, and deliver this despatch to General Salomon; it is most urgent. When you hand it to him you can say that I begged you to impress upon him the necessity for

losing not a moment of time. It is all-important that he should arrive here to-night, for to-morrow morning we may be attacked. Take your troopers with you."

The officer and his men mounted at once and rode off at full speed. Leigh remained quiet until Menou and the other officers rode out from the court-yard and proceeded down the street, followed by their escort. Then he got up, stretched himself, and walked slowly to the spot where his two comrades were awaiting him.

"I have learned what I wanted to know," he said. "Do you both make your way back to the spot where Pierre will be awaiting us, and tell him that I am going to swim the river a mile above the town. He is to wait where he is until Lucien comes back from Tours, which will not be till twelve o'clock to-night, for his orders are to remain within sight of the town till six in the afternoon. If by that hour the troops there have not set out, they will not arrive until after we have captured Saumur. Saunter along quietly, there is no hurry."

After they had set out he, too, strolled out of the town, kept along the road for another half-mile, and then struck off across the fields towards the river. Arrived there, he took off his heavy country shoes, tied them round his waist, and waded out into the river. He had but some thirty yards to swim. As soon as he reached the opposite bank he poured the water out of his shoes, put them on again, and set out at a run. He had to make a detour so as to get beyond the eminences on which the Republican troops were posted, and after running for a couple of miles, came down on the road. A short distance farther he arrived at a village; a peasant with a horse and cart was standing in front of a cabaret.

"Do you want to earn two crowns?" he asked the man.

The latter nodded. "Two crowns are not easily earned," he said. "I was just starting for Montreuil, but if it pays me better to go in another direction I must put that journey off until to-morrow."

"I want you to carry me to Doué," he said, "at the best speed at which your horse is capable."

The countryman looked at him doubtfully, his clothes were not yet dry. Leigh saw that the man was not sure of his power to fulfil his promise; he therefore produced two crowns and held them up.

"By Saint Matthew," he said, "it is the first silver I have seen for months. I will take you."

Leigh jumped up beside the peasant. The latter at once whipped up his horse, and started at a brisk trot.

"You know that the Catholic Army is there?" he asked.

"Yes, I know; I belong to it myself. I have been with it from the first."

"I would have taken you for nothing if you had said so before," the man said. "We are all heart and soul with them here; and if, as they say, they will come along here to attack Saumur, every man in the village will go with them. How is it that you are here?"

"I am an officer," Leigh said, "and have been in disguise into Saumur to see what is going on there, and am now taking the news back to Cathelineau."

Conversation was difficult, for the jolting of the cart was terrible, and Leigh found it next to impossible to talk. He was well content when the belfries of Doué came into sight. On arriving at the town they drew up at the house where Cathelineau and the generals had their quarters. As he got down he offered the peasant the two crowns.

"No, sir," the man said, "I will not take a sou for my service. We in this part have had no chance of doing any-

thing, and I should be ashamed indeed to take money from from those who have been fighting for the good cause. As you say they will advance to-morrow, I will wait here, it may be that my cart will be useful; and whether or no, I shall stay if it is only to get a sight of Cathelineau, whose name we all reverence."

"I will tell him of your good-will. You had best remain here for a few minutes."

He was about to enter, when two armed peasants who were guarding the door stopped him.

"No one can enter, the general is in council."

"Do you not know me? I am Captain Stansfield."

The men drew back at once. It was not strange that they did not recognize him. He generally wore a sort of uniform with a red sash round his waist, which was the distinguishing badge of the officers, but had always adopted a peasant dress on setting out on an expedition. There was no one to announce him, and he entered a room where the leaders were sitting round a table. They looked up in surprise. He was grimed with the dust which had risen in clouds as he drove along, and his clothes bore signs of their immersion.

"Back again, monsieur!" Cathelineau exclaimed, "and with news, no doubt."

"Very important news, sir. I have been in Saumur, and have learned that an officer has started for Thouars, by way of Loudun, with orders to General Salomon to march instantly into Saumur, and that he is to arrive there to-night. I left the town five minutes after the messenger. Three-quarters of an hour later I struck the road two miles this side of Saumur, and have been brought here in a cart by a peasant. It is now four o'clock, and I do not think that the officer would arrive at Thouars before half-past three."

"That is important news indeed," Cathelineau said. "Well, gentlemen, what do you think had best be done?"

