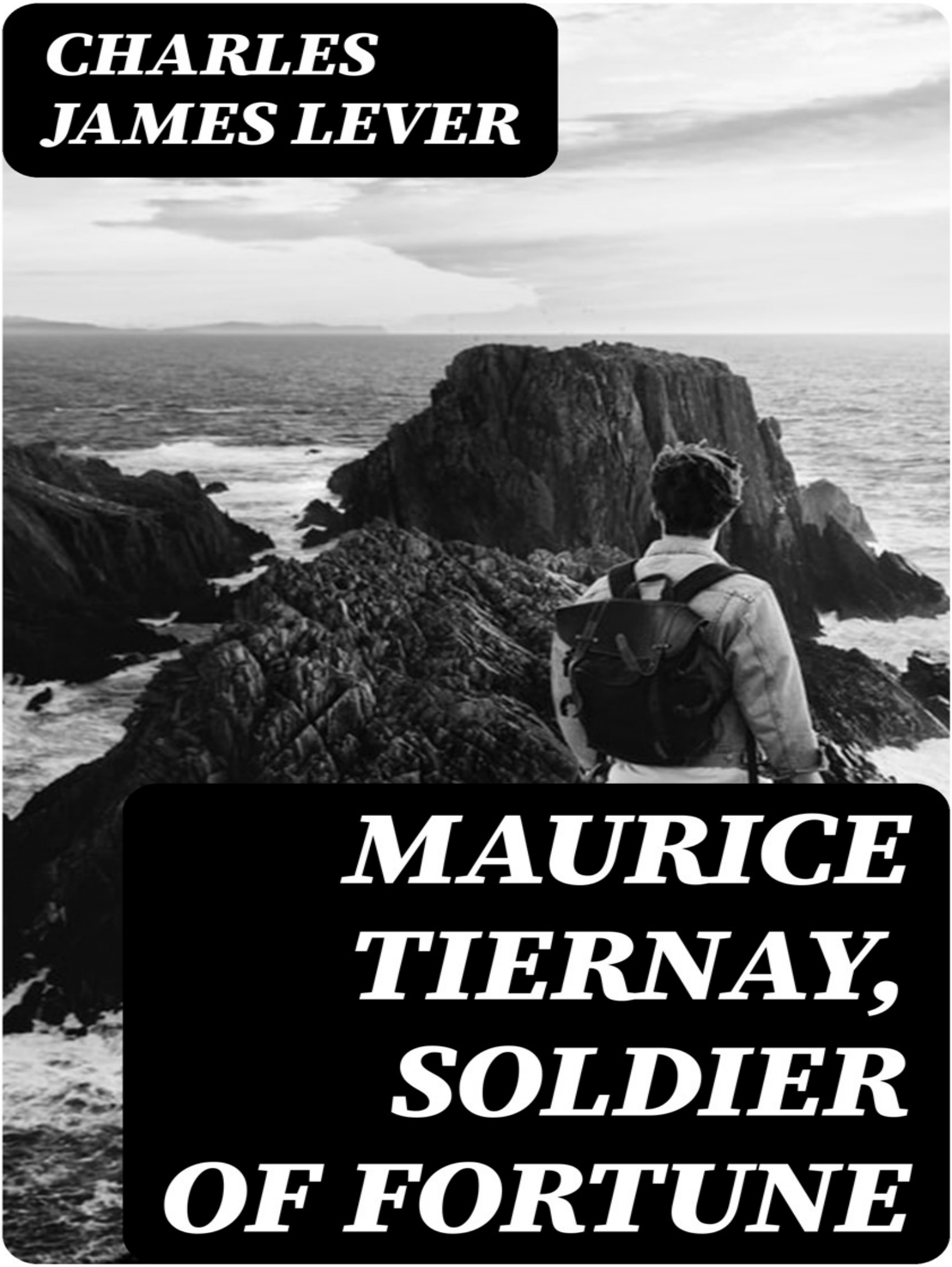
CHARLES JAMES LEVER



MAURICE TIERNAY, SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

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CHAPTER I. ‘THE DAYS OF THE GUILLOTINE’

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Neither the tastes nor the temper of the age we live in are such as to induce any man to boast of his family nobility. We see too many preparations around us for laying down new foundations, to think it a suitable occasion for alluding to the ancient edifice. I will, therefore, confine myself to saying, that I am not to be regarded as a mere pretender because my name is not chronicled by Burke or Debrett. My great-grandfather, after whom I am called, served on the personal staff of King James at the Battle of the Boyne, and was one of the few who accompanied the monarch on his flight from the field, for which act of devotion he was created a peer of Ireland, by the style and title of Timmahoo —Lord Tiernay, of Timmahoo the family called it—and a very rich-sounding and pleasant designation has it always seemed to me.

