RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Scaramouche

Rafael Sabatini

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY BERNARD CORNWELL

When Andre-Louis witnesses the murder of his best friend by an arrogant and privileged aristocrat he swears to avenge his death. Forced to flee his hometown after stirring up revolutionary fervour in the citizens, he falls in with a travelling theatre company and disguises himself as the character of the wily rogue Scaramouche. His ensuing adventures involve hair-raising duels, romance, treachery and shocking family secrets all handled with brilliance and wit by this extraordinary hero.

About the Author

Rafael Sabatini was born in Jesi, Italy in 1875 to an English mother and an Italian father, both renowned opera singers. Sabatini travelled extensively as a child, and could speak six languages fluently by the age of seventeen. After a brief stint in the business world, he turned to writing. He worked prolifically, writing short stories in the 1890s, with his first novel published in 1902. *Scaramouche* was published in 1921 to widespread acclaim, and was soon followed by the equally successful *Captain Blood*. Rafael Sabatini died on 13 February 1950 in Switzerland.

Also by Rafael Sabatini

The Lovers of Yvonne
The Tavern Knight
Bardelys the Magnificent
The Trampling of the Lilies
Love-at-Arms
The Shame of Motley
St. Martin's Summer
Mistress Wilding
The Lion's Skin
The Strolling Saint
The Gates of Doom
The Sea Hawk
The Snare
Captain Blood
Fortune's Fool
The Carolinian
Bellarion the Fortunate
The Hounds of God
The Romantic Prince
The King's Minion
Scaramouche the Kingmaker
The Black Swan
The Stalking Horse
Venetian Masque
Chivalry
The Lost King
The Sword of Islam
The Marquis of Carabas
Columbus
King in Prussia

The Gamester

RAFAEL SABATINI

Scaramouche

A Romance of the French Revolution

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

‘Hommes sensibles qui pleurez sur les maux de la Révolution, Versez donc aussi quelques larmes sur les maux qui l’ont amenée’
MICHELET

INTRODUCTION

Scaramouche was Rafael Sabatini's first bestseller, what publishers call the 'breakthrough' book, the one that made him famous throughout the world. It took his stories to Hollywood and brought him prosperity, but it must also have caused him great heartache, for it seemed for much of 1921 that the book would fail to find an American publisher. Sabatini had been writing for nineteen years, during which time he had produced thirteen novels and a collection of short stories, but he was not a household name. In America his publishers were unhappy with sales, so they turned down his fourteenth novel, which was a story of the French Revolution with the curious title of *Scaramouche*. The manuscript was hawked round New York, rejected again and again, until eventually the Riverside Press in Cambridge, Massachusetts, took a chance on it and found they had a runaway bestseller on their hands. Two years later, it was the first book of Sabatini's to be turned into a film, a silent movie starring Ramon Novarro, and from then on the studios turned out a steady succession of Sabatini's stories. He gave Hollywood what it wanted and what audiences still want: strong storylines, vivid characters, and exotic settings. Before he died in 1950 he published twenty more novels, and though not all were as successful as *Scaramouche* or its successor, *Captain Blood*, the rejected story of the French Revolution had started him on the road to financial security that made it possible for him to live in his beloved marcher lands on the English—Welsh border.

He was English by adoption, but he was not English by birth. His father was Italian and his mother English, both of them opera singers, and Sabatini was born near Ancona on Italy's Adriatic coast. Jesse F. Knight, who is the foremost authority on Sabatini's life and work[1], suggests that he was illegitimate. That is certainly reflected in many of his books, perhaps in none so much as *Scaramouche* in which the hero, André-Louis, though born and raised a gentleman, is nevertheless an outsider by virtue of his bastardy. 'Do you account birth of no importance?' André-Louis is asked, to which he replies, and it seems like Sabatini speaking, 'Of none, madame – or else my own might trouble me.' Today bastardy is unremarkable, yet in the closing years of the nineteenth century it was an affront to respectable society, thus Rafael Sabatini was an outsider from the very start. Though he was born at his father's home in Italy, he was immediately sent to be raised by his mother's parents in Cheshire, England, where he stayed until he was seven. Then he joined his parents, now married, in Portugal before moving back with them to Italy, from where he was sent to be schooled in Switzerland. At seventeen he was dispatched back to England to find himself a job in Liverpool, where he became a commercial interpreter. It is little wonder that in his childhood he escaped reality by an addiction to fiction and history. At some point in his youth, Sabatini decided that the best stories were all written in English, and so when he came to write, he chose to use that language. He became a dream-weaver, writing the kind of books that had helped him endure childhood. They are adventures, but imbued with a great insight into character and written by a masterful storyteller.