"It seems to me that nothing could be better," Monsieur de Lescure said. "The enemy's column cannot start until five o'clock at the earliest. It will be dark before they can arrive at Saumur. I know the road well; it runs in several places through woods, and where this is not the case there are high hedges.

"Nothing could be more suitable for an ambuscade. I propose that half of our force should march at once and take post on the other side of Montreuil. It will be nearly sunset before Salomon can arrive at that town, and if we engage him at dusk he will lose half the benefit of the discipline of the regiment of gendarmes who will no doubt accompany him."

"I quite approve of that plan, monsieur," Cathelineau said. "Are you all of the same opinion, gentlemen?"

There was a general expression of assent.

"Will you, General Bonchamp, with Monsieur de Lescure, take command of that force? I myself will proceed with the rest of our army until past the point where the road from Montreuil falls into that from this town. In that way, if General Bonchamp fails to arrest Salomon's march, we can fall upon him; and on the other hand, if the firing should be heard at Saumur, and Menou leads out a force to assist Salomon, we can oppose him. General Dommaigne, your cavalry would be useless in the attack on Salomon, while it might be of great value if Menou comes out. You have rendered us another good service, Monsieur Stansfield. If Salomon had thrown another four thousand men into Saumur, including his regiment of gendarmes, it would have been a serious business to take the place, whereas with the troops Menou has, half of whom

are Leigonyer's fugitives, I do not anticipate any great difficulty."

"I shall be glad, general, if you would speak a word to the good fellow who brought me here. I had bargained with him for two crowns, but when he found that I was one of your officers he refused to receive anything; and moreover, he said that he would remain here with his cart until to-morrow, as perhaps he might be useful in carrying stores. He expressed the greatest desire to see you."

"Certainly I will speak to him," Cathelineau said, as he sent out to give orders for the church bells to ring and the horns to blow.

The man was standing by his cart a short distance off in the hope of catching sight of Cathelineau. The general at once walked up to him.

"This is General Cathelineau," Leigh said.

The countryman took off his hat and dropped on his knees.

"Get up, my good fellow," Cathelineau said; "I am but a Vendéan peasant like yourself. I thank you for the good service that you have rendered by bringing Monsieur Stansfield so quickly to us. The time it has saved may make all the difference to us, and in the future you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have played an important part in the capture of Saumur."

In five minutes the quiet street was crowded with men. The peasants had encamped in the fields round the town, and at the summons caught up their arms and ran in hastily, feeling sure that the occasion was important, as they had been told that they were not to march until next morning. The divisions commanded by Monsieur de Les cure and General Bonchamp speedily gathered round the distinguishing flags of those officers. Other leaders joined

them with their followers, until some ten thousand men were gathered outside the town.

Leigh had changed his clothes and mounted his horse, Monsieur de Lescure having invited him to ride with him. As they were about to start, one of André's messengers arrived with the news that an officer and three troopers had arrived at the town, and that ten minutes later the trumpets were sounding the assembly.

"It is well that we got your news first," Monsieur de Lescure said to Leigh, "for otherwise we could hardly have got our forces together and been ready for a start until it was too late to intercept Salomon."

The route of the column was by a by-road between Doué and Montreuil. It was seven o'clock before they approached the town. Then, striking off the road, they marched through the fields until a mile and a half to the east of it, when they halted in a thick wood. They were now divided into three columns of equal strength. That under Monsieur de Lescure occupied the wood on one side of the road, that under Monsieur Bonchamp the other side. The third column were posted in rear of the wood, and were to thickly line the hedges that bordered it. It was just dusk when the force from Thouars came along. It consisted of three thousand six hundred men, with four pieces of cannon. It was allowed to pass nearly through the wood, when a heavy fire was opened upon it on both flanks. The regiment of gendarmes which led the column showed great coolness, and, animated by their example, the whole force remained steady. Darkness came on, but it was not until eleven o'clock that there was any change in the situation. Owing to the darkness in the forest neither side was able to distinguish its foes, the men fired only at the flashes of the muskets. Lescure then sent

round four or five hundred men, who suddenly fell upon the baggage train of the enemy. The guard were completely taken by surprise. Many of the carters cut the ropes and traces and galloped off, delighted to escape from a service into which they had for the most part been dragged against their will. The alarm thus began spread rapidly. The young troops, who, encouraged by the example of the gendarmes, had so far stood their ground, at once lost heart. The darkness of the night, their ignorance as to the strength of the force that had attacked the rear, and the fear that all retreat would be cut off, would have shaken older soldiers than these, and in spite of the efforts of their officers the wildest confusion soon reigned.

