

THE ROMANCE OF WAR, VOLUME 2

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VOLUME 2 (OF 3) ***

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THE ROMANCE OF WAR:

OR,

THE HIGHLANDERS IN SPAIN

BY
JAMES GRANT, ESQ.

Late 62nd Regiment.

"In the garb of old Gaul, with the fire of old Rome,
From the heath-covered mountains of Scotia we come;
Our loud-sounding pipe breathes the true martial strain,
And our hearts still the old Scottish valour retain."

Lt.-Gen. Erskine.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.

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THE ROMANCE OF WAR.

CHAPTER I. CASTELLO BRANCO.

"Yet since thou wilt an idle tale of mine,
Take one which scarcely is of worth enough
To give or to withhold. Our time creeps on;
Fancy grows colder, as the silvery hair
Tells the advancing winter of our life:

But if it be of worth enough to please,
That worth it owes to her who set the task;
If otherwise, the fault rests with the author."

Macduff's Cross.—Prelude.

"Well, Ronald, my *bon camarado*, and so you are really here, and in safety?" said Macdonald as he came up at the head of his sub-division. "Quite well now, I perceive. You received my letter from your servant, of course?"

"Yes. I have a thousand strange adventures to tell you of; but I will reserve them for the halt, which I suppose will be at the castle of Zagala. But meanwhile, let me hear the regimental news."

"Defer that till the halt also,—talking is dry work. A few rank and file were knocked on the head at Fuente del Maistre; but the officers, you may see, are all present. We feared you were on your route for France, when we heard that Dombrowski's dragoons were in Merida."

"A daring deed it was, for a handful of men to advance thus."

"Daring indeed!"

"But then they were Poles,—and the Poles are no common troops. Sad work, however, they have made at Merida. Every shop and house in the Plaza has been gutted and destroyed."

"More shame to the citizens! A city containing five or six thousand inhabitants, should have made some resistance to so small a party."

"Ay; but the cits here are not like what our Scottish burghers were two centuries ago,—grasping axe and spear readily at the slightest alarm. By Sir Rowland's orders, Thiele, the German engineer, blew up the Roman bridge, to prevent D'Erlon from pressing upon part of the 13th, who form the rear-guard."

"'Twas a pity to destroy so perfect a relic of antiquity."

"It was dire necessity."

"Did you see any thing of our friends in the Calle de Guadiana,—the house at the corner of the Plaza?"

"Ah! Donna Catalina's residence? Blushing again! Why, no; it was dark, and I was so fatigued when we marched through the market-place, that I could not see the house, and Fassifern is so strict that it is impossible to leave the ranks. But I could observe that nearly all the houses above the piazzas are in ruins. However, we have captured nearly every man of the ravagers. A glorious-looking old fellow their commander is,—a French *chef-de-bataillon*,—Monsieur le Baron de Clappourknuis, as he styles himself."

"Clappourknuis? That has a Scottish sort of sound."

"The name is purely Scottish. I had a long conversation with him an hour

since. He is grandson of the famous John Law of Laurieston, and brother of the French general, the great Marquis of Laurieston.[*] He takes his title of Clap-pourknuis from some little knowes, which stand between the old castle of Laurieston and the Frith of Forth. What joy and enthusiasm he displayed at sight of our regiment, and the 71st! 'Ah, *mon ami!*' he exclaimed, holding up his hands. 'Braave Scots,—very superb troupes!' he added, in his broken English, and the soldiers gave him a hearty cheer. He is a true Frenchman of the old school, and has a peculiar veneration for Scotland, which is only equalled by his bitter hatred for England; and all my arguments were lost in endeavouring to prove to him that we are one people,—one nation now. There is one of the 71st, a relation of the Laurieston family: I must introduce him to the baron, who seems to have a great affection for all who come from the land of his fathers.—A handsome young man, apparently, this Louis Lisle, our new sub."

[*] To the political or historical reader, the names of the marquis and his brother will be familiar. The house of Laurieston stands within four miles from Edinburgh, on the south bank of the Forth.

"Very agreeable you'll find him, I dare say," replied Ronald, colouring slightly.

"A smart fellow he is, and will please Fassifern. His harness is mighty gay and glossy just now, but a night's bivouacking—by the by, he is from Perthshire, is he not?"

"Ay, the mountainous part of the country,—my own native place. He comes of good family, and we are old acquaintance."

"Yet you seem to behave very drily to him: why you have not spoken to him since the corps came up."

"I have my reasons. A few words with him last night—I will tell you afterwards," said Ronald in confusion.

"Pshaw, Stuart! You should not dishearten a young sub, who has just joined, by this sort of behaviour. Nothing disgusts one who has recently left his home with the service, so much as coldness on the part of those that he considered his friends. I shall see it made up—"

"I beg, Macdonald, you will not interfere in this matter," was Ronald's answer, with a vehemence that surprised his friend. "I am aware how I ought to behave to Mr. Lisle: we must be on distant terms—for the present at least."

"You are the best judge, of course," said Macdonald, with some confusion. "I merely meant for the best what I said. I dislike discord among brother officers."

"I am aware that your intentions were good,—they always are so, Alister; but change the subject. How did you like Almendralejo?"

"Not well: a dull place it is, and the dons are very quarrelsome."

"Ay, I remember your letter mentioning two brawls with the inhabitants."

"Your servant, Mr. Iverach, and that rogue Mackie, of your own company, were the heroes of one."

"I should be glad to hear the story now. My servant has often mentioned it, when I had neither time nor inclination to listen."

"There is an old *abogado* at Almendralejo," answered Macdonald, "a fierce old fellow he is, with bristling moustaches twisted up to his very ears, and eyes like those of a hawk,—the Senor Sancho de los Garcionadas the people there call him for shortness, but he has a name as long as a Welsh pedigree. This lawyer dwells, of course, in one of the best houses in the town, and on him Iverach and Angus Mackie were billeted. He has a daughter, whom I have seen on the Prado, a fine-looking girl, with regular features, Spanish eyes, and Spanish ankles,—quite bewitching, in fact; and although she has not Donna Catalina's stately and splendid appearance, yet she is plump as a partridge, and rosy, pretty, and merry as can be imagined. Her beauty completely vanquished the heart of Mackie, on whom she had cast favourable glances, for he is what Campbell calls one of the duchess's picked men, (a strapping Blair-Athole man, from the mountain of Bein Meadhonaidh).

"A very agreeable correspondence ensued between them, but how they managed I cannot tell, as neither knew a word of the other's language, and Angus speaks more Gaelic than English; so I suppose they conversed by the eyes instead of the mouth.

"There is a French writer who exclaims, 'Ah! what eloquence is so powerful as the language of two charming eyes!'"[*] and very probably Master Angus (whom I now see trudging away yonder with his knapsack on) found this to be the case. At last the *abogado* began to suspect what was going on, and his blood boiled up at the idea that the Scottish private soldier should have the presumption to address his daughter, and the treacherous old fox hatched a very nice, but very cowardly, plan for cutting off poor Mackie.

[*] The author of the "Memoirs of Madame de Maintenon."

"The Senora Maria he put securely under lock and key, and despatched a message to her cavalier that she would expect him that evening after vespers, sending at the same time a stout ladder of ropes, with which he was to scale her window. The plan succeeded to admiration. The savage old attorney and some five or six kinsmen, muffled and masked, lurked in a dark place, grasping their knives

and crucifixes,—for a Spaniard never thinks he can commit a murder comfortably without having his crucifix about him: if it contains a piece of the true cross, so much the better. Mackie came to the rendezvous, but attended by his comrade Iverach, and both had luckily brought their side arms with them. Scarcely had the unsuspecting gallant placed his foot on the first step of the ladder, when the concealed assassins rushed upon him, dagger in hand, from their ambush. The Highlanders drew and fought manfully with their bayonets, ran two through the body, and after receiving a few cuts in return, put the rest to flight; and so the matter ended for the night. But a terrible row was made about it next day. Cameron's quarters were besieged by all the alcaldes, alguazils with their halberets, abogados, and other rogues in the town, headed by the corregidor, demanding revenge. Fassifern made a short matter of it with them, and desired the guard to drive them out. I know not how it might ultimately have ended, if the route for Villa Franca had not arrived just then, and put a stop to the affair by our sudden march. But since that occurrence I understand Mackie has not been the same sort of man he was,—always grave, absorbed, and thoughtful. I fear he will give us the slip, and desert. The old lawyer's daughter seems to have bewitched him. He has more than once asked leave to return to Almendralejo, although he knows that it is now in possession of the enemy, and that his death is certain, should he be seen there again."

During the five days of the weary forced march across the Spanish frontier to the town of Portagalre (which signifies the 'happy port') in Portugal, the same distance of manner and reciprocal coolness, which we have described in a preceding chapter, subsisted between Ronald Stuart and young Lisle; and although secretly both longed to come to some satisfactory, and if possible a friendly explanation, their Scottish pride and stubbornness forbade them both alike to make the first advances towards a reconciliation. Louis had written to his sister, but had said nothing of Ronald, further than that he was well, &c.

At Niza, Ronald parted with Pedro Gomez, who had accompanied him thus far, but whom he now despatched to join his troop in a neighbouring province, giving him in charge a long letter to Don Alvaro. The morning the first brigade entered Niza, they found the greedy inhabitants, on their approach, busily employed in pulling their half-ripe oranges, shaking them down from the trees and carrying them off in baskets with the utmost expedition, lest some of those soldiers,—soldiers who were shedding their blood to rescue the Peninsula from the iron grasp of Napoleon! should have plucked a few in passing under the groves.

That night a part of the Highland regiment were quartered in the convent[*] of San Miguel, and great was the surprise of the reverend Padre José, and the rest of the worthy brotherhood, to find themselves addressed in pure Latin by private

soldiers, who could not speak either Spanish or Portuguese. But to those who know the cheapness of education at our Scottish village schools, this will excite little or no wonder.

[*] Convent is a term applied indiscriminately, in Spain, to houses occupied by either monks or nuns.