The events of the time, the scanty intervals of leisure enjoyed by the king, and other matters, prevented a due registry of my ancestors’ claims; and, in fact, when more peaceable days succeeded, it was judged prudent to say nothing about a matter which might revive unhappy recollections, and open old scores, seeing that there was now another king on the throne ‘who knew not Joseph’; and so, for this reason and many others, my greatgrandfather went back to his old appellation of Maurice Tiernay, and was only a lord among his intimate friends and cronies of the neighbourhood.

That I am simply recording a matter of fact, the patent of my ancestors' nobility, now in my possession, will sufficiently attest: nor is its existence the less conclusive, that it is inscribed on the back of his commission as a captain in the Shanabogue Fencibles—the well-known 'Clear-the-way-boy s'—a proud title, it is said, to which they imparted a new reading at the memorable battle aforementioned.

The document bears the address of a small public-house called the 'Nest,' on the Kells road, and contains in one corner a somewhat lengthy score for potables, suggesting the notion that his Majesty sympathised with vulgar infirmities, and found, as the old song says, 'that grief and sorrow are dry.'

The prudence which for some years sealed my greatgrandfather's lips, lapsed, after a time, into a careless and even boastful spirit, in which he would allude to his rank in the peerage, the place he ought to be holding, and so on: till at last, some of the Government people, doubtless taking a liking to the snug house and demesne of Timmahoo, denounced him as a rebel, on which he was arrested and thrown into gaol, where he lingered for many years, and only came out at last to find his estate confiscated, and himself a beggar.

There was a small gathering of Jacobites in one of the towns of Flanders, and thither he repaired; but how he lived, or how he died, I never learned. I only know that his son wandered away to the east of Europe, and took service in what was called Trenck's Pandours—as jolly a set of robbers as ever stalked the map of Europe, from one side to the

other. This was my grandfather, whose name is mentioned in various chronicles of that estimable corps, and who was hanged at Prague afterwards, for an attempt to carry off an archduchess of the empire, to whom, by the way, there is good reason to believe he was privately married. This suspicion was strengthened by the fact that his infant child, Joseph, was at once adopted by the imperial family, and placed as a pupil in the great military school of Vienna. From thence he obtained a commission in the Maria Theresa Hussars, and subsequently, being sent on a private mission to France, entered the service of Louis xvi., where he married a lady of the Queen's household—a Mademoiselle de la Lasterie—of high rank and some fortune; and with whom he lived happily till the dreadful events of 17—, when she lost her life, beside my father, then fighting as a Garde du Corps, on the staircase at Versailles. How he himself escaped on that day, and what were the next features in his history, I never knew; but when again we heard of him, he was married to the widow of a celebrated orator of the Mountain, and he himself an intimate friend of St. Just and Marat, and all the most violent of the Republicans.

My father's history about this period is involved in such obscurity, and his second marriage followed so rapidly on the death of his first wife, that, strange as it may seem, I never knew which of the two was my mother—the lineal descendant of a house, noble before the Crusades, or—the humble *bourgeoise* of the Quartier St. Denis. What peculiar line of political action my father followed I am unable to say, nor whether he was suspected with or without due cause; but suspected he certainly was, and at a time when

suspicion was all-sufficient for conviction. He was arrested, and thrown into the Temple, where I remember I used to visit him every week; and whence I accompanied him one morning, as he was led forth with a string of others to the Place de Grève, to be guillotined. I believe he was accused of royalism; and I know that a white cockade was found among his effects, and in mockery was fastened on his shoulder on the day of his execution. This emblem, deep dyed with blood, and still dripping, was taken up by a bystander, and pinned on my cap, with the savage observation, 'Voilà, it is the proper colour; see that you profit by the way it became so.' As, with a bursting heart, and a head wild with terror, I turned to find my way homeward, I felt my hand grasped by another—I looked up, and saw an old man, whose threadbare black clothes and emaciated appearance bespoke the priest in the times of the Convention.

'You have no home now, my poor boy,' said he to me; 'come and share mine.'

I did not ask him why. I seemed to have suddenly become reckless as to everything present or future. The terrible scene I had witnessed had dried up all the springs of my youthful heart; and, infant as I was, I was already a sceptic as to everything good or generous in human nature. I followed him, therefore, without a word, and we walked on, leaving the thoroughfares and seeking the less frequented streets, till we arrived in what seemed a suburban part of Paris—at least the houses were surrounded with trees and shrubs; and at a distance I could see the hill of Montmartre

and its windmills—objects well known to me by many a Sunday visit.