The Vendéans pressed their attack more hotly, and General Salomon, seeing that unless a retreat was made while there was yet time, a terrible disaster might take place, ordered the gendarmes to fall back in good order. The movement was effected without great loss. In the darkness it was impossible for Lescure and the other leaders to get their men together and to press hard upon their retreating foes, and they were well satisfied at having carried out the object of their expedition and prevented the force from Thouars from entering Saumur. Word was sent to Cathelineau that Salomon had fallen back, and the peasants then lay down till morning.

André with his little band had joined the force when fighting began; they had, as soon as Salomon started from Thouars, followed his movements at a distance, from time to time sending off a messenger to Doué giving an account of the progress of the enemy. As soon as the firing broke out in the wood, André, with the twelve who still remained with him, joined the combatants, and, finding that Leigh was with Monsieur de Lescure, was not long in discovering him.

"You have done very well, André," he said. "I don't think anything will come of this fighting; it is getting dark already, and I have no fear now that the Blues will break through. Neither party will be able to see the other in this wood, and certainly you could do no good with your pistols. Practically few are engaged on either side. The Blues have made one effort, and, finding that we have a very strong force in their front, have given up the attempt to push forward. I don't believe that the new levies have courage enough to keep steady through a whole night's uncertainty. You had best draw off some distance and rest till you hear, by the firing, that some change has taken place. If you hear that the Blues are retreating, follow them at a distance. It is important for the generals to know what course they are taking. They may halt in Montreuil, they may return to Thouars, they may retire to Niort or Parthenay. If they remain in Montreuil, let us know at once, because in that case we shall have to stay here, in case they should attempt to push on again. If they go farther, we need have no more concern about them. Still, it would be of great importance to our generals to know whether they return to Thouars or retire farther south."

"Very well, captain, I will see that you are kept informed."

"You had better instruct your first messengers to come straight here. Cathelineau and the rest of the forces started directly we did, and will halt at the junction of the roads, and are likely to remain there all day to-morrow. Therefore, if your messengers find the wood deserted they have simply to follow the road, and they will either overtake us or find us with Cathelineau."

"How long must we follow the Blues?"

“There is no occasion to go any great distance. I do not suppose that we shall pursue them; they could certainly defend themselves at Montreuil, and we should not risk suffering heavy loss, and having the men dispirited by failure, when all are needed for the work at Saumur. If you follow them far enough to determine whether they are retiring on Thouars, or are marching towards Niort, that is all that is necessary, and you will be able to rejoin us in plenty of time to see the fight at Saumur.”

As Leigh thought would be probable, Monsieur de Lescure restrained the peasants from following in pursuit when the Blues retreated. The latter had left two of their guns behind them, and a number of carts laden with ammunition and provisions for the march fell into the peasants' hands, the latter providing them with breakfast before they started early next morning, rejoining Cathelineau's force two hours later. These had been apprised some hours before, by one of the mounted gentlemen who had accompanied the column, of the success that had attended the operation, and they were received with great joy by their comrades on their arrival.

Cathelineau with General Bonchamp and a small escort of cavalry had ridden towards Saumur to examine the positions occupied by the enemy, and to discuss the plan of attack. They now felt confident of success, unless, indeed, Biron should come up in the course of the day with the Paris brigade at Tours together with its guns. The description that Leigh had given of the confusion and want of discipline in the garrison showed that it could not be relied upon for hard fighting, and as it was certain that the failure of Salomon to get through to its assistance would be known in Saumur early in the day, it could not but add to the dismay produced by the advance against the town. This

was indeed the case. As artillery had not been employed on either side, the sound of the conflict did not reach the town. However, as the officer who had taken the order to Thouars returned at seven o'clock, saying that Salomon was preparing to march and would assuredly arrive some time in the evening, the anxiety increased hour by hour, and by midnight the conviction that he must have been attacked by the enemy, and had failed to get through, became a certainty and spread dismay through the town.