Next day the troops entered Castello Branco, a fortified place, situated on the face of a rugged mountain a couple of leagues north of the river Tajo, or Tagus, a city of great importance in bygone days. Its streets are narrow, close, and dirty, like those of all Portuguese towns, where the refuse of the household lies piled up in front of the street-door, where lean and ravenous dogs, ragged mendicants, and starving gitanas contest the possession of the well-picked bones and fragments of melons and pumpkins, that lie mouldering and rotting, breeding flies and vermin innumerable under the influence of a burning sun. Water is conveyed to the houses, or *flats*, as in ancient Edinburgh and Paris, by means of barrels carried on the backs of men from the public fountains. The streets are totally destitute of paving, lamps, or police; and by night the passenger, unless he goes well armed, is exposed to attacks of masked footpads, or annoyed by the bands of hungry dogs which prowl in hundreds about the streets of every Portuguese town, howling and yelping for food until one dies, when immediately it becomes a prey to the rest.

Major Campbell and Stuart, with some of the officers, were seated in one of the best rooms of their billet,—the most comfortable posada the place possessed, and truly the peninsular inns are like no others that I know of. As they were in the days of Miguel Cervantes, so are they still; in every thing Spain and Portugal are four hundred years behind Great Britain in the march of civilization.

In a posada, the lower story, which is always entered by a large round archway, is kept for the accommodation of carriages and cattle. It is generally one large apartment, like a barn in size, the whole length and breadth of the building floored with gravel, and staked at distances with posts, to which the cattle of travellers are tied and receive their feed of chopped straw, or of Indian corn which has become too rotten and mouldy for the use of human beings. The whole fabric is generally ruinous, no repairs being ever given; the furniture is always old, rotten, and decayed,—the chairs, beds, &c. being but nests for myriads of insects, which render guests sufficiently uncomfortable. *Sábanas limpiatas* (clean sheets) are a luxury seldom to be had; and provisions, a thing scarcely to be thought of in a Spanish inn. However, as Senor Raphael's posada was at some distance from the actual seat of war, it was hoped that his premises would be better victualled, and

he was summoned by the stentorian voice of Campbell, the house being destitute of bells.

"Well, *Senor de Casa*," said the major, as he stretched himself along half-a-dozen hard-seated chairs to rest, "what have you in the larder? Any thing better than *castanas quemadas* and cold water?—*agua hermoisissima de la fuente*, as they say here?"

"*Si, si, noble caballero*," replied the patron, as he stood with his ample beaver in his left hand, bowing low at every word, and laying his right upon his heart.

"Ah! Well, then, have you any beef or mutton,—roasted, boiled, or cooked in any way?"

"No, *senor officiale*; *no hay*."

"Any fish? You are near the Tajo."

"*Si, baccallao*."

"Pho! hombre! What, have you nothing else? Any fowl?"

"*No hay*."

"Any fruit?"

"*No hay*."

"*Diavolo!* *Senor Raphael*," cried Campbell angrily, after receiving the same reply to a dozen things he asked for; "what on earth have you got, then?"

"*Huevos y tocino, senor mio*."

"Could you not have said so at once, hombre? Ham and eggs,—excellent! could we but have barley-meal bannocks and whisky toddy with them; but here one might as well look for nectar and the cakes that Homer feeds his gods with. Any Malaga or sherry?"

"Both, *senor*, in abundance."

"Your casa seems well supplied for a peninsular one,—*pan y cebollas*, cursed onions and bread, with bitter aquardiente, being generally the best fare they have to offer travellers, however hungry. But *presto!* *Senor Raphael*; look sharp, and get us our provender, for saving a handful or so of rotten *castanas*, the devil a morsel have we tasted since we left Niza yesterday. And, d'ye hear, as you value the reputation of your casa, put not a drop of your poisonous garlic among the viands! Talking of garlic," he added, after Raphael had withdrawn, "I was almost suffocated with the fumes of it to-day, when we passed to the leeward of my namesake's Portuguese cavalry."

As the evening was very fine, they experienced no inconvenience from the two unglazed apertures where windows ought to have been, through which the soft wind blew freely upon them. The apartment commanded a view of an extensive plain, through which wound the distant Tagus, like a thread of gold among the fertile fields and inclosures of every varying tint of green and brown. *Golden* is the term applied to the Tajo, and such it really appeared, while the

saffron glow of the western sky was reflected on its current, as it wound sweeping along through ample vineyards, groves of orange and olive-trees, varied here and there by a patch of rising corn. Far down the plain, and around the base of the hill of Castello Branco, the red fires, marking the posts of the out-lying picquets, were seen at equal distances dotting the landscape; and their white curling smoke arose through the green foliage, or from the open corn-field, in tall spiral columns, melting away on the calm evening sky. Now and then the vesper-song from the little chapel of San Sebastian, half way down the mountain, came floating towards them, swelling loud and high at one moment, and almost dying away the next. Here and there, upon the pathway leading to it, stood a Portuguese peasant with his head uncovered, listening with superstitious devotion to the sounds coming from the little edifice, the gilded spire and gothic windows of which were glittering in the light of the setting sun.

"A glorious view," observed Ronald, after he had surveyed it for some time in silence; "it reminds me of one I have seen at home, where the blue Tay winds past the green carse of Gowrie. That hill yonder, covered with orange-trees to its summit, might almost pass for the hill of Kinnoul with its woods of birch and pine, and those stony fragments for the ruined tower of Balthayock."

"Truly the scene is beautiful; but its serenity might better suit an English taste than ours," replied Macdonald. "For my own part, I love better the wild Hebrides, with the foaming sea roaring between their shores, than so quiet a scene as this."

"Hear the western islesman!" said an officer, laughing. "He is never at home but among sterile rocks and boiling breakers."

"You are but southland bred, Captain Bevan," answered Macdonald gravely, "and therefore cannot appreciate my taste."

"The view—though I am too tired to look at it—is, I dare say, better than any I ever saw when I was with Sir Ralph in Egypt, where the scenery is very fine."

"The sandy deserts excepted," observed Bevan. "Many a day, marching together, we have cursed them, Campbell?"

"Of course. But where is that young fellow, Lisle? I intended to have had him here to-night, for the purpose of wetting his commission in Senor Raphael's sherry."

"He is at Chisholm's billet, I believe. They have become close friends of late," replied another officer, who had not spoken before.

"So I have observed, Kennedy; he is the nephew of an old Egyptian campaigner, and I love the lad as if he was a kinsman of my own. But here come the 'vivres!' Smoking-hot and tempting, faith! especially to fellows so sharply set as we are. Senor Raphael deserves a pillar like Pompey's erected in his honour, as

the best casa-keeper between Lisbon and Carthage.

While the talkative major ran on thus, the 'maritornes' of the establishment brought in the supper, or dinner, on a broad wooden tray, and arrayed it on the rough table—cloth there was none—to the best advantage, flanking the covers with several leathern flasks of sherry, brown glazed jugs of rich oily Malaga, and round loaves of bread from the Spanish frontier.

"Now, this is what I consider being comfortable," observed the major, as he stowed his gigantic limbs under the table, and gazed on the dishes with the eager eye of a hungry man who had tasted nothing for twenty-four hours.

"We have been lucky in receiving a billet here, and are much indebted to the worshipful alcalde," said Bevan, interrupting a silence which nothing had broken for some time, except the clatter of plates and knives. "A little more of the ham, major."

"And huevos?—With pleasure. But eat away, gentlemen; be quite at home, and make the most of a meal when you can get one. I'll trouble you for that round loaf, Kennedy."

"Splendid bread, the Spanish."

"I have seen whiter in Egypt, when I used to visit the house of Capitan Mohammed Djedda, at Alexandria—"

"A visit nearly cost you your life there once, major."

"You remember it, Bevan; so do I, faith, nor am I likely to forget it. But it is too soon for a story yet; otherwise I would tell the affair to the young subs. Help yourself plentifully, Stuart. Lord knows when we may get such another meal; so store well for to-morrow's march."

"I am hungry enough to eat an ostrich, bones and all, I do believe," said Kennedy. "And in truth, this fare is the most delicious I have seen since I first landed at the Castle of Belem, some eighteen months ago."

"Simple fare it is, indeed," replied the major. "'Tis very well: the Senor Raphael's tocino is excellent, being cured probably for his own use; but his eggs are not so fresh as I used to get from my own roosts at Craighiantech, near Inverary."

"A deuced hard name your estate has, major. A little more ham, if you please."

"Few can pronounce it so well as myself, Bevan. Craig'fi'antech,—*that* is the proper accent."

"Meaning the rock of the house of Fingal, when translated?" observed Ronald.

"Right, Stuart, my boy; the rock of the king of Selma."

"It has been long in your family, I suppose."

"Since the year 400. You may laugh, Bevan, being but a Lowlander, yet it is

not the less true. Since the days of the old Dabriadic kings, when the great clan Campbell, the race of Diarmid, first became lords of Argyle," replied the major with conscious pride, as he pushed away his plate and stretched himself back in his chair,— "Ardgile, or Argathelia, as it was then called. My fathers are descended in a direct line from Diarmid, the first lord of Lochow."

"A long and noble pedigree, certainly," observed Macdonald with a proud smile, becoming interested in the conversation. "It out-herods mine, though I come of the line of Donald, the lord of the Western Isles."

"Come, come, gentlemen, never mind descents: none can trace further up than Adam. Let us broach some of these sherry bottles," said Bevan impatiently. "Pedigrees are too frequently a subject for discussion at Highland messes, and were introduced often enough at ours, when we had one. Yesterday at Niza, at the *scuttle* there, which we called a dinner, the colonel and old Macdonald nearly came to loggerheads about the comparative antiquity of the Camerons of Fassifern and Locheil."

"D—n all pedigrees!" cried Kennedy, uncorking the sherry. "I am not indebted to my forbears the value of a herring-scale!"

"These are matters only for pipers and seanachies to discuss," said Ronald, affecting a carelessness which he was very far from feeling. Few indeed cherished with a truer feeling of Highland satisfaction the idea that he came of a royal and long-descended line. "Let the subject be dropped, gentlemen. Fill your glasses: let us drink to the downfall of Ciudad Rodrigo!"

"Well said, Stuart," echoed Kennedy; "push the Malaga this way."

"I'll drink it with all my heart," said the major, filling up his glass; "let it be a bumper, a brimming bumper, gentlemen,—the downfall of Ciudad Rodrigo!"

"Pretty fair sherry this, major."

"But it has all the greasy taste of the confounded pig-skin."

"Why the deuce don't the lazy dogs learn to blow decent glass bottles?"

"Try the Malaga. Fill up, and drink to the hearts we have left behind us!"