Scaramouche is a wonderfully adventurous story, and not just because the hero possesses as many lives as a basketful of cats. It is adventurous because that hero, André-Louis, is such a complicated character. There is a

glibness to this lawyer turned actor turned fencing master that might be repellent if he were not written with such skill. ‘How nimble he was in the art of making the white look black,’ Sabatini writes, and we might reflect that this is an art we expect in politicians and other repellent creatures, not in heroes, yet Sabatini keeps us sympathetic to André-Louis. At times André-Louis is heartless, devious, and very proud, but he is our hero, and perhaps the reason we follow him with such sympathy is that he is the closest to a self-portrait that Sabatini ever wrote. Sabatini is describing the character he knows best, and he touches his portrait with a beguiling dash of mockery.

The book’s title is part of that mockery. Scaramouche was a stock character from the traditional form of Italian theatre called *commedia dell’arte*, which also gave us Harlequin, Pierrot, and Pantaloon. *Commedia dell’arte*, which literally means comedy of art, was hugely popular between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. It presented plays which had no scripts, but were improvised by the actors, who could thereby insert topical comments, a subversive process that is wonderfully described by Sabatini in *Scaramouche* when André-Louis joins a band of travelling players. This happens in France, where the *commedia dell’arte* was known as *Comedie Italienne;* in both countries the popularity of the form depended for much of its appeal on the tradition that the same characters would appear in all the different stories. Thus the audience had the pleasure of knowing what behaviour to expect: Harlequin would be a witty servant, Pantaloon would be a stuffy bore, Columbina would be beautiful, and the action would be spiced by much music, dancing, and acrobatics. The nearest theatre to *commedia dell’arte* today is probably the traditional English pantomime, which uses familiar stories, vulgarity, dancing, and stock characters.

One of the stock characters of *commedia dell’arte* was Scaramuccia, anglicised as Scaramouche, a braggart

soldier who was originally called, simply, *Capitano*, the Captain. *Capitano* was Spanish and he was full of boasts, swagger, and bravado, yet very short on achievements. This was a deliberately unkind portrait of a bully from a nation that was then the most powerful and, therefore, the most unpopular in Europe. Over time the Captain became Scaramuccia and was changed into a servant. He kept some of the Captain's martial swagger, but now his defining characteristics were a complete lack of scruples and an ever-present deviousness. 'He has a gift of sly intrigue,' Sabatini writes of Scaramouche, 'an art of setting folk by the ears, combined with an impudent aggressiveness upon occasion when he considers himself safe from reprisals. He is Scaramouche.' He is also forever becoming entangled in extraordinarily dangerous predicaments, yet each time he somehow frees himself and leaves others to take the blame. We see this process again and again in the novel. It was a huge risk to make the hero so like the sly and immodest Scaramouche, yet Sabatini persuades us that André-Louis is indeed a hero. Peter Blood might be Sabatini's most famous character, yet André-Louis is his most ambitious, best drawn, and, in the end, most human, just as the plot of *Scaramouche* is Sabatini's best. It takes us through the theatres of pre-revolutionary France, into the fencing schools of Paris, and has an ending as impudent, daring, and surprising as any of Scaramouche's devious ploys.

It is a splendid novel, whose author fully deserved the fame and fortune it brought to him. Sabatini was to write for another twenty-nine years. He died while on vacation in Switzerland and was buried there. His second wife had the opening words of *Scaramouche* carved on his tombstone: 'He was born with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad.' He also gave us great stories and this one, at least for me, is his best.

[1] I am greatly indebted to Mr Knight, whose work I drew on for these biographical notes. His own biography of Sabatini can be found at http://www.rafaelsabatini.com/rsbio.html

BOOK I
THE ROBE

SCARAMOUCHE

CHAPTER I

THE REPUBLICAN

HE WAS BORN with a gift of laughter and a sense that the world was mad. And that was all his patrimony. His very paternity was obscure, although the village of Gavrillac had long since dispelled the cloud of mystery that hung about it. Those simple Brittany folk were not so simple as to be deceived by a pretended relationship which did not even possess the virtue of originality. When a nobleman, for no apparent reason, announces himself the godfather of an infant fetched no man knew whence, and thereafter cares for the lad's rearing and education, the most unsophisticated of country folk perfectly understand the situation. And so the good people of Gavrillac permitted themselves no illusions on the score of the real relationship between André-Louis Moreau—as the lad had been named—and Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillac, who dwelt in the big grey house that dominated from its eminence the village clustering below.