Even after my own home, the poverty of the Père Michel's household was most remarkable: he had but one small room, of which a miserable settle-bed, two chairs, and a table constituted all the furniture; there was no fireplace, a little pan for charcoal supplying the only means for warmth or cookery; a crucifix and a few coloured prints of saints decorated the whitewashed walls; and, with a string of wooden beads, a cloth skull-cap, and a bracket with two or three books, made up the whole inventory of his possessions; and yet, as he closed the door behind him, and drew me towards him to kiss my cheek, the tears glistened in his eyes with gratitude as he said—

'Now, my dear Maurice, you are at home.'

'How do you know that I am called Maurice?' said I, in astonishment.

'Because I was an old friend of your poor father, my child; we came from the same country—we held the same faith, had the same hopes, and may one day yet, perhaps, have the same fate.'

He told me that the closest friendship had bound them together for years past, and in proof of it showed me a variety of papers which my father had intrusted to his keeping, well aware, as it would seem, of the insecurity of his own life.

'He charged me to take you home with me, Maurice, should the day come when this might come to pass. You will now live with me, and I will be your father, so far, at least, as humble means will suffer me.'

I was too young to know how deep my debt of gratitude ought to be. I had not tasted the sorrows of utter desertion; nor did I know from what a hurricane of blood and anarchy Fortune had rescued me; still I accepted the père's benevolent offer with a thankful heart, and turned to him at once as to all that was left to me in the world.

All this time, it may be wondered how I neither spoke nor thought of my mother, if she were indeed such; but for several weeks before my father's death I had never seen her, nor did he ever once allude to her. The reserve thus imposed upon me remained still, and I felt as though it would have been like a treachery to his memory were I now to speak of her whom, in his lifetime, I had not dared to mention.

The père lost no time in diverting my mind from the dreadful events I had so lately witnessed. The next morning, soon after daybreak, I was summoned to attend him to the little church of St. Blois, where he said mass. It was a very humble little edifice, which once had been the private chapel of a château, and stood in a weed-grown, neglected garden, where broken statues and smashed fountains bore evidence of the visits of the destroyer. A rude effigy of St. Blois, upon whom some profane hand had stuck a Phrygian cap of liberty, and which none were bold enough to displace, stood over the doorway; except this, not a vestige of ornament or decoration existed. The altar, covered with a white cloth, displayed none of the accustomed emblems; and a rude crucifix of oak was the only symbol of the faith remaining. Small as was the building, it was even too spacious for the few who came to worship. The terror which

prevailed on every side—the dread that devotion to religion should be construed into an adherence to the monarchy, that submission to God should be interpreted as an act of rebellion against the sovereignty of human will—had gradually thinned the numbers, till at last the few who came were only those whose afflictions had steeled them against any reverses, and who were ready martyrs to whatever might betide them. These were almost exclusively women—the mothers and wives of those who had sealed their faith with their blood in the terrible Place de Grève. Among them was one whose dress and appearance, although not different from the rest, always created a movement of respect as she passed in or out of the chapel. She was a very old lady, with hair white as snow, and who led by the hand a little girl of about my own age; her large dark eyes and brilliant complexion giving her a look of unearthly beauty in that assemblage of furrowed cheeks, and eyes long dimmed by weeping. It was not alone that her features were beautifully regular, or that their lines were fashioned in the very perfection of symmetry, but there was a certain character in the expression of the face so different from all around it, as to be almost electrical in effect. Untouched by the terrible calamities that weighed on every heart, she seemed, in the glad buoyancy of her youth, to be at once above the very reach of sorrow, like one who bore a charmed fate, and whom Fortune had exempted from all the trials of this life. So at least did I read those features, as they beamed upon me in such a contrast to the almost stern character of the sad and sorrow-struck faces of the rest.

It was a part of my duty to place a footstool each morning for the ‘Marquise,’ as she was distinctively called, and on these occasions it was that I used to gaze upon that little girl’s face with a kind of admiring wonder that lingered in my heart for hours after. The bold look with which she met mine, if it at first half abashed, at length encouraged me; and as I stole noiselessly away, I used to feel as though I carried with me some portion of that high hope which bounded within her own heart. Strange magnetism! it seemed as though her spirit whispered to me not to be downhearted or depressed—that the sorrows of life came and went as shadows pass over the earth—that the season of mourning was fast passing, and that for us the world would wear a brighter and more glorious aspect.

Such were the thoughts her dark eyes revealed to me, and such the hopes I caught up from her proud features.