"Right, Macdonald,—an old Scottish toast," answered Campbell, emptying his horn. "But for Ciudad Rodrigo, I almost wish that the place may hold out until we encounter old Marmont, and thrash his legions to our hearts' content, eh! Bevan?"

"A few days' march will bring us close on Lord Wellington's head-quarters; and should the place not capitulate by that time, we shall probably act Vimiera over again, in the neighbourhood of Ciudad Rodrigo."

"I shall be very happy to see something of the kind," observed Ronald. "I have been six months in the peninsula, and have scarcely heard the whiz of a French bullet yet."

"Should we come within a league of Marmont, your longing for lead will

probably be gratified—as we used to say in Egypt, especially should he attempt to raise the siege. But drink, lads; talking makes one very thirsty.”

”I am heartily tired of our long forced-marches by night and day, and was very glad when, from the frontiers of Portugal, I looked back and saw the wide plains of Spanish Estremadura left so far behind.”

”Many a weary march we have had there, Alister.”

”And many more we shall have again.”

”Never despond,” said Bevan. ”With honour and the enemy in our front—”

”As we used to say in Egypt,—Both be —! Carajo! I’ll thank you for the sherry.”

”But the troops of the Count d’Erlon—”

”Are arrant cowards, I think. They have fled before the glitter of our arms when three leagues off: the very flaunt of our colours is quite enough for them, and they are off double quick!”

”The soldiers of *la belle* France behaved otherwise in Egypt, when I was there with gallant old Sir Ralph. But we shall come up with them sometime, and be revenged for the trouble they have given us in dancing after them between Portalagre and Fuente del Maistre.”

”That was a brilliant affair,” said Macdonald, ”and you unluckily missed it, Stuart.”

”Ay; but I hope Marshal Marmont will make me amends next week; and if ever Senor Narvaez comes within my reach—”

”Or mine, by heavens! he shall be made a mummy of!”

”You could scarcely reduce him to any thing more disagreeable, Alister. I saw some in Egypt a devilish deal closer than I relished,” said Campbell, filling his glass as if preparing for a story, while a smile passed over the features of his companions, who began to dread one of those long narratives which were readily introduced at all times, but especially when wine was to be had, and the evening was far advanced. The smile, however, was unseen, as the dusk had increased so much, that the gloomy apartment was almost involved in darkness. But without, the evening sky was so clear, so blue and spangled, the air so cool and balmy, and the perfume wafted on the soft breeze from the fertile plain below so odoriferous, that they would scarce have exchanged the ruinous chamber of the posada in which they were seated for the most snug parlour in the most comfortable English inn, with its sea-coal fire blazing through the bright steel bars, the soft hearth-rug in front, the rich carpet around, and the fox-hunts framed on the wall.

”Mummies, indeed!” continued the field-officer; ”I almost shiver at the name!”

”How so, major?” asked Ronald. ”What! a British grenadier like you, that would not duck his head to a forty-six pound shot?”

"Why, man! I would scorn to duck to a shot from auld Mons Meg herself; but then a mummy, and in the dark, is another affair altogether. I care nothing about cutting a man down to the breeks, and did so at Corunna, in Egypt, and in Holland, more than once; but I am not over fond of dead corpses, to tell you the truth, and very few Highlandmen you'll find that are. Have I never before told you of my adventure with the mummies, and the *tulzie* that Fassifern and I had at Alexandria?"

"No,—never!"

"Bevan knows all about it."

"He was in Egypt 'with Sir Ralph,' you know. It must be something new to us, major."

"I'll tell you the story; meantime light cigars and fill your glasses, for talking is but dry work, and there's sherry enough here,—not to mention the Malaga, to last us till *reveille*, even if we drink as hard as the king's German Legion."

His companions resigned themselves to their fate, three of them consoled by the idea that it was one of the major's stories they had never heard before. Cigars were promptly lighted, and the red points, glowing strangely in the dark, were the beacons which dimly showed each where the others sat.

"Drink, gentlemen; fill your glasses, fill away, lads. However, I must tell you the affair as briefly as possible. I am field-officer for the day, and have to visit the quarter-guards and cursed out-picquets in the plain below: but I will go the rounds at ten, and desire them to mark me at two in the morning. They are all our own fellows, and will behave like Trojans, if I wish them."

"Well, Campbell, the story."

After a few short pulls at the cigar, and long ones at his wine-cup, the major commenced the story, which is given in the following chapter, and as near the original as I can from recollection repeat it.

CHAPTER II. THE MAJOR'S STORY.

"Who has not heard, where Egypt's realms are named,
What monster gods her frantic sons have framed?
Here ibis gorg'd with well-grown serpents, there
The crocodile commands religious fear."

Juvenal, sat. xv.

"We are a fine regiment as any in the line; but I almost think we were a finer corps when we landed in Egypt in 1801. We had been embodied among the clan of Gordon just six years before, and there was scarcely a man in the ranks above five-and-twenty years of age,—all fiery young Highlanders, raised among the men of Blair-Athol, Braemar, Strathdu, Garioch, Strathbogie, and the duke's own people, the 'gay and the gallant,' as they were styled in the olden time.

"There is a story current that the corps was raised in consequence of some wager between the Duchess of Gordon and the Prince of Wales, about who would muster a regiment in least time; and certainly, her grace got the start of his royal highness.

"The duchess (here's to her health,—a splendid woman she is!) superintended the recruiting department in famous style,—one worthy Camilla herself! With a drum and fife,—oftener with a score of pipers strutting before her,—cockades flaunting and claymores gleaming, I have seen her parading through the Highland fairs and cattle-trysts, recruiting for the 'Gordon Highlanders;' and a hearty kiss on the cheek she gave to every man who took from her own white hand the shilling in King George's name.

"Hundreds of picked mountaineers—regular dirk and claymore men—she brought us; and presented the battalion with their colours at Aberdeen, where we were fully mustered and equipped. Trotting her horse, she came along the line, wearing a red regimental jacket with yellow facings, and a Highland bonnet with an eagle's wing in it: a hearty cheer we gave her as she came prancing along with the staff. I attracted her attention first, for I was senior sub of the grenadiers, and the grenadiers were always *her* favourites. I would tell you what she said to me, too, about the length of my legs, but it ill becomes a man to repeat compliments.

"Right proud I was of old Scotland and the corps, while I looked along the serried line when we drew up our battle-front on the sandy beach of the bay of Aboukir. Splendid they appeared,—the glaring sun shining on their plaids and plumes, and lines of burnished arms. Gallant is the garb of old Gaul, thought I, and who would not be a soldier? Yes, I felt the true *esprit du corps* burning within me at the sight of our Scottish blades, and equally proud, as a Briton, at the appearance of other corps, English or Irish, as they mustered on the beach beneath St. George's cross[*] or the harp of old Erin. The tri-colours and bayonets of France were in our front, and the moment was a proud one indeed, as we advanced towards them animated by the hearty British cheers from our men-of-war in the bay. All know the battle of Alexandria. We drove the soldiers of Buonaparte before us 'like chaff before the wind;' but the victory cost us dear:

many a bold heart dyed the hot sand with its gallant blood, and among them our countryman, noble old Abercrombie.

[*] St. George's red cross is the distinguishing badge of every English regiment.

"Poor Sir Ralph! When struck by the death-shot, I saw him reel in his saddle, his silver hair and faded uniform dabbled with his blood. His last words are yet ringing in my ears, as, waving his three-cocked hat, he fell from his horse,—

"Give them the bayonet, my boys! Forward, Highlanders! Remember the hearts and the hills we have left behind us!"

"Here's his memory in Malaga, though I would rather drink it in Islay or Glenlivet. We did give them the bayonet, and the pike too, in a style that would have done your hearts good to have seen. It was a glorious victory,—Vimiera, the other day, was nothing to it,—and well worth losing blood for. That night we hoisted the union on the old Arab towers of Aboukir, and Lord Hutchinson took command of the army. On the 18th September, 1801, we placed Alexandria in the power of the Turks. Our wounded we stowed away in the mosques and empty houses; our troops were quartered on the inhabitants, or placed under canvas without the city walls, and we found ourselves while there tolerably comfortable, excepting the annoyance we suffered from insects and the enervating heat, which was like that of a furnace; but the *kamsin*, or 'hot wind of the desert,' one must experience to know what it really is.

"When it begins to blow, the air feels perpetually like a blast rushing from a hot fire, and the atmosphere undergoes a change sufficient to strike even the heart of a lion with terror. The louring-sky becomes dark with clouds of a bloody hue, and the sun, shorn of its rays and its glory, seems to float among them like a round ball of glowing purple, while the whole air becomes dense and dusty, rendering respiration out of doors almost an impossibility. Although during the reign of the terrible *kamsin* the sun was scarcely visible, the water in the public fountains grew hot; our musquet barrels and steel weapons, the wood, marble, iron, and every thing, felt warm and burning. When the awful blast is discovered afar off, coming sweeping from the arid deserts of Lybia and Arabia, the inhabitants of cities fly to their dwellings for refuge, and shut themselves up closely; the wandering Arab in the silent wilderness hollows a pit in the sand wherein to hide himself; and the unfortunate traveller, when surprised on the way-side, throws himself on the earth, with his face towards Mecca, while he covers his mouth and nostrils with the lawn of his turban, or the skirt of his robe: the very camel buries its head in the sand till the fearful blast is over. Hand me the sherry, Kennedy;

the very remembrance of the *kamsin* makes me thirsty.

"Cameron—I mean Fassifern—and I lived together in the same tent, which was pitched without the city, in a spot where enormous ruins incrustated with saltpetre were piled on every side. I well remember drawing back the triangular door of the tent, and looking cautiously forth when the wind had passed. Here and there I saw the prostrate corpses of some Turks and Egyptians, who had been suffocated by inhaling the hot sandy air. They presented a terrible spectacle, certainly. They were swelled enormously, turned to a pale blue colour; and there they lay, rapidly festering and decomposing in the heat of the sun, although they had been alive and well that morning.

"By it I nearly lost Jock Pentland, my servant. I discovered the poor chield lying, half dead, at the base of Cleopatra's needle, and had him looked to in time to save his life. Many of our men were dangerously affected by it; but when it passed away, all was right again,—and I remember how pleased Fassifern and I were, when, for the first time after the *kamsin*, we sallied forth on our daily visit to our friend Mohammed Djedda, a Turkish captain, with whom we had become acquainted in the course of garrison-duty, and who had a very handsome house of his own within the walls of Alexandria.