André-Louis had learnt his letters at the village school, lodged the while with old Rabouillet, the attorney, who in the capacity of fiscal intendant looked after the affairs of M. de Kercadiou. Thereafter, at the age of fifteen, he had been packed off to Paris, to the Lycée of Louis Le Grand, to study law, which he was now returned to practise in conjunction with Rabouillet. All this at the charges of his godfather, M. de Kercadiou, who by placing him once more under the

tutelage of Rabouillet would seem thereby quite clearly to be making provision for his future.

André-Louis, on his side, had made the most of his opportunities. You behold him at the age of four-and-twenty stuffed with learning enough to produce an intellectual indigestion in an ordinary mind. Out of his zestful study of Man, from Thucydides to the Encyclopædists, from Seneca to Rousseau, he had confirmed into an unassailable conviction his earliest conscious impressions of the general insanity of his own species. Nor can I discover that anything in his eventful life ever afterwards caused him to waver in that opinion.

In body he was a slight wisp of a fellow, scarcely above middle height, with a lean, astute countenance, prominent of nose and cheek-bones, and with lank, black hair that reached almost to his shoulders. His mouth was long, thin-lipped and humorous. He was only just redeemed from ugliness by the splendour of a pair of ever-questing, luminous eyes, so dark as to be almost black. Of the whimsical quality of his mind and his rare gift of graceful expression, his writings—unfortunately but too scanty—and particularly his Confessions, afford us very ample evidence. Of his gift of oratory he was hardly conscious yet, although he had already achieved a certain fame for it in the literary Chamber of Rennes—one of those clubs by now ubiquitous in the land, in which the intellectual youth of France forgathered to study and discuss the new philosophies that were permeating social life. But the fame he had acquired there was hardly enviable. He was too impish, too caustic, too much disposed—so thought his colleagues—to ridicule their sublime theories for the regeneration of mankind. Himself he protested that he merely held up to them the mirror of truth, and that it was not his fault if when reflected there they looked ridiculous.

All that he achieved by this, as you conceive, was to exasperate; and to such an extent, that his expulsion from

the Literary Chamber was under serious consideration, and seemed at last to be rendered inevitable by the fact that the Lord of Gavrillac had appointed him his delegate in the States of Brittany. It was felt almost unanimously that there was no room for the official representative of a nobleman, for a man of such avowed reactionary principles, in a society devoted to social reform.

This was no time for half-measures. The light of hope which had begun to glow upon the horizon when M. Necker had at last persuaded the King to convoke the States General—a thing that had not happened for nearly two hundred years—had lately been overcast by the insolence of the nobility and clergy, who were determined that these States General should be so composed as to safeguard their own privileges.

The prosperous, industrious maritime city of Nantes—the first to express the feeling that was now rapidly spreading throughout the land—had issued in the first days of that November of 1788 a manifesto, which it had constrained the municipality to place before the King. It was not intended that the States of Brittany about to sit in Rennes should be, as in the past, a mere instrument of the nobility and clergy, and that the Third Estate should have no voice or power save that of voting subsidies as bidden. To make an end of the bitter anomaly which placed the whole of the power in the hands of those who paid no taxes, the manifesto demanded that the Third Estate should be represented by one deputy for every ten thousand inhabitants; that this deputy should be drawn strictly from the class he was to represent, and that he should not be a nobleman, or the delegate, seneschal, attorney or intendant of a nobleman; that the representatives of the Third Estate should be of a number equal to that of the other two estates, and that upon all matters the votes should be by heads, and not, as hitherto, by orders.

This manifesto, containing some further but secondary demands, gave elegant triflers in the Œil de Bœuf at Versailles a disconcerting glimpse of the things to which M. Necker was venturing to open the door. If their will had prevailed, the answer to that manifesto is not difficult to surmise. But M. Necker was the pilot endeavouring to make harbour with the foundering ship of State. Upon his advice the King's Majesty had referred the matter back to the States of Brittany for settlement, but with the significant promise to intervene should the privileged orders—the nobility and the clergy—resist the popular demands. And the privileged orders, rushing blindly upon destruction, had of course resisted, whereupon the King had adjourned the States.