It is easy to colour a life of monotony; any hue may soon tinge the outer surface, and thus mine speedily assumed a hopeful cast; not the less decided, that the distance was lost in vague uncertainty. The nature of my studies—and the père kept me rigidly to the desk—offered little to the discursiveness of fancy. The rudiments of Greek and Latin, the lives of saints and martyrs, the litanies of the Church, the invocations peculiar to certain holy-days, chiefly filled up my time, when not sharing those menial offices which our poverty exacted from our own hands.

Our life was of the very simplest; except a cup of coffee each morning at daybreak, we took but one meal; our drink was always water. By what means even the humble fare we enjoyed was procured I never knew, for I never saw money

in the père’s possession, nor did he ever appear to buy anything.

For about two hours in the week I used to enjoy entire liberty, as the père was accustomed every Saturday to visit certain persons of his flock who were too infirm to go abroad. On these occasions he would leave me with some thoughtful injunction about reflection or pious meditation, perhaps suggesting, for my amusement, the life of St. Vincent de Paul, or some other of those adventurous spirits whose missions among the Indians are so replete with heroic struggles; but still with free permission for me to walk out at large and enjoy myself as I liked best. We lived so near the outer boulevard that I could already see the open country from our windows; but fair and enticing as seemed the sunny slopes of Montmartre—bright as glanced the young leaves of spring in the gardens at its foot—I ever turned my steps into the crowded city, and sought the thoroughfares where the great human tide rolled fullest.

There were certain spots which held a kind of supernatural influence over me—one of these was the Temple, another was the Place de Grève. The window at which my father used to sit, from which, as a kind of signal, I have so often seen his red kerchief floating, I never could pass now, without stopping to gaze at—now, thinking of him who had been its inmate; now, wondering who might be its present occupant. It needed not the onward current of population that each Saturday bore along, to carry me to the Place de Grève. It was the great day of the guillotine, and as many as two hundred were often led out to execution. Although the spectacle had now lost every charm

of excitement to the population, from its frequency, it had become a kind of necessity to their existence, and the sight of blood alone seemed to slake that feverish thirst for vengeance which no sufferings appeared capable of satiating. It was rare, however, when some great and distinguished criminal did not absorb all the interest of the scene. It was at that period when the fierce tyrants of the Convention had turned upon each other, and sought, by denouncing those who had been their bosom friends, to seal their new allegiance to the people. There was something demoniacal in the exultation with which the mob witnessed the fate of those whom, but a few weeks back, they had acknowledged as their guides and teachers. The uncertainty of human greatness appeared the most glorious recompense to those whose station debarred them from all the enjoyments of power, and they stood by the death-agonies of their former friends with a fiendish joy that all the sufferings of their enemies had never yielded.

To me the spectacle had all the fascination that scenes of horror exercise over the mind of youth. I knew nothing of the terrible conflict, nothing of the fierce passions enlisted in the struggle, nothing of the sacred names so basely polluted, nothing of that remorseless vengeance with which the low born and degraded were still hounded on to slaughter. It was a solemn and a fearful sight, but it was no more; and I gazed upon every detail of the scene with an interest that never wandered from the spot whereon it was enacted. If the parade of soldiers, of horse, foot, and artillery, gave these scenes a character of public justice, the horrible mobs, who chanted ribald songs, and danced

around the guillotine, suggested the notion of popular vengeance; so that I was lost in all my attempts to reconcile the reasons of these executions with the circumstances that accompanied them.

Not daring to inform the Père Michel of where I had been, I could not ask him for any explanation; and thus was I left to pick up from the scattered phrases of the crowd what was the guilt alleged against the criminals. In many cases the simple word ‘Chouan,’ of which I knew not the import, was all I heard; in others, jeering allusions to former rank and station would be uttered; while against some the taunt would imply that they had shed tears over others who fell as enemies of the people, and that such sympathy was a costly pleasure to be paid for but with a life’s-blood. Such entire possession of me had these awful sights taken, that I lived in a continual dream of them. The sound of every cart-wheel recalled the dull rumble of the hurdle—every distant sound seemed like the far-off hum of the coming multitude—every sudden noise suggested the clanking drop of the guillotine! My sleep had no other images, and I wandered about my little round of duties pondering over this terrible theme.

Had I been less occupied with my own thoughts, I must have seen that the Père Michel was suffering under some great calamity. The poor priest became wasted to a shadow; for entire days long he would taste of nothing; sometimes he would be absent from early morning to late at night, and when he did return, instead of betaking himself to rest, he would drop down before the crucifix in an agony of prayer, and thus spend more than half the night. Often and often have I, when feigning sleep, followed him as he recited the

litanies of the breviary, adding my own muttered prayers to his, and beseeching for a mercy whose object I knew not.