At five in the morning a mounted messenger brought a despatch from Salomon saying that he had fought for four hours near Montreuil against a large force of the enemy, and that another column of these having fallen on his rear, he found it necessary to retire, as a panic was spreading among the National Guard, and a serious disaster would have happened had he continued his attempts to push on. In the evening Generals Coustard and Berthier, who had been sent by Biron to act under Menou's orders, arrived in the town, and Santerre, the brewer of Paris, who had been the leader of the mob there and was now a general, arrived next morning. Cathelineau's army was astir early; the leaders had been gladdened by the arrival at five o'clock of a messenger from Pierre, saying that one of his messengers had come in from Tours, and that up to seven o'clock in the evening no troops had left that city. It was, therefore, certain that the garrison of Saumur could receive no assistance from that quarter.

Breakfast was eaten, and the army then formed up in its divisions. Mass was celebrated, and it then set out for Saumur. In that town all was confusion and dismay. The newly-arrived generals were strangers alike to the town, its defences, and the troops they were to command. In front of the works defending Saumur ran the river Dives, which

fell into the Loire a mile or so below the town. It was crossed by a bridge; but so great was the confusion that, in spite of the representations of the civil authorities no steps were taken either to cut or guard it. It was not until three o'clock in the afternoon that the Vendéans approached the town, and General Menou sent two battalions of the line, one of volunteers, and eighty horse, under the orders of General Berthier, to take possession of a château in front of the position. Two hundred and fifty men were posted in a convent near it. Santerre commanded the force which was to defend the intrenchments at Nantilly, and Coustard the troops who occupied the heights of Bourlan.

At four o'clock the skirmishers on both sides were hotly engaged. The Vendéans advanced in three columns—the central one against the post occupied by Berthier, the left against Nantilly, and the right threatened to turn the position at Beaulieu. Berthier allowed the force advancing against him to approach within a short distance of the château, and then poured a storm of grape into it from a battery that he had established. Lescure, who was in command, was badly wounded. The head of the column fell into confusion, and Berthier at once attacked them with his two regiments of the line, and for a time pressed the column back. His little body of cavalry, whom he had ordered to charge, fell back as soon as the Vendéans opened fire upon them, and the latter then attacked the line battalions with such fury that Berthier was obliged to call up his regiment of volunteers. Cathelineau sent reinforcements to his troops, and these pressed on so hotly that Berthier, who had had a horse shot under him, was obliged to fall back, and the exulting Vendéans rushed forward and carried the faubourg of Fenet.

Dommaigne, with his cavalry, charged the cuirassiers and

the German Legion. There was a sharp fight; Dommaigne was killed, and the colonel of the German Legion desperately wounded; but a body of the Vendéan infantry, coming up, took the cuirassiers in flank with their fire, and they fell back into Saumur. General Menou had been in the thick of the fight and had three horses killed under him. He sent another battalion to reinforce Berthier, but as soon as they came within shot of the Vendéans they broke and fled. The two line battalions, reinforced by four companies of gendarmes, kept up a heavy fire. The artillery until now had zealously supported them, but their ammunition was failing. Menou and Berthier placed themselves at the head of the cavalry, and called upon them to charge; but instead of doing so they raised their favourite cry of "Treason!" and galloped back to the town.

The line regiments and gendarmes, pressed more and more hotly, and finding themselves without support, withdrew in good order into Saumur. The Vendéans had now possession of all the works in the centre of the defenders' line. Coustard, seeing that the centre was lost and that the Vendéans were moving towards a bridge across the Dives, by which alone they could enter the town, ordered two battalions with two pieces of cannon to hold it. He was not only disobeyed, but with shouts of "Treason!" they rushed upon him, and with difficulty he escaped with his life. The Vendéans seized the bridge and established a battery for its defence. Coustard saw that it must be recaptured, as the town was now open to the enemy, and ordered a detachment of cuirassiers, commanded by Colonel Weissen, to carry the bridge; the two battalions of infantry now promised to follow.

Although he saw that to charge the battery with a handful of cavalry was to ride to almost certain death, Weissen

gallantly led his men forward. The infantry followed for a short distance, but, being taken in flank by a volley from a party of Vendéans, they broke and fled. The cavalry were almost annihilated, and Weissen was desperately wounded, two or three of his men alone riding back. The main force of Coustard's division in the redoubts at Bourlan had not been attacked, and retired to Angers during the night. The rout of the rest of the defenders was now complete, and the town open. La Rochejaquelein, by whose side Leigh and a small party of gentlemen rode, had made a succession of desperate charges into the midst of the fugitives; and he now said to Leigh and three other gentlemen, "Come along, we will see what they are doing in the town." Then, dashing forward at full speed, they passed through the gate, entered the main street, and found that it contained a battalion of infantry retreating.