But now, if you please, the privileged orders refused to be adjourned, refused to bow to the authority of the sovereign. They would sit in despite of it, ignoring it, and they would proceed with the elections in their own fashion, and thus make sure of safeguarding their privileges and continuing their rapine.

Coming on a November morning to Gavrillac laden with the news of this, Philippe de Vilmorin, a divinity student from the seminary of Rennes and a popular member of the Literary Chamber, found in that sleepy Bréton village matter to quicken his already lively indignation. A peasant of Gavrillac, named Mabey, had been shot dead that morning in the woods of Meupont, across the river, by a gamekeeper of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr. The unfortunate fellow had been caught in the act of taking a pheasant from a snare, and the gamekeeper had acted under explicit orders from his master.

Infuriated by an act of tyranny so absolute and merciless, M. de Vilmorin proposed to lay the matter before M. de Kercadiou. Mabey was a vassal of Gavrillac, and Vilmorin hoped to move the Lord of Gavrillac to demand at

least some measure of reparation for the widow and the three orphans which that brutal deed had made.

But because André-Louis was Philippe's dearest friend—indeed, his almost brother—the young seminarist sought him out in the first instance. He found him at breakfast alone in the long, low-ceilinged, white-panelled dining-room at Rabouillet's—the only home that André-Louis had ever known—and after embracing him, deafened him with his denunciation of M. de La Tour d'Azyr.

"I have heard of it already," said André-Louis.

"You say it as if the thing occasioned no surprise," his friend reproached him.

"Nothing beastly can surprise me when done by a beast. And La Tour d'Azyr is a beast, as all the world knows. The more fool Mabey for stealing his pheasants. He should have stolen somebody else's."

"Is that all you have to say about it?"

"What more is there to say? I've a practical mind, I hope."

"What more there is to say I propose to say to your godfather, M. de Kercadiou. I shall appeal to him for justice."

"Against M. de La Tour d'Azyr?" André-Louis raised his eyebrows.

"Why not?"

"My dear ingenuous Philippe, dog doesn't eat dog."

"You are unjust to your godfather. He is a humane man."

"Oh, as humane as you please. But this isn't a question of humanity, it's a question of game-laws."

M. de Vilmorin tossed his long arms to Heaven in disgust. He was a tall, slender young gentleman, a year or two younger than André-Louis. He was very soberly dressed in black, as became a seminarist, with white bands at wrists and throat and silver buckles to his shoes. His neatly clubbed brown hair was innocent of powder.

"You talk like a lawyer," he exploded.

“Naturally. But don’t waste anger on me on that account. Tell me what you want me to do?”

“I want you to come to M. de Kercadiou with me, and to use your influence to obtain justice. I suppose I am asking too much?”

“My dear Philippe, I exist to serve you. I warn you that it is a futile quest; but give me leave to finish my breakfast, and I am at your orders.”

M. de Vilmorin dropped into a winged arm-chair by the well-swept hearth, on which a piled-up fire of pine-logs was burning cheerily. And whilst he waited he gave his friend the latest news of the events in Rennes. Young, ardent, enthusiastic and inspired by Utopian ideals, he passionately denounced the rebellious attitude of the privileged.

André-Louis, already fully aware of the trend of feeling in the ranks of an order in whose deliberations he took part as the representative of a nobleman, was not at all surprised by what he heard. M. de Vilmorin found it exasperating that his friend should apparently decline to share his own indignation.

“Don’t you see what it means?” he cried. “The nobles, by disobeying the King, are striking at the very foundations of the throne. Don’t they perceive that their very existence depends upon it; that if the throne falls over, it is they who stand nearest to it who will be crushed? Don’t they see that?”

“Evidently not. They are just governing classes, and I never heard of governing classes that had eyes for anything but their own profit.”

“That is our grievance. That is what we are going to change.”

“You are going to abolish governing classes? An interesting experiment. I believe it was the original plan of creation, and it might have succeeded but for Cain.”

“What we are going to do,” said M. de Vilmorin, curbing his exasperation, “is to transfer the government to other

hands.”

“And you think that will make a difference?”