For some time his little chapel had been closed by the authorities; a heavy padlock and two massive seals being placed upon the door, and a notice, in a vulgar handwriting, appended, to the effect that it was by the order of the Commissary of the Department. Could this be the source of the père's sorrow? or did not his affliction seem too great for such a cause? were questions I asked myself again and again.

In this state were matters, when one morning—it was a Saturday—the priest enjoined me to spend the day in prayer, reciting particularly the liturgies for the dead, and all those sacred offices for those who have just departed this life.

'Pray unceasingly, my dear child—pray with your whole heart, as though it were for one you loved best in the world. I shall not return, perhaps, till late to-night; but I will kiss you then, and to-morrow we shall go into the woods together.'

The tears fell from his cheek to mine as he said this, and his damp hand trembled as he pressed my fingers. My heart was full to bursting at his emotion, and I resolved faithfully to do his bidding. To watch him as he went, I opened the sash, and as I did so, the sound of a distant drum, the well-known muffled roll, floated on the air, and I remembered it was the day of the guillotine—that day in which my feverish spirit turned, as it were in relief, to the reality of blood. Remote as was the part of the city we lived in, I could still mark the hastening steps of the foot-passengers, as they

listened to the far-off summons, and see the tide was setting towards the fatal Place de Grève. It was a lowering, heavy morning, overcast with clouds, and on its loaded atmosphere sounds moved slowly and indistinctly; yet I could trace through all the din of the great city, the incessant roll of the drums, and the loud shouts that burst forth, from time to time, from some great multitude.

Forgetting everything save my intense passion for scenes of terror, I hastened down the stairs into the street, and at the top of my speed hurried to the place of execution. As I went along, the crowded streets and thronged avenues told of some event of more than common interest; and in the words which fell from those around me, I could trace that some deep Royalist plot had just been discovered, and that the conspirators would all on that day be executed. Whether it was that the frequent sight of blood was beginning to pall upon the popular appetite, or that these wholesale massacres interested less than the sight of individual suffering, I know not; but certainly there was less of exultation, less of triumphant scorn in the tone of the speakers. They talked of the coming event as of a common occurrence, which, from mere repetition, was gradually losing interest.

‘I thought we had done with these Chouans,’ said a man in a blouse, with a paper cap on his head. ‘*Pardie!* they must have been more numerous than we ever suspected.’

‘That they were, citizen,’ said a haggard-looking fellow, whose features showed the signs of recent strife; ‘they were the millions who gorged and fed upon us for centuries—who

sipped the red grape of Bordeaux, while you and I drank the water of the Seine.'

'Well, their time is come now,' cried a third.

'And when will ours come?' asked a fresh-looking, dark-eyed girl, whose dress bespoke her trade as a flower-girl, 'or do you call this our time, my masters, when Paris has no more pleasant sight than blood, nor any music save the "Ça ira" that drowns the cries of the guillotine? Is this our time, when we have lost those who gave us bread, and got in their place only those who would feed us with carnage?'

'Down with her! down with the Chouane! *à bas la Royaliste!*' cried the pale-faced fellow; and he struck the girl with his fist upon her face, and left it covered with blood.

'To the Lantern with her—to the Seine!' shouted several voices; and now, rudely seizing her by the shoulders, the mob seemed bent upon sudden vengeance; while the poor girl, letting fall her basket, begged with clasped hands for mercy.

'See here, see here, comrades,' cried a fellow, stooping down among the flowers, 'she is a Royalist: here are lilies hid beneath the rest.'

What sad consequences this discovery might have led to, there is no knowing; when, suddenly, a violent rush of the crowd turned every thought into a different direction. It was caused by a movement of the *Gendarmerie à cheval*, who were clearing the way for the approaching procession. I had just time to place the poor girl's basket in her hands, as the onward impulse of the dense mob carried me forward. I saw her no more. A flower—I know not how it came there—was

in my bosom, and seeing that it was a lily, I placed it within my cap for concealment.

The hoarse clangour of the bassoons—the only instruments which played during the march—now told that the procession was approaching; and then I could see, above the heads of the multitude, the leopard-skin helmets of the dragoons, who led the way. Save this I could see nothing, as I was borne along in the vast torrent towards the place of execution. Slowly as we moved, our progress was far more rapid than that of the procession, which was often obliged to halt from the density of the mob in front. We arrived, therefore, at the Place a considerable time before it; and now I found myself beside the massive wooden railing placed to keep off the crowd from the space around the guillotine.