"Cameron and I had become close comrades, then being only a couple of jovial subs. He was senior, and has got in advance of me; but since he has obtained command of the corps he keeps us all at the staff's end, and acts the Highland chief on too extended a scale. Yet Jock (we called him Jock then, for shortness, but it would be mutiny to do so now,) is a fine fellow, and a brave officer, and I pledge him heartily in Senor Raphael's sherry.

"To a stranger the appearance of Alexandria is certainly striking. The gigantic ruins of a people whose power has passed away, overtop the terraced roofs of the moderns. The embattled towers, the shining domes, the tall and slender minarets rise on every side among groves of the graceful palm and spreading fig-tree, intermingled with the sad remains of the years that are gone, the crumbling temple, the prostrate pillar, and the mouldering archway! Friezes and pedestals, rich with carving and hieroglyphics, lie piled in shapeless masses, covered with moss and corroded with saltpetre, meeting the view on every side, and striking the stranger with veneration and awe, while his heart is filled with sadness and sublimity. The ruins of these vast palaces which the great genius of Dinocrates designed, and which the immense wealth of Alexander erected, are now the dwelling-place of the owl and the jackal, the serpent, the asp, and the scorpion. The inhabitants of the modern city are indeed strange-looking beings, with brown faces, bushy black beards, and wearing large turbans of linen on their bald pates. Their dress appears like a shapeless gown of divers colours, enveloping them from chin to heel; a cimeter and poniard in the sash, slippers on the

feet, and a pipe six feet long in the hand, completes their costume. Their women are muffled up to the eyes, which are the only parts of them visible; and then the shaggy camels and hideous asses with which every thoroughfare is crowded—”

”Well, major, but the mummies; you have not told us of them yet,” said Ronald, becoming impatient.

”I am coming to the point,” replied the major, not in the least displeased at the interruption, abrupt though it was; ”but you must permit me to tell a story in my own rambling way. To continue,—

”The redoubtable captain, Mohammed Djedda, had become a very great friend of ours; we used to visit him daily, in the cool part of the evening, pretending that we came to enjoy a pipe of opium with him, under the huge *nopal* or cochineal tree which flourished before his door. He knew no English, I very little Turkish, and Cameron none at all; consequently our conversation was never very spirited or interesting, and we have sat, for four consecutive hours, pulling assiduously, or pretending to do so, at our long pipes, without uttering a syllable, staring hard at each other the while with a gravity truly oriental, until we scarcely knew whether our heads or heels were uppermost. We took great credit to ourselves for never laughing outright at the strange figure of the Capitan Djedda, as he sat opposite to us, squatted on a rich carpet, and garbed in his silken vest, gown, wide cotton pantaloons, and heavy turban, looking like Blue Beard in the story-book. You may wonder what pleasure we found in this sort of work, but the secret was this: Mohammed was one of the most fashionable old bucks in the Turkish service, and of course could not do without four wives,—no Turk of any pretensions to rank being without that number. These he kept in most excellent order and constant attendance upon his own lazy person, although he had a score of wretched slaves,—poor barefooted devils, who wore nought to hide their brown skins but a blue shirt, girt about their waist with a leather belt, and a red kerchief twisted round their crowns.

”But Mohammed’s veiled and draperied spouses were the gentlest creatures I ever beheld, and not in the least jealous, because he entertained for them all the same degree of cool contempt; and often he told us, that ’women were mere animals, without souls, and only good for breeding children and mischief.’ One brought his pipe and lit it, a second spread his carpet under the *nopal*, a third arranged his turban, and a fourth put on his slippers; but he would scorn to thank any with a glance, and kept his round eyes obstinately fixed on the ground, as became a Turk and superior being. This strange old gentleman had two daughters; perfect angels they were,—seraphs or *houris*. We could not see their faces, all of which, with the exception of the eyes, were concealed by an abominable cloth veil, which it was almost incurring death to remove before such an infidel as me. But their eyes! By heavens such were never beheld, not even in the

land of sunny eyes—so large and black, so liquid and sparkling! No other parts were visible except their hands and ankles, which were bare and white, small and beautiful enough to turn the heads of a whole regiment. The expression of their lustrous eyes, the goddess-like outline of their thinly clad forms, made Cameron and me imagine their faces to be possessed of that sublime degree of dazzling beauty which it is seldom the lot of mortals to—”

”Excellent, major,” exclaimed Alistair; ”of all your Egyptian stories, this is the best. Then it was the daughters you went to see?”

”To be sure it was! and for the pleasure of beholding them, endured every evening the staring and smoking with their ferocious old dog of a papa, who, could he have divined what the two *giaours* were after, would soon have employed some of his followers to deprive us of our heads. I am sure, by the pleased and melting expression of their eyes, that the girls knew what we came about, and we would certainly have opened a correspondence with them by some means, could we have done so; but as they were kept almost continually under lock and key, we never found an opportunity to see them alone, and letters—if we could have written them—would have been useless, as they could neither read nor write a word of any known language, their education being entirely confined to dancing, singing, and playing on the *’o-ód*, a kind of guitar used in Egypt: it is a plano-convex affair, which you may often see introduced in eastern views and paintings.

”Well, as I related before, on the evening after the blowing of the *kamsin*, Fassifern and I departed on our daily visit, eagerly hoping that we might have an opportunity to see Zela and Azri, the two daughters, alone, as we marched the next day *en route* for that great city of the genii and the fairies, Grand Cairo, and might never again be at Alexandria. We were confoundedly smitten, I assure you, though we have often laughed at it since. We were as much in love as two very romantic young subalterns could be, and very earnest—hoping, fearing, trembling, and all that—we were in the matter.”

”Well, major, and which was your flame?”

”Zela was mine. They named her, ’the White Rose of Sidrah;’ which means, I believe, ’the wonderful tree of Mahomet’s paradise.’ But to continue:

”On approaching the house, we found it all deserted and silent. The carpet and pipe lay under the shadow of the umbrageous nopal, but the grave and portly Mohammed Djedda was not there. The house and garden likewise were tenantless, and after wandering for some time among its maze of flower-beds and little groves, where the apricot, the pomegranate, date-palm, custard-apple, and fig-tree, flourished luxuriantly, we were met by one of Mohammed’s half-naked slaves, who informed us—me at least, as I alone knew a little of his guttural language,—that the Capitan Djedda, his four wives, his slaves, and all his

household, were gone to the great mosque, to return thanks for the passing away of the *kamsin*.

"As we were very much overcome by the heat of the atmosphere, we were about to enter the cool marble vestibule of the mansion, when the airy figures of the young ladies, in their floating drapery, appeared at an upper window.

"Now or never, Colin!" said Fassifern. "The young ladies are upstairs and the house is empty; we will pay them a visit now in safety."

"And what if old Blue Beard returns in the mean time with all his Mamelukes?"

"Then there is nothing for it but cutting our way out and escaping. We march to-morrow, and the affair would be forgotten in the hurry of our departure. But is not death the penalty of being found in the chambers of Turkish women?"

"So I have heard," said I, shrugging my shoulders; "but old Mohammed will scarcely try experiments in the art of decapitation while our own troops are so near. Yonder are the sentinels of the 42nd, among the ruins of the Roman tower, almost within hail."

"Which is the way, Colin?" asked he, as we wandered about the vestibule, among columns and pedestals surmounted by splendid vases filled with gorgeous flowers.

"Up this staircase, I think."

"But what the devil am I to say when we meet them? I know not a word of the language."

"Tush! never mind that, Jock: do as I do," said I, as we ascended the white marble steps leading to the upper story, and passed through several apartments, the very appearance of which made me long to become Mohammed's son-in-law; but I can assure you, that never until that moment had I thought seriously of making the 'White Rose of Sidrah' Mrs. Colin Campbell of Craighiunteoch. The chambers through which we passed were singular, and gorgeously rich beyond conception; realizing all those ideas of oriental magnificence which are so well described in the 'Thousand and One Nights.' The walls, floors, and columns were of polished marble, pure and spotless as snow; and then there were arches hung, and pillars wreathed, with festoons and garlands of dewy and freshly gathered flowers. Globes of crystal, vases of the purest alabaster, Persian carpets, hangings of damask and silk, girt with cords and tassels of gold, appeared on every side, and in many of the apartments bubbled up fountains of bright and sparkling water, diffusing a cool and delightful feeling through the close atmosphere of the mansion.

"The tinkling sound of the 'o-ód, or Egyptian lute, attracted us towards the kiosk which contained the fair objects who had led us on the adventure. We raised the heavy folds of a glossy damask curtain, and found ourselves, for the

first time, in their presence unobserved by others.

"The two graceful creatures, who were as usual closely veiled, sprang from the ottomans on which they were seated, and came hastily towards us, exclaiming in surprise mingled with fear and pleasure, '*Ma sha Allah! Ya mobareh, ya Allah!*' and a score of such phrases as the tumult of their minds caused them to utter.

"*Salam alai hom,*' said Fassifern, meaning 'good morrow,' which was all the progress he had made in the oriental languages, and we doffed our bonnets, making a salaam in the most graceful manner.

"Colin, tell them to take off their confounded veils,' whispered Cameron.

"I asked them to do so in the most high-flown style imaginable, but they screamed out another volley of exclamations, and fled away to the further corner of the apartment, yet came again towards us timidly, while I felt my heart beating audibly as I surveyed the soft expression of pleasure that beamed in their orient eyes. They were evidently delighted at the novelty of our visit, though their pleasure was tinged with a dash of dread when they thought of their father's return, and the boundless fury of a Turkish vengeance. Zela placed her little white hands on my epaulets, and looking steadfastly at me through the round holes in her veil, burst into a merry shout of laughter.

"Beautiful Zela,' said I, as I threw my arm around her, 'White Rose of Sidrah, at what do you laugh?'

"You have no beard!' said she, laughing louder. 'Where is the bushy hair which hangs from the chin of a man?'

"I haven't got any yet,' I answered in English, considerably put out by the question; but I was only a sub, you know, and had never even thought of a razor: my chin was almost as smooth as her own, and so she said as she passed her soft little hand over it. Again I attempted to remove the veil which hid her face, but so great was her terror, so excessive her agitation, that I desisted for a time. But between caressing and entreating, in a few minutes we conquered their scruples and oriental ideas of punctilio, when we were permitted to remove the lawn hoods and view their pure and sublime features, with the heavy masses of long black and glossy hair falling over naked necks and shoulders, which were whiter than Parian marble. They were indeed miraculously beautiful, and fully realized our most romantic and excited ideas of their long-hidden loveliness.