“I know it will.”

“Ah! I take it that being now in minor orders, you already possess the confidence of the Almighty. He will have confided to you His intention of changing the pattern of mankind.”

M. de Vilmorin’s fine ascetic face grew overcast.

“You are profane, André,” he reproved his friend.

“I assure you that I am quite serious. To do what you imply would require nothing short of divine intervention. You must change man, not systems. Can you and our vapouring friends of the Literary Chamber of Rennes, or any other learned society of France, devise a system of government that has never yet been tried? Surely not. And can they say of any system tried that it proved other than a failure in the end? My dear Philippe, the future is to be read with certainty only in the past. Ab actu ad posse valet consecutio. Man never changes. He is always greedy, always acquisitive, always vile. I am speaking of Man in the bulk.”

“Do you pretend that it is impossible to ameliorate the lot of the people?” M. de Vilmorin challenged him.

“When you say the people, you mean, of course, the populace. Will you abolish it? That is the only way to ameliorate its lot, for as long as it remains populace its lot will be damnation.

“You argue, of course, for the side that employs you. That is natural, I suppose.” M. de Vilmorin spoke between sorrow and indignation.

“On the contrary, I seek to argue with absolute detachment. Let us test these ideas of yours. To what form of government do you aspire? A republic, it is to be inferred from what you have said. Well, you have it already. France in reality is a republic to-day.”

Philippe stared at him. “You are being paradoxical, I think. What of the King?”

“The King? All the world knows there has been no King in France since Louis XIV. There is an obese gentleman at Versailles, who wears the crown, but the very news you bring shows for how little he really counts. It is the nobles and clergy who sit in the high places, with the people of France harnessed under their feet, who are the real rulers. That is why I say that France is a republic; she is a republic built on the best pattern—the Roman pattern. Then, as now, there were great patrician families in luxury, preserving for themselves power and wealth, and what else is accounted worth possessing; and there was the populace crushed and groaning, sweating, bleeding, starving and perishing in the Roman kennels. That was a republic; the mightiest we have seen.”

Philippe strove with his impatience. “At least you will admit—you have, in fact, admitted it—that we could not be worse governed than we are?”

“That is not the point. The point is, should we be better governed if we replaced the present ruling class by another? Without some guarantee of that, I should be the last to lift a finger to effect a change. And what guarantee can you give? What is the class that aims at government? I will tell you. The bourgeoisie.”

“What?”

“That startles you, eh? Truth is so often disconcerting. You hadn’t thought of it? Well, think of it now. Look well into this Nantes manifesto. Who are the authors of it?”

“I can tell you who it was constrained the municipality of Nantes to send it to the King. Some ten thousand workmen—shipwrights, weavers, labourers and artisans of every kind.”

“Stimulated to it, driven to it, by their employers, the wealthy traders and ship-owners of that city,” André-Louis replied. “I have a habit of observing things at close

quarters, which is why our colleagues of the Literary Chamber dislike me so cordially in debate. Where I delve they but skim. Behind those labourers and artisans of Nantes, counselling them, urging on these poor, stupid, ignorant toilèrs to shed their blood in pursuit of the will o’ the wisp of freedom, are the sail-makers, the spinners, the ship-owners and the slave-traders. The slave-traders! The men who live and grow rich by a traffic in human flesh and blood in the colonies are conducting at home a campaign in the sacred name of liberty? Don’t you see that the whole movement is a movement of hucksters and traders and peddling vassals swollen by wealth into envy of the power that lies in birth alone? The money-changers in Paris who bold the bonds in the national debt, seeing the parlous financial condition of the State, tremble at the thought that it may lie in the power of a single man to cancel the debt by bankruptcy. To secure themselves, they are burrowing underground to overthrow a State and build upon its ruins a new one in which they shall be the masters. And to accomplish this they inflame the people. Already in Dauphiny we have seen blood run like water—the blood of the populace, always the blood of the populace. Now in Brittany we may see the like. And if in the end the new ideas prevail? If the seigneurial rule is overthrown, what then? You will have exchanged an aristocracy for a plutocracy. Is that worth while? Do you think that under money-changers and slave-traders, and men who have waxed rich in other ways by the ignoble arts of buying and selling, the lot of the people will be any better than under their priests and nobles? Has it ever occurred to you, Philippe, what it is that makes the rule of the nobles so intolerable? Acquisitiveness. Acquisitiveness is the curse of mankind. And shall you expect less acquisitiveness in men who have built themselves up by acquisitiveness? Oh, I am ready to admit that the present government is execrable, unjust, tyrannical—what you will—but I beg you to look

ahead, and to see that the government for which it is aimed at exchanging it may be infinitely worse."