It was the first time I had ever stood so close to the fatal spot, and my eyes devoured every detail with the most searching intensity. The colossal guillotine itself, painted red, and with its massive axe suspended aloft—the terrible basket, half filled with sawdust, beneath—the coarse table, on which a rude jar and a cup were placed—and, more disgusting than all, the lounging group, who, with their newspapers in hand, seemed from time to time to watch if the procession were approaching. They sat beneath a misshapen statue of wood, painted red like the guillotine. This was the goddess of Liberty. I climbed one of the pillars of the paling, and could now see the great cart, which, like a boat upon wheels, came slowly along, dragged by six horses. It was crowded with people, so closely packed that they could not move their bodies, and only waved their

hands, which they did incessantly. They seemed, too, as if they were singing; but the deep growl of the bassoons, and the fierce howlings of the mob, drowned all other sounds. As the cart came nearer, I could distinguish the faces, amid which were those of age and youth, men and women, bold-visaged boys and fair girls—some, whose air bespoke the very highest station, and beside them, the hardy peasant, apparently more amazed than terrified at all he saw around him. On they came, the great cart surging heavily, like a bark in a stormy sea; and now it cleft the dense ocean that filled the Place, and I could descry the lineaments wherein the stiffened lines of death were already marked. Had any touch of pity still lingered in that dense crowd, there might well have been some show of compassion for the sad convoy, whose faces grew ghastly with terror as they drew near the horrible engine.

Down the furrowed cheek of age the heavy tears coursed freely, and sobs and broken prayers burst forth from hearts that until now had beat high and proudly.

‘There is the Due d’Angeac,’ cried a fellow, pointing to a venerable old man, who was seated at the corner of the cart with an air of calm dignity; ‘I know him well, for I was his perruquier.’

‘His hair must be content with sawdust this morning, instead of powder,’ said another; and a rude laugh followed the ruffian jest.

‘See! mark that woman with the long dark hair—that is La Bretonville, the actress of the St. Martin.’

‘I have often seen her represent terror far more naturally,’ cried a fashionably dressed man, as he stared at

the victim through his opera-glass.

‘Bah!’ replied his friend, ‘she despises her audience, *voilà tout*. Look, Henri, if that little girl beside her be not Lucille, of the Pantheon.’

‘*Parbleu!* so it is. Why, they’ll not leave a pirouette in the Grand Opera. *Pauvre petite*, what had you to do with politics?’

‘Her little feet ought to have saved her head any day.’

‘See how grim that old lady beside her looks; I’d swear she is more shocked at the company she’s thrown into than the fate that awaits her. I never saw a glance of prouder disdain than she has just bestowed on poor Lucille.’

‘That is the old Marquise d’Estelles, the very essence of our old nobility. They used to talk of their *mésalliance* with the Bourbons as the first misfortune of their house.’ ‘*Pardi!* they have lived to learn deeper sorrows.’ I had by this time discovered her they were speaking of, whom I recognised at once as the old marquise of the chapel of St. Blois. My hands nearly gave up their grasp as I gazed on those features, which so often I had seen fixed in prayer, and which now—a thought paler, perhaps—wore the self-same calm expression. With what intense agony I peered into the mass, to see if the little girl, her granddaughter, were with her; and, oh! the deep relief I felt as I saw nothing but strange faces on every side. It was terrible to feel, as my eyes ranged over that vast mass, where grief, and despair, and heart-sinking terror were depicted, that I should experience a spirit of joy and thankfulness; and yet I did so, and with my lips I uttered my gratitude that she was spared! But I had not time for many reflections like this; already the

terrible business of the day had begun, and the prisoners were now descending from the cart, ranging themselves, as their names were called, in a line below the scaffold. With a few exceptions, they took their places in all the calm of seeming indifference. Death had long familiarised itself to their minds in a thousand shapes. Day by day they had seen the vacant places left by those led out to die, and if their sorrows had not rendered them careless of life, the world itself had grown distasteful to them. In some cases a spirit of proud scorn was manifested to the very last; and, strange inconsistency of human nature! the very men whose licentiousness and frivolity first evoked the terrible storm of popular fury, were the first to display the most chivalrous courage in the terrible face of the guillotine. Beautiful women, too, in all the pride of their loveliness, met the inhuman stare of that mob undismayed. Nor were these traits without their fruits. This noble spirit—this triumphant victory of the well born and the great—was a continual insult to the populace, who saw themselves defrauded of half their promised vengeance, and they learned that they might kill, but they could never humiliate them. In vain they dipped their hands in the red life-blood, and, holding up their dripping fingers, asked—‘How did it differ from that of the people?’ Their hearts gave the lie to the taunt; for they witnessed instances of heroism, from grey hairs and tender womanhood, that would have shamed the proudest deeds of their new-born chivalry!

‘Charles Grégoire Courcelles!’ shouted out a deep voice from the scaffold.

‘That is my name,’ said a venerable-looking old gentleman, as he arose from his seat, adding, with a placid smile, ‘but for half a century my friends have called me the Duc de Riancourt.’