"I had just obtained some half-dozen kisses from the dewy little mouth of Zela, when I saw Cameron start up and draw his sword.

"What is the matter, Fassifern?' I exclaimed; but the appalling and portly figure of Mohammed Djedda, as he stood in the doorway, swelling with rage and eastern ferocity, was a sufficient answer. In his right hand he held his drawn sabre of keen Damascus steel, and in the other a long brass Turkish pistol. Crowding the marble staircase beyond, we saw his ferocious Mameluke soldiers, clad in

their crimson *benishes* or long robes of cotton, and tall *kouacks* or cylindrical yellow turbans, while their spears, poniards, and cimetars, short, crooked, and of Damascus steel, flashed and glittered in a manner very unpleasant to behold. The poor girls, horrified beyond description at being discovered in the society of men, of Christians, and unveiled too, were so much overcome by their terrors, that they were unable to fly; and calling on the bride of Mahomet in Paradise to protect them, embraced each other frantically and fondly, expecting instant death.

"Here is a devil of a mess, Cameron," cried I, drawing out Andrea. "Let us leap the window, and fly for the camp!"

"But their carbines throw a dozen balls at once," was his hurried reply.

"Shoulder to shoulder, Jock! now for the onset," said I, preparing to rush recklessly upon them. "We must take our chance of—"

"The rest was cut short by a slash the old savage made at me with his cimetar, which took three inches off the oak stick I cut at home in the green woods of Inverary, before I left them to follow the drum. My blood began to boil.

"Mohammed Djedda!" said I, in Turkish, "we have done no wrong; we are strangers among you, and know not the laws of the land. Allow us to depart in peace; otherwise you may have good reason to repent," I added, pointing to the tents of the 'auld forty-twa."

"Depart in peace, said you? Desplicable giaour!" thundered he, his Turkish tone becoming more guttural by his ferocity. "Never, never! By the sacred stone of Mecca!—by every hair in the beard of the holy Prophet!—by the infernal bridge which spans the sea of fire,—slave of an accursed race, ye never shall! Never! I have sworn it."

"I saw Cameron's eyes flash and glare as he prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible.

"Then our steel for it, old man; and remember, should we fall, our friends in the white tents will avenge us."

"Thou too shalt die!" growled the old barbarian, discharging his pistol at poor little Zela, who fell dead without a groan, with the purple blood streaming from her white bosom, which I saw heave its last convulsive throb around the death-shot. The thick muslin turban of Mohammed saved him from one tremendous blow which I dealt at his scowling visage, but he sunk to the earth beneath the weight of the claymore.

"Allah, il Allah! death to the soldiers of Isauri!"[*] yelled his infuriated followers, rushing madly on me, and in an instant I was vanquished: I received a terrible blow on the back of my head from the iron mace of a Mameluke. I remember no more than just seeing Cameron cut two down to the teeth, run a third through the brisket, leap the window, and escape.

[*] Jesus Christ.

”Good by, Cameron; gallantly done!” cried I, as I sunk stunned and senseless by the lifeless corse of Zela.

”How long I lay insensible I know not; but when my faculties returned I found myself stretched upon the ground, which felt cold and damp, and in a place involved in the deepest and most impenetrable gloom. I found that the epaulets and lace had been torn from my coat, and an intense pain on the back of my head reminded me of the blow of the steel mace; and on raising my hand to the wound, I found my hair clotted and hardened with coagulated blood. Rats or some monstrous vermin running over me caused me to leap from the ground, and endeavour to discover where I was. This the darkness rendered impossible; but by the chill atmosphere of the place, the difficulty of respiration I experienced, and the hollow echoes of my feet, dying dismally away in distant cavities, I conjectured rightly that I was imprisoned in some subterranean vault. What the agony of my mind was when this idea became confirmed, you may better conceive than I describe. I recollected that the troops marched next day, and that unless Fassifern made some most strenuous attempt to discover and free me, I should be left at the mercy of the lawless Mohammed, either to be his perpetual captive in a dungeon, to be left to a slow lingering death by starvation, or a more expeditious one by some mode of torture, such as the most refined spirit of Eastern cruelty and barbarism could invent.

”In groping about, I soon came in contact with a stone wall, which I felt carefully all round, but no door or outlet could I discover. A succession of wooden boxes placed upright, sounding and hollow when I touched them, informed me at once of the truth,—that I was cast into one of those ancient catacombs which are so numerous under the city of Alexandria,—horrible caverns hollowed in the bowels of the earth, where the mummy-remains of the subjects of the Pharaohs, the Ptolemies, and others, out-standing the course of more than twenty centuries, lay swathed in their bandages and embalming! The blood rushed back upon my trembling heart, and every hair on my aching head seemed to bristle upon my scalp, as I staggered dizzily against the mouldy wall, knocking down half-a-dozen mummy-coffers, which fell heavily and hollowly upon the pavement.

”You may imagine what were my feelings when I reviewed my situation. I, a superstitious Highland boy, that used to shake in my brogues, like a dog in a wet sack, if I passed the kirk-yard of Inverary after night-fall, and never went into the dark but with my eyes closed tight for fear of seeing something ‘uncanny,’ when I found myself in this gloomy repository of the dead I was so confounded and terrified, that it was long before I recovered my self-possession so far as to

cast a firm glance of scrutiny around me, and endeavour to discover some means of escape. I perceived with joy a faint ray of daylight streaming through a small aperture, which appeared nearly twenty feet above me.

”Dawn has broken!” I exclaimed in sudden anguish; ‘the troops must have marched! Cameron cannot have escaped Mohammed, or, oh, my God! surely he would not, without making an effort to save me, abandon me to perish here!’

”Perish here!” repeated half-a-dozen dreary echoes. I looked around me in consternation. The sounds almost seemed to proceed from the red blubber-like lips of the frightful faces which I now perceived carved and painted on the outside of the upright mummy-coffers. They were the figures of the dead, and tinted with those imperishable colours with which the ancient Egyptians decorated the exterior of their temples. The large round eyes of these appalling effigies seemed to be staring hard at me from every dark corner, winking, goggling, and rolling; while their very mouths, capacious and red, expanded into a broad grin, methought, at my misery. Against the black wall they were ranked at equal distances, but here and there were some which had fallen to pieces, and lay upon the earth, exposing the decayed and mouldered corse standing stark, gaunt, and erect, swathed tightly in its cerements. Others had fallen down, and lay prostrate among little urns, containing, I suppose, the embalmed remains of the sacred ibis, the monkey, or other animals revered by the ancient idolaters. Enormous bats were sailing about, black scorpions, and many a huge bloated reptile, of which I knew not even the name, appearing as if formed alone for such a place, crawled about the coffins, or fell now and then with a heavy squabby sound from the wet slimy wall on the moist and watery pavement.

”By the grey light, straggling through what seemed a joint in the key-stone of an arch above, I was enabled to note these things, and I did so with wary and fearful glances, while my heart swelled almost to breaking when I thought of my blighted hopes, and that home which was far awa—the green mountains of Mull and of Morven, and the deep salt lochs of Argyle; and, dearer than all, the well-known hearth where I had sat at the knee of my mother, and heard her rehearse those wild traditions of hill and valley, which endeared them more to me.

”Have the followers of the false Isauri departed?” asked the guttural voice of old Mohammed or some one above me; while the cranny over-head became darkened, and the trampling of feet, together with the clatter of weapons, became audible. ‘Have the eaters of pork and drinkers of wine,—have the unclean dogs departed from the walls of Iskandrieh?’ I listened in breathless suspense.

”They have,’ answered the yet more guttural voice of a Mameluke; ‘they go towards the desert. May they perish in the sand, that the jackal and wolf may fatten and howl over their bones!’

”Amen,—*Allah kebur!* Great is God, and Mahomet his holy Prophet!’

replied the Capitan Djedda, while my heart died within me to hear that our people had departed from Alexandria. These were some of the ungrateful infidels for whom brave Sir Ralph, and so many gallant Britons, had reddened the arid sand with their blood!

"Then bring ye up this follower of Isauri," said Mohammed, "and he will see whether his prophet, or all the dervishes and mollahs of his faith, can preserve him from the death I have sworn he shall die. Ere night, his carcass shall be food for the jackals; and while the unbeliever looks his last on the bright setting sun, Hadji Kioudh get ready the....." What word he finished with I know not, but it was sufficient to strike terror to the inmost recesses of my heart. I well knew some terrible instrument of torture was named.

"What my emotions were I cannot describe, when I found death so near, and knew that I was powerless, defenceless, and unarmed, having no other weapon but my oaken staff, which, strange to say, I had never relinquished. I beheld the claw of an iron crow-bar inserted in the cranny which admitted light, for the purpose of raising the stone trap-door of the catacomb; and as the space opened, I saw, or imagined I saw, the weapons of Mohammed's followers flashing in the sun-light. My life never appeared so dear, or of such inestimable value, as at that moment, when I found myself about to lose it,—to be sacrificed like a poor mouse in a trap. I cast around a furious glance of eagerness and despair. A small round archway, which I had not before observed, met my eye; yawning and black it appeared in the gloom, and supported by clumsy short Egyptian pillars. I flew towards it, as novels say, animated by the most tumultuous hopes and fears, praying to Heaven that it might afford me some chance of escape from the cimetars of the savage Mahometans, who had already raised the trap stone, and lowered a long ladder into the vault.

"The passage was long but straight, and guided by a distant light, glimmering at the other end, I sped along it with the fleetness of a roebuck; receiving, as I went, many a hard knock from the bold carvings and knobby projections of the short dumpy pillars that formed a colonnade on each side. I heard the sabres and iron maces of the Mameluke warriors clatter, as successively five or six of them leaped into the vault, and set up the wild shout of "*Ya Allah!*" when they found that I was not there. By their not immediately searching the passage, I concluded that they were unacquainted with the geography of the place, and, in consequence of their having come from the strong glare of the sun, were unable to perceive the arch in the gloom of the cavern. They became terrified on finding that I was gone, and withdrew, scampering up the ladder with the utmost precipitation, attributing, I suppose, my escape to supernatural means.