Philippe sat thoughtful a moment. Then he returned to the attack.

"You do not speak of the abuses, the horrible, intolerable abuses of power under which we labour at present."

"Where there is power there will always be the abuse of it."

"Not if the tenure of power is dependent upon its equitable administration."

"The tenure of power is power. We cannot dictate to those who hold it."

"The people can—the people in its might."

"Again I ask you, when you say the people, do you mean the populace? You do. What power can the populace wield? It can run wild. It can burn and slay for a time. But enduring power it cannot wield, because power demands qualities which the populace does not possess, or it would not be populace. The inevitable, tragic corollary of civilization is populace. For the rest, abuses can be corrected by equity; and equity, if it is not found in the enlightened, is not to be found at all. M. Necker is to set about correcting abuses, and limiting privileges. That is decided. To that end the States General are to assemble."

"And a promising beginning we have made in Brittany, as Heaven hears me," cried Philippe.

"Pooh! That is nothing. Naturally the nobles will not yield without a struggle. It is a futile and ridiculous struggle—but then . . . it is human nature, I suppose, to be futile and ridiculous."

M. de Vilmorin became witheringly sarcastic. "Probably you will also qualify the shooting of Mabey as futile and ridiculous? I should even be prepared to hear you argue in defence of the Marquis de La Tour d'Azyr that his gamekeeper was merciful in shooting Mabey, since the alternative would have been a life-sentence to the galleys."

André-Louis drank the remainder of his chocolate; set down his cup, and pushed back his chair, his breakfast done.

“I confess that I have not your big charity, my dear Philippe. I am touched by Mabey’s fate. But, having conquered the shock of this news to my emotions, I do not forget that, after all, Mabey was thieving when he met his death.”

M. de Vilmorin heaved himself up in his indignation.

“That is the point of view to be expected in one who is the assistant fiscal intendant of a nobleman, and the delegate of a nobleman to the States of Brittany.”

“Philippe, is that just? You are angry with me!” he cried, in real solicitude.

“I am hurt,” Vilmorin admitted. “I am deeply hurt by your attitude. And I am not alone in resenting your reactionary tendencies. Do you know that the Literary Chamber is seriously considering your expulsion?”

André-Louis shrugged. “That neither surprises nor troubles me.”

M. de Vilmorin swept on, passionately: “Sometimes I think that you have no heart. With you it is always the law, never equity. It occurs to me, André, that I was mistaken in coming to you. You are not likely to be of assistance to me in my interview with M. de Kercadiou.” He took up his hat, clearly with the intention of departing. André-Louis sprang up and caught him by the arm.

“I vow,” said he, “that this is the last time ever I shall consent to talk law or politics with you, Philippe. I love you too well to quarrel with you over other men’s affairs.”

“But I make them my own,” Philippe insisted, vehemently.

“Of course you do, and I love you for it. It is right that you should. You are to be a priest; and everybody’s business is a priest’s business. Whereas I am a lawyer—the fiscal intendant of a nobleman, as you say—and a lawyer’s

business is the business of his client. That is the difference between us. Nevertheless, you are not going to shake me off."

"But I tell you frankly, now that I come to think of it, that I should prefer you did not see M. de Kercadiou with me. Your duty to your client cannot be a help to me." His wrath had passed; but his determination remained firm, based upon the reason he gave.

"Very well," said André-Louis. "It shall be as you please. But nothing shall prevent me at least from walking with you as far as the château, and waiting for you while you make your appeal to M. de Kercadiou."

And so they left the house good friends, for the sweetness of M. de Vilmorin's nature did not admit of rancour, and together they took their way up the steep main street of Gavrillac.

CHAPTER II

THE ARISTOCRAT

THE SLEEPY VILLAGE of Gavrillac, a half-league removed from the main road to Rennes, and therefore undisturbed by the world's traffic, lay in a curve of the River Meu, at the base, and straggling half-way up the slope of the shallow hill that was crowned by the squat manor. By the time Gavrillac had paid tribute to its seigneur—partly in money and partly in service—tithes to the Church and imposts to the King, it was hard put to it to keep body and soul together with what remained. Yet hard as conditions were in Gavrillac, they were not so hard as in many other parts of France; not half so hard, for instance, as with the wretched feudatories of the great lord of La Tour d'Azyr, whose vast possessions were at one point separated from this little village by the waters of the Meu.