‘We have no dukes nor marquises; we know of no titles in France,’ replied the functionary. ‘All men are equal before the law.’

‘If it were so, my friend, you and I might change places; for you were my steward, and plundered my château.’

‘Down with the Royalist—away with the aristocrat!’ shouted a number of voices from the crowd.

‘Be a little patient, good people,’ said the old man, as he ascended the steps with some difficulty; ‘I was wounded in Canada, and have never yet recovered. I shall probably be better a few minutes hence.’

There was something of half simplicity in the careless way the words were uttered that hushed the multitude, and already some expressions of sympathy were heard; but as quickly the ribald insults of the hired ruffians of the Convention drowned these sounds, and ‘Down with the Royalist’ resounded on every side, while two officials assisted him to remove his stock and bare his throat. The commissary, advancing to the edge of the platform, and, as it were, addressing the people, read in a hurried, slurring kind of voice, something that purported to be the ground of the condemnation. But of this not a word could be heard. None cared to hear the ten-thousand-time told tale of suspected Royalism, nor would listen to the high-sounding declamation that proclaimed the virtuous zeal of the Government—their untiring energy—their glorious

persistence in the cause of the people. The last words were as usual responded to with an echoing shout, and the cry of ‘*Vive la République!* rose from the great multitude.

‘*Vive le Roi!* cried the old man, with a voice heard high above the clamour; but the words were scarce out when the lips that uttered them were closed in death; so sudden was the act, that a cry burst forth from the mob, but whether in reprobation or in ecstasy I know not.

I will not follow the sad catalogue, wherein nobles, and peasants, priests, soldiers, actors, men of obscure fortune, and women of lofty station, succeeded each other, occupying for a brief minute every eye, and passing away for ever. Many ascended the platform without a word; some waved a farewell towards a distant quarter, where they suspected a friend to be; others spent their last moments in prayer, and died in the very act of supplication. All bore themselves with a noble and proud courage; and now some five or six alone remained of whose fate none seemed to guess the issue, since they had been taken from the Temple by some mistake, and were not included in the list of the commissary. There they sat, at the foot of the scaffold, speechless and stupefied—they looked as though it were matter of indifference to which side their steps should turn—to the gaol or the guillotine. Among these was the marquise, who alone preserved her proud self-possession, and sat in all her accustomed dignity; while close beside her an angry controversy was maintained as to their future destiny—the commissary firmly refusing to receive them for execution, and the delegate of the Temple, as he was styled, as flatly asserting that he would not reconduct them to prison. The

populace soon grew interested in the dispute, and the most violent altercations arose among the partisans of each side of the question.

Meanwhile the commissary and his assistants prepared to depart. Already the massive drapery of red cloth was drawn over the guillotine, and every preparation made for withdrawing, when the mob, doubtless dissatisfied that they should be defrauded of any portion of the entertainment, began to climb over the wooden barricades, and, with furious cries and shouts, threaten vengeance upon any who would screen the enemies of the people.

The troops resisted the movement, but rather with the air of men entreating calmness than with the spirit of soldiery. It was plain to see on which side the true force lay.

‘If you will not do it, the people will do it for you,’ whispered the delegate to the commissary; ‘and who is to say where they will stop when their hands once learn the trick!’

The commissary grew lividly pale, and made no reply.

‘See there!’ rejoined the other—‘they are carrying a fellow on their shoulders yonder—they mean him to be the executioner.’

‘But I dare not—I cannot—without my orders.’

‘Are not the people sovereign?—whose will have we sworn to obey but theirs?’

‘My own head would be the penalty if I yielded.’

‘It will be, if you resist—even now it is too late.’

And as he spoke he sprang from the scaffold, and disappeared in the dense crowd that already thronged the space within the rails.

By this time the populace were not only masters of the area around, but had also gained the scaffold itself, from which many of them seemed endeavouring to harangue the mob—others contenting themselves with imitating the gestures of the commissary and his functionaries. It was a scene of the wildest uproar and confusion—frantic cries and screams, ribald songs and fiendish yellings on every side. The guillotine was again uncovered, and the great crimson drapery, torn into fragments, was waved about like flags, or twisted into uncouth head-dresses. The commissary, failing in every attempt to restore order peaceably, and either not possessing a sufficient force, or distrusting the temper of the soldiers, descended from the scaffold, and gave the order to march. This act of submission was hailed by the mob with the most furious yell of triumph. Up to that very moment they had never credited the bare possibility of a victory; and now they saw themselves suddenly masters of the field—the troops, in all the array of horse and foot, retiring in discomfiture. The exultation knew no bounds; and, doubtless, had there been amongst them those with skill and daring to profit by the enthusiasm, the torrent had rushed a longer and more terrific course than through the blood-steeped clay of the Place de Grève.