"I kept myself close between the twisted columns, scarcely daring to breathe until they had withdrawn and all was quiet, when I again pursued my

way towards the glimmering light, which was still in view, but at what distance before me I could form no idea. Sometimes it appeared close at hand, sometimes a mile off, dancing before me like a will o' the wisp. My progress was often embarrassed by prostrate columns, and oftener by heaps of fallen masonry. More than once I was nearly suffocated by the foul air of the damp vaults, or the dust and mortar among which I sometimes fell. But I struggled onward manfully, yet feeling a sort of sullen and reckless despair, putting up the while many a pious prayer and ejaculation, strangely mingled with many an earnest curse in Gaelic on Mohammed Djedda, and the architect who planned the labyrinth, though perhaps it might have been the great Gnidian Sostrates himself.[*] After toiling thus for some time until wearied and worn out, I found myself in the lower vault of one of those large round towers which are so numerous among the ancient and ruinous fortifications of Alexandria. A round and shattered aperture, about ten feet from the floor, admitted the pure breeze, which I inhaled greedily, while my eyes gloated on the clear blue sky; and I felt more exquisite delight in doing so, than even when gazing on the pure snowy bosom of the beautiful Zela, whom, to tell you the truth, I had almost forgotten during the quandary in which I found myself. The cry of '*Jedger Allah!*' shouted close beside the ruinous tower, informed me I was near the post of a Mussulman sentinel, and compelled me to act with greater caution. I heard the cry (which answers to our 'All's well') taken up by other sentinels at intervals, and die away among the windings of the walls.

[*] A famous architect, who lived in the reign of one of the Ptolemies.

"By the assistance of a large stone I was enabled to reach the aperture, through which I looked cautiously, to reconnoitre the ground. It was a glorious evening, and the dazzling blaze of the red sun, as it verged towards the west, was shed on the still, glassy sea, where the white sails of armed xebecs, galleys, and British ships of war were reflected downwards in the bosom of the ample harbour. Appearing in bold light or shadow, as the sun poured its strong lustre upon them, I saw the long lines of mouldering battlements,—the round domes, the taper spires and obelisks which rose above the embrasures, where the sabres and lances of the Turks gave back the light of the setting sun, whose farewell rays were beaming on the pillar of Diocletian and the grey old towers of Aboukir, from the summits of which were now waving the red colours of Mahomet. But the beauty of the scenery had no charms for the drowsy Moslem (whose cry I had heard, and whom I now perceived to be a cavalry vidette,) stationed under the cool shadow of a palm-grove close by. He was seated on a carpet, with his legs folded

under him. His sabre and dagger lay near him, drawn, and he sat without moving a muscle, smoking with grave assiduity, and wearing his tall yellow *kouack* very much over his right eye, which led me to suppose that he was a smart fellow among the Mamelukes—perceiving, to my great chagrin, that he was one of Mohammed's savage troop. His noble Arab horse, with its arching neck and glittering eyes, stood motionless beside him, its bridle trailing on the ground, while it gazed with a sagacious look on the columns of smoke, which at times curled upwards from the moustached mouth of its master, who was staring fixedly in an opposite direction to the city. I followed the point to which he turned his round glassy eye, and beheld, to my inexpressible joy, an English infantry regiment—Hutchinson's rearguard—halted under a grove of fig-trees, but alas! at a distance far beyond the reach of my call.

"I formed at once the resolution of confronting the sentinel, and endeavouring to escape. The moment was a precious one: the corps was evidently about to move off, and was forming in open column of companies, with their band in the centre.[*] While I was collecting all my scattered energies for one desperate and headlong effort, a loud uproar in the distant catacomb arrested me for a moment, and I heard the terrible voice of Mohammed Djedda, exclaiming—

'*Bareh Allah!* we shall find him yet: the passage, slaves! the passage! By God and the holy Prophet, if the giaour escape, false dogs, ye shall die! Forward!'

[*] Regimental bands always marched in the centre in those days.

"A confused trampling of feet, a rush and clatter followed, and I sprang lightly through the aperture into the open air. Stealing softly towards the unconscious Mameluke, I wreathed my hand in the flowing mane of his Arab horse, and seizing the dangling bridle, vaulted into his wooden-box saddle; while he, raising the cry of '*Allah, il Allah!*' sprung up like a harlequin, and made a sweeping stroke at me with his sharp sabre. He was about to handle his long brass-barrelled carbine, when, unhooking the steel mace which hung at his saddle-bow, and discharging it full on his swarthy forehead, I stretched him motionless on the earth. At that instant Mohammed, sabre and lance in hand, rushed from the ruined tower at the head of his followers.

"'Hoich! God save the king,—hurrah!' cried I, giving them a shout of reckless laughter and derision, as I forced the fleet Arab steed onward, like an arrow shot from a bow,—madly compelling it to leap high masses of ruinous wall, blocks of marble and granite, all of which it cleared like a greyhound, and carried me in a minute among our own people, with whom I was safe, and under whose escort

I soon rejoined the regiment, whom I found all assured of my death,—especially the senior ensign, Cameron, who had got off scot-free, having related the doleful story of my brains being knocked out by the Mameluke soldier of Mohammed Djedda, a complaint against whom was about to be lodged with the *Shaik-el-beled* by Lord Hutchinson, commanding the troops.

"Well, this was my adventure among the mummies, and it was one that left a strong impression, you may be sure. How dry my throat is with talking! Pass the decanters—the sherry jugs, I mean, whoever has them beside him: 'tis now so dark, that I cannot see where they are."

CHAPTER III. ANOTHER NIGHT AT MERIDA.

"The fire had resounded in the halls; and the voice of the people is heard no more..... Desolate is the dwelling of Moïna: silence is in the house of her fathers."—*Ossian's Poems*.—Carthor.

The conversation which ensued on the close of the major's story, was interrupted by the clatter of a horse trotting along the causeway street.

"That must be my batman, Jock Pentland, with my horse for the rounds," said Campbell impatiently. "I am sure I told the Lowland loon not to come till the bells of San Sebastian rang the hour of ten."

"It is a dragoon, I think; but the night is so dark I am not certain," said Ronald, as he drew back from the open window. "He has dismounted here."

At that moment the door opened, and the host appeared, bearing a long candle in his hand, flaring and sputtering in the currents of air, while he, bowing very low, introduced the Condé de Truxillo, who advanced towards them, making his long staff plume sweep the tiles of the floor at every bow he gave.

"Welcome, noble condé!" said Stuart, rising and introducing him to the rest.

"Ah, Don Ronald, are you here? I am indeed proud to see you."

"You come upon us most unexpectedly, condé."

"I have been in my saddle all day," replied the other, casting himself languidly into a chair, "and have this moment come from the quarters of Sir Rowland Hill, for whom I had despatches—"

"From Lord Wellington?"

"Yes, caballeros."

"And Ciudad Rodrigo?" cried they eagerly.

"Has fallen—"

"Fallen?"

"Two days ago."

"Hurrah! Well done Lord Wellington!" cried Bevan, draining his glass.

"The devil!" muttered Campbell; "then we shall have no fighting with Marmont."

"He has retreated to Salamanca," said the condé, "abandoning to its fate the fortress, which I saw the gallant *Inglesos* carry by storm in the course of half-an-hour,—killing, wounding, and capturing three thousand of the enemy."

"Glorious news, Don Balthazar," said Ronald. "But refresh yourself: here is sherry, and there Malaga, with cigars in abundance. After you have rested, we shall be glad to hear an account of the assault."

"I thank you, senor caballero," said the count, providing himself.

"What is our loss?" asked Campbell. "Have many *oficiales y soldados* fallen?"

"What the allies suffered I have never heard,—at least 'twas not known when I left for Castello Branco; but two brave general officers have been slain."

"Their names, condé?"

"Crawfurd and Mackinnon: one fell dead while I was speaking to him."

"Gallant fellows they were, and countrymen of our own, too!" said Campbell, gulping down his sherry with a dolorous sigh. "But 'tis the fortune of war: every bullet has its billet,—their fate to-day may be ours to-morrow."

During a long discussion which ensued upon the news brought by the condé, the latter had applied himself to the remnants of the tocino and huevos, with infinite relish.

"I wonder what the despatches for Sir Rowland may contain?" observed Captain Bevan, supposing that the condé might throw some light on the matter; but the hungry Español was too busy to hear him.

"Most likely an order to retrace our steps," replied Campbell. "I would wager my majority against a maravedi, that you will find it to be the case."

"Very probably. The devil! we are a mere corps of observation just now."

"It was not wont to be so with the second division," observed Kennedy.

"Never mind," replied Campbell; "it will be our turn in good time. I drink this horn to outmost noble selves, and— Hah! there are the bells of San Sebastian. I must be off to visit these confounded picquets: my horse will be here immediately."

The major rose and buckled on Andrea, surveying with a sour look the

long line of equi-distant fires which were glowing afar off,—marking the chain of out-posts, around the base of the mountain, and along the level plain.

"Here comes my batman, Jock," said he, looking into the street. "Pentland, my man; is that you?"

"Ay, sir!" replied a soldier, dressed in his white shell-jacket and kilt, as he rode a horse up to the door and dismounted.

"You are a punctual fellow. Desire Senor Raphael, the inn-keeper, to give you a canteen full of aquardiente. Are the holsters on, the pistols loaded, and fresh flinted?"

"A's richt, sir," replied the groom, raising his hand to his flat bonnet.

"I will see you again, lads, when we get under arms in the morning," said Campbell, enveloping himself in an immense blue cloak.

"How, major! Are you so fond of bivouacking, that you mean to sleep with the out-picquets?"

"Not quite, Alister; but I mean to finish the night at Fassifern's billet, and fight our battles and broils in Egypt over again for the entertainment of his host, a rich old canon, who is said to have in his cellars some of the best wine on this side the peak of Ossian."[*]

[*] A high peak of the Pyrennean mountains.

"Do not forget, senor, to make the reverend Padre's borachio-skins gush forth like a river," said the condé. "A priest would as soon part with his heart's blood, as his wine to a stranger."

"I am too old a soldier to require that advice, Balthazzar," said Campbell, wrapping his mantle around his gigantic figure, which the Spaniard surveyed with a stare of surprise. "I regret you have not all invitations; but be as much at home here as you can, and be careful how you trust yourselves within any of Senor Raphael's couches. Peninsular—pardon, condé!—I mean Portuguese posadas are none of the most cleanly; and if you would wish to avoid being afflicted with *sarna* for twelve months to come, it would be quite as safe and pleasant to repose on the floor."