So cowed were these that they opened their ranks and allowed the five horsemen to dash through them. Then they made a tour of the place, and returned to inform the Vendéans who were just entering that all resistance had ceased. As on two previous occasions, the flying Republicans owed their safety to the piety of the peasants, who, instead of pursuing at once, rushed into the churches, where the curés, who had accompanied them, returned thanks for the victory that had been gained, and thus lost the half-hour of daylight that would have been invaluable. Cathelineau, after a consultation with Lescure and Bonchamp, decided that it would be useless to attempt a pursuit in the dark. Berthier's battalion was, too, unbroken. The generals, finding that there was no pursuit, might have rallied a considerable number of the others, when the peasants, coming up in the dark, could in turn have been repulsed with heavy loss. Saumur had been taken with all its stores of

cannon, ammunition, and provisions, and it was considered that under the circumstances it was best to be contented with the signal success they had gained.

Berthier and Menou, indeed, although both severely wounded, had covered the retreat with the line regiments and gendarmes, and carried off with them seven cannon which they came across as they passed through the town, and would have given the peasants a warm reception had they followed them. The rest of the army were hopelessly scattered, and continued their flight all night, some towards Tours, others to Angers, their reports causing the wildest dismay in both towns. Had Charette, who had always acted independently in lower Vendée, been persuaded at this moment to join hands with Cathelineau, there can be little question that they might have marched to Paris without encountering any serious resistance, and that their arrival there would have changed the whole course of events. Unfortunately, however, he was himself sorely pressed by several columns of the enemy, and was with difficulty holding his own. The great opportunity was, therefore, lost, never to return.

The castle of Saumur was still in the hands of the Blues. Five hundred of the National Guards of the town, and about the same number of men of different regiments, threw themselves into it before the Vendéans entered, carrying with them what provisions they could lay hands upon. The wives of the National Guards soon surrounded the château, crying to their friends to surrender, and asserting that if they did not do so the Vendéans would give the town over to pillage and fire.

For a time the commandant resisted their entreaties, but feeling that his position was desperate, and that there was no hope of relief, he surrendered. In the morning the

garrison marched out; the officers were allowed to retain their side-arms and the men to return to their homes. Eighty cannon fell into the hands of the victors, many thousands of muskets, a large quantity of ammunition, and very many prisoners. Here, as at other places, the peasants behaved with great moderation. The agents of the Convention, who had tyrannized the town so long, were thrown into prison, as were their chief supporters, but private property was untouched. On the following day there was a council, at which Lescure, seriously wounded as he was, was present. It was agreed that it was indispensable that one man should be appointed commander-in-chief. Many difficulties had arisen from independent action by generals and leaders of bands more or less numerous, and it was necessary that all should act under the orders of a recognized head.

When this was agreed to, the question had to be decided as to who should be appointed to this responsible post. The claims of Lescure, la Rochejaquelein, d'Elbée, Bonchamp, Cathelineau, and Stofflet were almost even. Each had a large band of followers, all had been unwearied in their devotion to the cause. It is probable that Lescure would have been chosen. He was the largest landed proprietor, and was of the highest rank, with the exception of Rochejaquelein, who had, although the idol of the army, scarcely experience and ballast enough to take so responsible a position. Lescure himself, however, proposed that Cathelineau should be chosen. His influence was great, his talents unquestionable, and the simple honesty of his character, his modesty and untiring zeal in the cause, alike recommended him. Lescure felt that if he himself, Bonchamp, or d'Elbée were chosen, jealousies might arise and the cause suffer. His choice was felt by all to be a good

one, and Cathelineau was unanimously appointed to the post of commander-in-chief. No finer tribute was ever paid to the virtues and talent of a simple peasant, than such a choice made by men so greatly his superior in rank and station.

CHAPTER IX.

BAD NEWS.