‘Here is the man we want,’ shouted a deep voice. ‘St. Just told us t’ other day that the occasion never failed to produce one; and see, here is “Jean Gougon”; and though he’s but two feet high, his fingers can reach the pin of the guillotine.’

And he held aloft on his shoulders a misshapen dwarf, who was well known on the Pont Neuf, where he gained his living by singing infamous songs, and performing mockeries

of the service of the mass. A cheer of welcome acknowledged this speech, to which the dwarf responded by a mock benediction, which he bestowed with all the ceremonious observance of an archbishop. Shouts of the wildest laughter followed this ribaldry, and in a kind of triumph they carried him up the steps, and deposited him on the scaffold.

Ascending one of the chairs, the little wretch proceeded to address the mob, which he did with all the ease and composure of a practised public speaker. Not a murmur was heard in that tumultuous assemblage, as he, with a most admirable imitation of Hébert, then the popular idol, assured them that France was, at that instant, the envy of surrounding nations; and that, bating certain little weaknesses on the score of humanity—certain traits of softness and over-mercy—her citizens realised all that ever had been said of angels. From thence he passed on to a mimicry of Marat, of Danton, and of Robespierre—tearing off his cravat, baring his breast, and performing all the oft-exhibited antics of the latter, as he vociferated, in a wild scream, the well-known peroration of a speech he had lately made—‘If we look for a glorious morrow of freedom, the sun of our slavery must set in blood!’

However amused by the dwarfs exhibition, a feeling of impatience began to manifest itself among the mob, who felt that, by any longer delay, it was possible time would be given for fresh troops to arrive, and the glorious opportunity of popular sovereignty be lost in the very hour of victory.

‘To work—to work, Master Gougon!’ shouted hundreds of rude voices; ‘we cannot spend our day in listening to

oratory.’

‘You forget, my dear friends,’ said he blandly, ‘that this is to me a new walk in life. I have much to learn, ere I can acquit myself worthily to the Republic.’

‘We have no leisure for preparatory studies, Gougon,’ cried a fellow below the scaffold.

‘Let me, then, just begin with monsieur,’ said the dwarf, pointing to the last speaker, and a shout of laughter closed the sentence.

A brief and angry dispute now arose as to what was to be done; and it is more than doubtful how the debate might have ended, when Gougon, with a readiness all his own, concluded the discussion by saying—

‘I have it, citizens, I have it! There is a lady here, who, however respectable her family and connections, will leave few to mourn her loss. She is, in a manner, public property, and if not born on the soil, at least a naturalised Frenchwoman. We have done a great deal for her, and in her name, for some time back, and I am not aware of any singular benefit she has rendered us. With your permission, then, I ‘ll begin with her.*

‘Name, name—name her!’ was cried by thousands.

‘*La voilà*,’ said he archly, as he pointed with his thumb to the wooden effigy of Liberty above his head.

The absurdity of the suggestion was more than enough for its success. A dozen hands were speedily at work, and down came the goddess of Liberty! The other details of an execution were hurried over with all the speed of practised address, and the figure was placed beneath the drop. Down

fell the axe, and Gougon, lifting up the wooden head, paraded it about the scaffold, crying—

‘Behold! an enemy of France. Long live the Republic, one and indivisible!’

Loud and wild were the shouts of laughter from this brutal mockery; and for a time it almost seemed as if the ribaldry had turned the mob from the sterner passions of their vengeance. This hope, if one there ever cherished it, was short-lived, and again the cry arose for blood. It was too plain that no momentary diversion, no passing distraction, could withdraw them from that lust for cruelty that had now grown into a passion.

And now a bustle and movement of those around the stairs showed that something was in preparation; and in the next moment the old marquise was led forward between two men.

‘Where is the order for this woman’s execution?’ asked the dwarf, mimicking the style and air of the commissary.

‘We give it—it is from us!’ shouted the mob, with one savage roar.

Gougon removed his cap, and bowed in token of obedience.

‘Let us proceed in order, citizens,’ said he gravely; ‘I see no priest here.’

‘Shrive her yourself, Gougon; few know the mummeries better!’ cried a voice.

‘Is there not one here can remember a prayer, or even a verse of the offices,’ said Gougon, with a well-affected horror in his voice.

‘Yes, yes, I do,’ cried I, my zeal overcoming all sense of the mockery in which the words were spoken; ‘I know them all by heart, and can repeat them from “lux beatissima” down to “hora mortis”’; and as if to gain credence for my self-laudation, I began at once to recite, in the sing-song tone of the seminary—