The Château de Gavrillac owed such seigneurial airs as might be claimed for it to its dominant position above the village rather than to any feature of its own. Built of granite, like all the rest of Gavrillac, though mellowed by some three centuries of existence, it was a squat, flat-fronted edifice of two stories, each lighted by four windows with external wooded shutters, and flanked at either end by two square towers or pavilions under extinguisher roofs. Standing well back in a garden, denuded now, but very pleasant in summer, and immediately fronted by a fine sweep of balustrated terrace, it looked what indeed it was, and always had been, the residence of unpretentious folk who found more interest in husbandry than in adventure.

Quintin de Kercadiou, Lord of Gavrillac—Seigneur de Gavrillac was all the vague title that he bore, as his

forefathers had borne before him, derived no man knew whence or how—confirmed the impression that his house conveyed. Rude as the granite itself, he had never sought the experience of courts, had not even taken service in the armies of his King. He left it to his younger brother, Étienne, to represent the family in those exalted spheres. His own interests from earliest years had been centred in his woods and pastures. He hunted, and he cultivated his acres, and superficially he appeared to be little better than any of his rustic *métayers*. He kept no state, or at least no state commensurate with his position or with the tastes of his niece, Aline de Kercadiou. Aline, having spent some two years in the court atmosphere of Versailles under the ægis of her uncle Étienne, had ideas very different from those of her uncle Quintin of what was befitting seigneurial dignity. But though this only child of a third Kercadiou had exercised, ever since she was left an orphan at the early age of four, a tyrannical rule over the Lord of Gavrillac, who had been father and mother to her, she had never yet succeeded in beating down his stubbornness on that score.

She did not yet despair—persistence being a dominant note in her character—although she had been assiduously and fruitlessly at work ever since her return from the great world of Versailles, some three months ago.

She was walking on the terrace when André-Louis and M. de Vilmorin arrived. Her slight body was wrapped against the chill air in a white pelisse; her head was encased in a close-fitting bonnet, edged with white fur. It was caught tight in a knot of pale-blue ribbon on the right her chin; on on the left a long ringlet of corn-coloured hair had been permitted to escape. The keen air had whipped so much of her cheeks as was presented to it, and seemed to have added a sparkle to eyes that were of darkest blue.

André-Louis and M. de Vilmorin had been known to her from infancy. The three had been playmates once, and André-Louis—in view of his spiritual relationship with her

uncle—she called her cousin. The cousinly relations had persisted between these two long after Philippe de Vilmorin had outgrown the earlier intimacy, and had become to her Monsieur de Vilmorin.

She waved her hand to them in greeting as they advanced, and stood—an entrancing picture, and fully conscious of it—to await them at the end of the terrace nearest the short avenue by which they approached.

“If you come to see monsieur my uncle, you come inopportunely, messieurs,” she told them, a certain feverishness in her air. “He is closely—oh, so very closely—engaged.”

“We will wait, mademoiselle,” said M. de Vilmorin, bowing gallantly over the hand she extended to him. “Indeed, who would hasten to the uncle that may tarry a moment with the niece?”

“Monsieur l’Abbé,” she teased him, “when you are in orders I shall take you for my confessor. You have so ready and sympathetic an understanding.”

“But no curiosity,” said André-Louis. “You haven’t thought of that.”

“I wonder what you mean, cousin André?”

“Well you may,” laughed Philippe. “For no one ever knows.” And then, his glance straying across the terrace settled upon a carriage that was drawn up before the door of the château. It was a vehicle such as was often to be seen in the streets of a great city, but rarely in the country: a beautifully-sprung two-horse cabriolet of walnut, with a varnish upon it like a sheet of glass and little pastoral scenes exquisitely painted on the panels of the door. It was built to carry two persons, with a box in front for the coachman and a stand behind for the footman. This stand was now empty, but the footman paced before the door, and as he emerged from behind the vehicle into the range of M. de Vilmorin’s vision, he displayed the resplendent blue and gold livery of the Marquis de La Tour d’Azyr.