"The sarna! major," exclaimed Stuart; "what does that mean?"

"We give a less classical name for it at home in the land o' cakes," said Campbell, as he descended the stair, making the place shake with his heavy tread; "but you will discover to your cost what it means, if you are rash enough to sleep between the sheets of any bed in the posadas of this country."

Don Balthazzar returned next morning to rejoin Lord Wellington's staff at

Ciudad Rodrigo.

His despatches contained an order to Sir Rowland Hill to return into Spanish Estremadura, the retreat of Marshal Marmont rendering the presence of the second division unnecessary in Portugal. Many were sadly disappointed when this order was read next morning in the hollow squares of regiments,—all having been in high spirits, and filled with enthusiasm at the prospect of a brush with the enemy before the expected capitulation of the celebrated fortress; but there was no help for it,—obedience being the first duty of a soldier. On the march towards Merida again, they consoled themselves with the hope that the Marshal Duke of Dalmatia, General Drouet, or some of the commanders in their front, would make them amends by showing fight. The British army had now been supplied with tents sent out to them from Britain; and they had the prospect of encamping with what they considered tolerable comfort during the summer campaign, and not lying, like the beasts of the field, without a shelter from the inclemency of the weather.

The same degree of coldness and hauteur was yet maintained between Ronald and Louis Lisle, who never addressed each other but when compelled by military duty to do so; and only then in the most distant terms, and studied style of politeness. The quarrel which had ensued on their first meeting was yet rankling in the hearts of both, and their fiery Scottish pride was fast subduing the secret feeling of friendship which still lurked in the breast of each.

The weather had become very warm, and the soldiers suffered excessively from the burning heat of the sun and the extreme scarcity of water, when traversing the wild and arid plains of Estremadura. Their rations were of such an indifferent quality, and so very scant, as barely to sustain life; and Ronald Stuart, although a stout young Highlander, felt often so much exhausted, that his heavy broad-sword nearly dropped more than once from his hand.

If such was his situation, what must that have been of the poor private soldiers, laden as they were with their heavy arms, ammunition, and accoutrements,—knapsack, great coat, blanket, haversack, and canteen,—a load weighing nearly eighty pounds! Day after day they marched forward in the face of the scorching sun,—hot, fierce, and glaring, hanging above them in the blue and cloudless vault, withering the grass beneath their feet, and causing the earth to gape and crack as if all inanimate nature were athirst for rain and moisture. Every breath of air they inhaled seemed hot and suffocating, like the fiery blast which gushes from an oven when the door is opened.

More than once on the march had Ronald relieved Louis by carrying his heavy standard, when he was almost sinking with exhaustion; but the want of water was the chief misery endured. The supply with which they filled their wooden canteens at the public fountains of Albuquerque, Zagala, and La Nava,

became during the march heated and tainted, sickly to the taste and unrefreshing.

Now and then, when a spring was passed on the line of march, the soldiers, unrestrained by discipline, crowded eagerly and wildly about it, striving furiously, almost at drawn bayonets, for the first canteen-full, until the place became a clay puddle, and further contention was useless.

"O for ae sough o' the cauler breeze that blaws ower the braes o' Strathonan!" Evan would often exclaim, as he wiped away the perspiration which streamed from under his bonnet; "or a single mouthfu' o' the Isla, where it rins sae cauld and deep at Corrie-avon, or the foaming swirl at the linn o' Avondhu, for my tongue is amaisht burnt to a cinder. Gude guide us, Maister Ronald, this is awfu'."

"O'ds man, Iverach, if I was again on the bonnie Ochil or Lomond hills," said a Lowlander, "de'il ding me gin I wad gie ower driving sheep and stots to follow the drum."

"Or staun to pe shoot at for twa pawbees ta hoor,—teevil tak' it!" added a Gordon from Garioch.

"Hear to the greedy kite!" exclaimed the Lowlander. "An Aberdonian is the chield to reckon on the bawbees."

"Teevil and his tam pe on you and yours!" cried the Gordon angrily. "Oich, oich! it's well kent that a Fife-man would rake hell for a bodle, and skin—"

The commanding voice of Colonel Cameron, exclaiming, "Silence, there, number four company! silence on the march!" put an instant end to the controversy.

"Hot work this, Stuart, very. Beats Egypt almost," Campbell would say, as he rode past at times.

Various were the emotions which agitated Ronald's breast, when he beheld before him the windings of the Guadiana and the well-known city of Merida, which was again in possession of the French. The jealous feeling with which he regarded Alice Lisle caused him to look forward with almost unalloyed pleasure to the expected meeting with his winning and beautiful patrona; and it was with a secret sensation of satisfaction—of triumph perhaps, of which, however, he almost felt ashamed, that he had witnessed the proud blood mantling in the cheek of young Louis, when he (Ronald) was rallied by Alister, Kennedy, and others, about his residence at Merida, and the favour he had found with Donna Catalina.

At the fountain where Stuart had been regaled by the muleteers, a fierce struggle ensued among the soldiers for a mouthful of water. The French troops had maliciously destroyed the pipe and basin; the water, in consequence, gushed across the pathway, where the current had now worn a channel. Although the whole of General Long's brigade of cavalry had passed through it, rendering it a thick and muddy puddle, yet so intense was the thirst of the soldiers that an angry

scramble ensued around it to fill canteens, or obtain a mouthful to moisten their tongues, which were swollen, and clove to their palates. By dint of the most strenuous exertions, Evan Iverach had supplied his master's canteen with the sandy liquid, neglecting to fill his own, although, poor fellow, he was perishing with thirst. Ronald had placed it to his lips, but found the water so much saturated with sand, that it was impossible almost to taste it. He was replacing the spigot in the little barrel, when the exclamation of—

"My God! I shall certainly faint with exhaustion. Soldiers, I will give a guinea for a drop of water,—only a single drop," pronounced in a remarkably soft and musical English accent, arrested his attention; and on looking up, he perceived a young lady, attired in a fashionable riding-habit and hat, pressing her graceful Andalusian horse among the Highlanders, who were crushing and jostling around the mutilated fountain. The wind blew up her lace veil, discovering a quantity of fair silky curls falling around a face which was very pretty and delicate, but thin, apparently from the fatigue and privations which were making many a stout soldier gaunt and bony. Many who had filled their vessels at the fountain, held them towards her; but she gratefully took Ronald's, thanking him by a smile from the finest blue eyes in the world.

"I am afraid it is impossible you can drink it," said he, as he held her bridle, "it is so thick with clay and animalculæ."

"It is very bad, certainly; but yet better than nothing," replied the lady, as she drank of it, quenching her burning thirst eagerly. "Ah, dear sir! I regret to deprive you of it; but accept my kindest thanks in return. My name is Mrs. Evelyn; Mr. Evelyn of the 9th Light Dragoons will return you a thousand thanks for your kindness to me. But I must ride fast, if I would see him again before they attack Merida; and so, sir, good morning!"

She struck her Andalusian with her little riding-rod, and bowing gracefully, galloped along the line of the infantry column towards where the horse-brigade were forming, previously to attacking seven hundred foot, which, with a strong party of steel-clad cuirassiers, occupied the city. Every eye was turned on the young lady as she flew along the line of march, with her long fair ringlets, her lace veil, and the skirt of her riding-habit waving wide and free about her.

"God's blessing on her bonnie face!"

"Her een are as blue and bricht as the vera lift aboon!" exclaimed the soldiers, charmed with her beauty and grace.

"What a happy fellow Evelyn is to possess so fine a girl," said Captain Bevan.

"How famously she manages that Andalusian horse!"

"Had Evelyn been a wise man, he would have left her at home in Kent. He has a splendid property there,—a regular old baronial hall, with its mullioned windows and rookery, surrounded by lawns and fields, where myriads of flies

buzz about the ears of the gigantic plough-horses in the warm weather. How foolish to bring a delicate English lady from her luxurious home, to undergo the ten thousand miseries incident to campaigning!"

"But what on earth can have brought her up from the rear just now, when her husband's corps are about to drive the enemy from their position?"

"There goes Long!" said Campbell, exultingly flourishing his stick. "Keep up your hearts, my boys! It will be our turn, in a few minutes, to give them a specimen of what we learned when in Egypt with Sir Ralph."

It was Sir Rowland Hill's earnest desire to capture this small party of the enemy; for which purpose the cavalry were ordered to ford the Guadiana at some distance below the ruined bridge, to out-flank them, and, if possible, to cut off their retreat. The French battalion of infantry, dressed in blue uniform with white trousers, (rather unusual, the French troops being generally very dirty in their persons when on service,) were seen in position on the opposite side of the river, drawn up in front of some orange plantations, while their squadron of cuirassiers occupied the avenues of the city, where their brass casques, steel corslets, and long straight swords were seen flashing in the noon-day sun. While the rest of the division halted, the first brigade, consisting of the 50th and 71st Highland Light Infantry, 92nd Highlanders, and Captain Blacier's German Rifle company, commanded by Major-general Howard, were ordered to advance with all speed upon the town; while the 9th and 13th English Light Cavalry, and king's German Hussars, boldly plunging into the Guadiana, swam their horses across the stream under a fire from the carbines of the cuirassiers, who, on finding their flank thus turned, fired one regular volley, which unhorsed for ever many of Long's brigade, and then fled at full speed. At the same time the battalion of infantry disappeared, without firing a shot, among the groves in their rear.

"Forward! double quick!" was the word; and, with their rustling colours bending forward on the breeze, the first brigade pressed onward at their utmost speed down the descent towards the city, and through its deserted streets, making their echoes ring to the clank of accoutrements, and the rapid and rushing tread of many feet. The ultimate escape of the enemy was favoured by the delay caused in providing planks to cross the blown-up arch of the Roman bridge. Rafters and flooring were, without ceremony, torn from some neighbouring houses, thrown hurriedly across the gap, and onward again swept the impatient infantry, eager to come up with, to encounter, and capture this little band, which had so adroitly eluded them. But for that evening they saw them no more; and after a fruitless pursuit for some miles, returned to Merida wearied and fatigued, when the shadows of night had begun to darken the sky and scenery.