NEITHER Leigh nor Jean Martin was at Saumur when this decision was arrived at. The very night that the town was taken one of the former's band, who was wounded and, greatly against his inclination, had been left behind, arrived there on horseback. He was the bearer of terrible news. Early on the previous day a troop of the enemy's cavalry had arrived. They had apparently ridden all night, and without exciting any alarm on the way. They had made straight for the château, without going into the village. Beyond the fact that they belonged to the force operating from Nantes none knew the route they had followed. They had doubtless expected to arrest Jean at the château, but on finding him absent, had seized his wife, had placed her in their midst, set fire to the château, and ridden off before any force could be gathered to oppose them. Jean and Leigh were horror-stricken at the news.

"What is to be done?" the former exclaimed. "What can be done?"

"I should say," Leigh said, "that the first thing to do will be to tell the generals that we must for the present leave them. Then we must go to Nantes in disguise, find out where she is imprisoned, and see what can be done to rescue her."





"Certainly that is the best thing, Leigh. Let us start at once."

"It will be daylight in two hours, Jean, and that will make no difference. I will go and talk with my boys, they are asleep together on the steps of the church of St. Marie. They may be useful to us, and I am sure would follow us anywhere."

Jean made no reply; he had buried his face in his hands, and deep sobs broke from him. Tears were streaming down Leigh's cheek as he spoke, but he put his hand upon Jean's shoulder and said, in a voice which he tried to keep steady, "It is terrible, Jean, but we must not give up hope; we have beaten the Blues in the field, and it is hard if we cannot manage to beat them somehow in this business." The other made no reply, and Leigh, feeling that it would be best to leave him to himself for the present, went downstairs. The lad who had brought the message was seated against the wall holding the horse's bridle in his hand. Being a stranger in the place, he did not know where to go.

"Come with me, Philippe, the others are all in the great square a hundred yards away. They got their bread yesterday morning, and will have plenty of it left for you and the horse. It can take a drink at the fountain in the centre. Ah!" he exclaimed stopping suddenly, "you said nothing about the child, and we did not think to ask. Did my sister take it away with her, or was it left?"

"I did not hear, captain. My mother ran into the house crying, and said, 'The Blues have come, and have set fire to the château and carried madame away prisoner. Take the horse and ride to the army and tell Monsieur Martin what has happened.' I ran into the stable and saddled it, took two loaves of bread, one for him and one for myself, and started. I should have been here in the middle of the

day, but I lost my way in the lanes last night, and had to stop till daylight, and even then rode for a long time in the wrong direction."

Leaving the lad and horse in the middle of the square, Leigh went to the steps of the church. A great number of peasants were sleeping there. He was not long in finding his own band. He roused André and Pierre with some difficulty, for, having both been up all the previous night, they slept heavily.

"Come with me," Leigh said as soon as they were sufficiently roused to understand who was speaking to them. "I want to have a talk with you. I have some bad news," he went on, as they passed beyond the sleepers: "the Blues have been at the château; they have burned it down, and have carried off Madame Martin."

Exclamations of rage broke from both the lads. Patsey had, during the months she had spent on the estate, made herself extremely popular among the peasantry, whose cottages she constantly visited, and who always found her ready to listen to their tales of trouble, and to supply dainty food for the sick. The thought, too, that the château had been burned down was also a blow, for all the tenantry considered that they had a personal interest in the affairs of their seigneur.

"How was it that there was no defence?" André asked. "I know that most of the men were away, but surely enough might have been gathered to keep the Blues back until madame escaped to the woods."

"It seems they rode by night, and arrived there soon after day broke. They had evidently come on purpose to seize your lord, for as soon as they found that he was not there they went away at once, only stopping to set fire to the château. They were evidently in a hurry to be off.

Here is Philippe Rehan, who has brought the news. He only knows what I have told you, as he mounted and rode off at once."

"I suppose they have taken our young lord too?"

"Philippe does not know about that. He says they came from the direction of Nantes, and no doubt my sister has been taken there."

"What is to be done, captain?" André asked, as he and Pierre looked at each other helplessly in face of this trouble.

"Monsieur Martin and I are going to leave at once. We don't know what we are going to do yet, but we shall certainly try by all means to get her out of prison. How it is to be managed we have not even thought, but if it can be done we shall do it. Now, I am sure that we can rely upon your assistance."

"We will do anything," André exclaimed; while Pierre said, "We will be cut to pieces for you, captain."

Leigh gave a hand to each. "I am sure of it," he said. "And the band?"

"Every one of those we had at first we could answer for," André replied. "And I believe that the others can be trusted too. They all esteem it a high honour to have been received into the band of Cathelineau's scouts. They knew that there would be danger when they joined, and that they must be prepared to die for the cause. All would certainly be faithful; there would be no fear about that."

"I have not the least idea at present what I shall want you to do; but at any rate we shall go to Nantes, and it is there that you must meet us. We shall ride off in an hour's time. Let the others sleep till there is a general movement, then you can tell them what has happened,

and that my orders are that you shall march home at once. You can be there by to-morrow night, can you not?"

"It will be two long marches, but we will be there, captain."

"We shall not be much before you. By that time we shall have determined how we shall set about the matter, and shall be able to give you instructions, which will probably be that you are to meet us at some point we will arrange, just outside the town. Of course you will not go in a body, but singly or in pairs, crossing the river at various points and travelling by different roads. Enter the town as if you belonged to villages round. I will ask Monsieur de la Rochejaquelein to let you have another pistol each before you leave. Of course you will hide your arms under your clothes. I don't know that it will be necessary to use force; of course, at first we shall try bribery. At any rate, you will both be most useful in obtaining information. There are very many people who know Monsieur Martin by sight, and a few who know me. Possibly some of your band may have friends in Nantes, and these, if they are of our party, would be able to ask questions and to find out the place in which my sister is imprisoned much better than strangers could do. We have heard nothing of what is passing in Nantes for many weeks, and as they have sent troops to arrest Monsieur Martin, it is possible that his father may also be arrested. If he is at liberty he would be sure to know where my sister is imprisoned."

The day was breaking now, and Leigh went next to the large house which had been set apart for the use of the generals. He knew Rochejaquelein's room, having been chatting with him till late the evening before. The young count sat up in bed as he opened the door.

"You have given me a start, Leigh," he said with a smile. "I was dreaming that the Blues had retaken the town, and when the door opened thought that it was a party come to make me prisoner. Is there any bad news? You look grave."

"Bad news as far as Jean Martin and I are concerned. A messenger arrived two hours ago with the news that a party of Blues from Nantes arrived at his château without being observed, as they had travelled all night and reached it at daybreak. They had no doubt been specially sent to arrest Jean, but, finding that he was away, they burnt the château and carried off my sister a prisoner. We are going to start at once. I trust that you will explain to the other generals the cause of our absence."

"I am sorry indeed to hear your news," Rochejaquelein said warmly. "A curse upon the Blues! Why can't they content themselves with making war on men, without persecuting and massacring women? Certainly I will explain to Cathelineau and the others the cause of your absence. But what are you thinking of doing?"

"That we have not even considered. We mean to get her out of their hands, if possible, but until we see whether she has been really taken to Nantes—of which I have little doubt—which prison she is placed in, and how it is guarded, we can form no plan. If possible, we shall bribe the jailers; if not, we will try to rescue her by force. I am taking my band with me. I can depend upon them, and there is no one in Nantes on whom we can rely. They will of course enter the town singly, and will, I am sure, give us their loyal service should we require it."

"If they serve you as well as they serve the cause, you could scarce have better assistants. I would that I could go with you, it would be an adventure after my own heart;

but private friendship must give way to our country's needs. I hope, Leigh, that it will not be long before we meet again, and that I may hear that you have been successful."

Half an hour later Leigh and Jean Martin started. The latter's first question when Leigh returned had been regarding the child. It was now nearly fifteen months old, but in the terrible shock caused by the news of his wife having been carried off, Jean had not thought of it till Leigh had left the room.

"The child is as nothing to me," he said when Leigh had told him that the messenger had heard nothing of it. "It would have been some day, but so far 'tis as nothing compared to Patsey. It slept with the nurse, and may possibly have escaped, unless, indeed, Patsey wished to take it with her."

"I do not think that she would do that," Leigh said. "No doubt it would have been a comfort to have it with her, but she would have known that its chances of life would be slight indeed, and for your sake she would have concealed it, if possible, before she was seized."

They reached the ruins of the château at noon next day, having stopped for the night at Chemillé, in order to rest their horses and keep them in condition for another long ride if necessary. The outhouse had been left standing. François came out on hearing the sound of the horses' hoofs.

"Thank God you are back, master!" he said. "It has been a terrible time."

"Is the child safe, or was it taken with its mother?" Jean asked.

"He is safe, sir; Marthe saved it. When madame heard the Blues ride up, and looked out and saw their uniforms, she ran into Marthe's room and said, 'Hide the child,

Marthe! Run with it downstairs without waking it, and put it in a cupboard in the kitchen. They will never think of searching for it there, then return to your bed again.' Tell your master, when he comes back again, I have left little Louis for him. I was getting up when I heard the horsemen, and guessed that it was the Blues, and without waiting a moment dropped from my window and ran past the stable and hid myself in the shrubbery behind it. I had scarcely done so when I heard them come round the house. Then there was a great knocking at the door, and a minute later a pistol-shot was fired. I heard afterwards that madame told Henri to open the door. As he did so the officer of the Blues shot him through the head.

"For ten minutes I heard nothing more. Then someone came to the stable, took out the two horses, and then set fire to it. Looking out through the bushes I saw the smoke coming out from two or three windows of the château. Then I made off as quickly as I could, got into the church, and set the bells ringing, thinking that it might frighten off the Blues, though I knew that the men were all away, and there was no chance of help. Soon they came riding along at full speed, and I saw madame in the middle of them. As soon as they had gone the women all ran out from their houses. We tried our best to put out the flames, but the fire had too much hold. As we were doing this I saw Marthe with the child in her arms.

"It had been saved well-nigh by a miracle, she said, and she told me how her mistress had run in to her. She caught up the child, and then, thinking that if they saw its clothes they would search for it, she opened the drawers, seized them all, and ran down and put them and the child into the kitchen cupboard as her mistress had

told her, then ran back to her bedroom and began to dress. She heard her mistress call to Henri to go down and open the door, she heard the pistol-shot, and the Blues pour into the house. She hurried on her clothes and went out. They were searching all over the château. The officer came up to her with a pistol in his hand.

“‘Where is your master?’ he said.

“‘I do not know,’ she replied. ‘He rode away from here ten days ago, and has not been back since.’

“‘That is the tale that your mistress tells,’ he said.

“‘It is true, sir. You go into the village and ask any of the women there, they will tell you the same thing. I will swear on the cross that it is so.’

“He seemed very angry, but turned away from her. Presently the mistress came down under a guard of two soldiers, and as she passed she said:

“‘Good-bye, Marthe! Tell your master that I am thankful indeed that he was not here.’

“Then the officers told the men to set fire to the house in a dozen places. They had all got bundles, having taken everything they thought of value. As soon as they had set fire to the curtains everywhere, and saw that the flames had got a good hold, they mounted and rode off. They had not searched the kitchen much, as they had only opened the closets large enough for a man to hide in, and not expecting to find anything worth taking, had not troubled themselves to look into the small ones, so Marthe had only to take the child out. Fortunately it had not awoken. When we found that it was hopeless to try and put the fire out, Marthe took the child over to the farm of Madame Rehan, who, as soon as she got the news of the mistress being carried off, had sent her son away on horseback to tell you.”

"Thank God the child has been spared!" Jean Martin said reverently. "We will go to the curé's; the boys will all be back to-night. Give the horses a good feed; we shall set out perhaps to-night, perhaps to-morrow morning."

"Ah, Monsieur Martin," the curé said as they entered his house, "this is a sad home-coming for you! If we had known that the Blues were coming but a quarter of an hour before they arrived, we could have got madame away to a place of safety. I knew nought about it until the church bells began to ring. Just as I was about to go out five minutes later to learn the cause, I saw them ride past with Madame Martin in their midst. We did not know that there were any of them within twenty miles of us, and thought that there was no chance whatever of their coming to a little village like ours."

"They came, no doubt, for me," Jean said gloomily. "If they had found Leigh and myself at home they would not have taken the place so easily. He and I and the two men could have made a stout defence. I hear that there were not more than twenty of them, and I warrant that there would not have been many of them left when the fight was over."

"I am sure," the curé said, "that if you had been there, and the place had been defended, all the women within sound of the church bell would have come in with arms, and would have fought like men in the defence of yourself and madame; but as it was, the whole thing was such a surprise, with everyone in bed and asleep, that the enemy were off before anyone could think of what had best be done. As it was, the women from all the farms round were here armed with hatchets or pitchforks half an hour after the bell began to ring. Of course, in the village here