Followed by ours, the enemy's cavalry had retired at a gallop along the level road to Almendralejo; often they turned on the way to shout "*Vive l'Empereur!*"

to brandish their swords, or fire a shot, which now and then stretched a British dragoon rolling in the dust. As the first brigade were returning towards Merida, a mournful episode in my narrative came under their observation,—one which calls forth all the best feelings of the soldier, when the wild excitement of the hour of conflict has passed away. Near one of those rude wooden crosses so common by the way-side in Spain, placed to mark a spot where murder has been committed, lay an English troop-horse in the agonies of death; the froth and blood, oozing from its quivering nostrils, rolled around in a puddle, while kicking faintly with its hoofs, it made deep indentations in the smooth grassy turf. Beside it lay the rider, with his glittering accoutrements scattered all about. His foot was entangled in the stirrup, by which he appeared to have been dragged a long way, as his uniform was torn to pieces, and his body was soiled with clay and dust. A carbine-shot had passed through his brain, and he was lying stark and stiff; his smart chako had rolled away, and the features of a dashing English dragoon,—the once gay Evelyn, were exposed to view. Beside the corse, weeping in speechless sorrow and agony, sat his wife,—the same interesting young lady who had that morning drank from Ronald's canteen at the fountain. Her face was ashy pale,—pale even as that of her dead soldier,—and she seemed quite unconscious of the approach of the Highlanders, who could not be restrained from making an involuntary halt. Her hat and veil had fallen off, permitting her fair curls to stream over her neck and shoulders: she uttered no sound of woe or lamentation, but sat with her husband's head resting on her lap, gazing on his face with a wild and terrible expression, while her little white hands were bedabbled with the blood which clotted his curly hair. From Merida she had seen him unhorsed, and dragged away in the stirrup by his frightened steed, which had also been wounded. With shrieks and outcries she had tracked him by the blood for two miles from the town, until the exhausted charger sunk down to die, and she found her husband thus.

Colonel Cameron, on approaching, sprang from his horse, and raised her from the ground, entreating her to return to Merida, as night was approaching; and to be left in so desolate a place, was unsafe and inadvisable. But she protested against being separated from the corpse of her husband; and, as it was impossible to leave her there, Cameron gave orders to carry Mr. Evelyn's remains to Merida. A temporary bier was made in the usual manner, by fastening a blanket to two regimental pikes: in this the dead officer was placed, and borne off by two stout Highlanders. Mrs. Evelyn mounted her Andalusian, which Evan Iverach had adroitly captured while it was grazing quietly at some distance, and Cameron, riding beside her, gallantly held her bridle rein as they proceeded towards the city. It was totally dark when the brigade, forming close column of regiments, halted in the now desolate Plaza.

The soldiers were instantly dismissed to their several billets.

That which Ronald had received was upon the hovel of a poor potter, residing near the convent of San Juan; but instead of going thither, he made straight towards the house of the old prior de Villa Franca, at the corner of the Calle de Guadiana, earnestly hoping, as he wended on his way, that it had escaped the heartless ravages he saw on every side of him.

"I will show this fiery Master Lisle of ours that I have more than one string to my bow, as well as the fickle Alice," he muttered aloud, and in a tone of gaiety which I must own he did not entirely feel.

That morning the mails had been brought up from Lisbon, and both Louis and himself had received letters from home; and Ronald concluded that there was still no letter from Alice, as Louis had, as usual, not addressed him during all that day. Old Mr. Stuart's letter was far from being a satisfactory one to his son.

"Inchavon," said he, in one part of it, "has now taken upon him the title of Lord Lysle, and has gained a great landed property in the Lothians. As these people rise, we old families seem to sink. All my affairs are becoming more inextricably involved: the rot has destroyed all my sheep at Strathonan, and a murrain has broken out among our black Argyleshires. The most of the tenants have failed to pay their rents; the farm towns of Tilly-whumle and Blaw-wearie were burned last week,—fifteen hundred pounds of a dead loss; and the damned Edinburgh lawyers are multiplying their insolent threats, their captions and homings, for my debts there; and all here at home is going to wreck, ruin, and the devil! I trust that you keep the *Hon.* Louis Lisle at a due distance: I know you will, for my sake. Folk, hereabout, say his sister is to be married to Lord Hyndford, during some part of the next month."

The last sentence Ronald repeated more than once through his clenched teeth, as he stumbled forward over the rough pavement of the market-place. As he looked around him, his heart sickened at the utter silence and desolation which reigned every where: not a single light visible, save that of the silver moon and twinkling stars.

As he approached the well-known mansion where he had spent so many delightful hours, the gaunt appearance of the gable, the roofless walls, the fallen balconies, the shattered casements, informed him at once that "the glory had departed."

The house had been completely gutted by fire, and Ronald, while he gazed around him, recalled the old tales of Sir Ian Mhor's days, when the savage cohorts of Cumberland (Cumberland the bloody and the merciless) were let loose over the Scottish highlands. In the garden, the flowerbeds were trampled down and destroyed,—the shrubbery laid waste,—the marble fountain was in ruins, and the water rushing like a mountain-torrent through Catalina's favourite walk. The

utmost labour had been expended to ruin and destroy every thing, Don Alvaro's rank and bravery having rendered him particularly odious to the soldiers of the usurper, Joseph Buonaparte. Fragments of gilded chairs, hangings, and books were tossing about in all directions. Some of the latter Ronald took up, and saw by the light of the moon that they had belonged to Catalina's little library, (books are a scarce commodity in Spain,) and were her most favourite authors. There was the romance of "Amadis de Gaul," written by that good and valiant knight, Vasco de Loberia, "Lopez de Ruedas," "Armeline," "Eusenia," "Los Enganados," all separate works, and other dramas and pastorals. But one richly bound little book, printed at Salamanca, the "Vidas de los Santos," upon which her own hand had written her name, he kept as a remembrance—he scarcely required one,—and bestowing a hearty malediction on the French, against whom he now felt the bitterest personal enmity, he left the place with an anxious and heavy heart, intending to question the first Español he should meet as to the fate of the family of Villa Franca. He encountered several in the streets, but none could give him the least information; and as he was weary with the fatigues of the day, he retired to his billet at the house of the potter. On the way thither, a ray of light shining through a low barred window, and the wailing as of one in deep distress, attracted his attention. On looking in he perceived the lady-like and graceful figure of Mrs. Evelyn bending over a table, on which, muffled up in a cavalry cloak, lay the cold remains of him she loved with her whole heart. A wearied dragoon, booted and accoutred, lay asleep in one corner; in another were grouped some Irish soldiers' wives, smoking and sipping aquardiente, while they listened in silence to the sorrowful moanings of the young lady, and the lowly muttered yet earnest prayer which a poor Cistercian padre, almost worn out with years and privation, offered up for the soul of the deceased, around whose bier he had placed several candles, which he had consecrated by lighting them at the shrine of San Juan. The chamber was ruinous and desolate, without either fire or furniture. It was in sooth a sad and strange situation for the poor girl, whose fair head rested on the bosom of the slain; and Ronald, as he turned away, thought of what her gay and fashionable friends at home would have said could they have seen her then,—bowed down in absorbing sorrow, without a friend to comfort her, and surrounded by squalid misery and desolation.

* * * * *

About day-break next morning Evelyn was buried hastily in a grassy spot among the ruins of the castle of Merida,—the alcalde having piously objected to the burial of a *heretic* in consecrated ground. Without other shroud but his tattered and bloody uniform,—without other coffin than his large military cloak,—he was

lowered into the hastily made tomb. The chaplain of the brigade performed the burial service, and he was hurriedly covered up. A volley of carbines from his troop, and the sobs of his young widow as she stood by, leaning on the arm of Fassifern, were the last requiem of the English dragoon.

CHAPTER IV. THE OUT-PICQUET.

"Then she is still alive:—
My lovely Lucrece in a Roman camp,
Midst hostile Tarquins! Would she had been slain!"
Fate of Capua: a Tragedy.

The *patron* of Ronald's billet could not give him any information about Donna Catalina, or any of the inmates of her mansion,—the hotel de Villa Franca, as the citizens named it. He knew that it had been occupied by the French, whose commanding officer quartered himself upon it as the best house in the place, and that his soldiers had burnt it when they saw that they should be compelled to abandon Merida, on the second advance of the British. From the first occupation of the town by the enemy, none of the Villa Franca family had been seen. This was all the information he could obtain, and Ronald was led to conclude that Catalina and her cousin had escaped, and might be at Majorga, or some other town on the Spanish frontiers.

The poor patron was a potter by trade, and made brown earthenware crocks and jars, which he retailed through Estremadura in panniers slung on the back of a mule; but he earned barely sufficient to support his wife and family. Nevertheless, to show their loyalty to King Ferdinand, and their gratitude to his allies, the *patrona* had, by dint of much exertion, procured for Ronald on the morning of his departure what was considered in Spain a tolerable breakfast.

On the wooden table was placed a large crock full of boiled pork and peas, opposite to which stood a jar of goat's milk, plates of eggs, dried raisins, and white bread,—even coffee was on the table; a display altogether of viands that raised the wonder and increased the appetites of the six hungry children who crowded round the board, holding up their little brown hands with many exclamations of

wonder, and cries to their *madre* and *padre* to help them; but their parents were intent on doing the honours of the table to the noble caballero.

In one corner of the miserable apartment lay the glossy hide of an English horse. Ronald, by some particular spots, recognised it to be that of Eveleyn's charger, about the flaying of which the host had been employed since day-break, intending as he said to make it into caps and shoes for his children. The latter were all swarthy and active, but sadly disguised by rags and filth, which obscured the natural beauty of their Spanish faces and figures, excepting one little girl, about ten years of age, who appeared to be her mother's pet, and consequently was more neatly dressed. Ronald was often amused at the looks of wonder with which this little creature watched him while eating—keeping at a distance as if he was an ogre; but when she became more familiar, venturing to touch the black feathers of his bonnet and other parts of his glittering dress, though always keeping close to the short skirt of the madre's petticoat, as if she feared being eaten up, or carried off for some future meal, by the strange caballero, the richness of whose uniform filled the little boys with wonder and envy.

At last, by dint of much entreaty, she permitted herself to be drawn towards him. Raising up her radiant eyes, she took a copper crucifix from her bosom, and asked him if the people in his country wore a thing like that. On his telling her no, she broke away from his arm, and crying, "*O mi madre*,—the heretic! the devil!" hid her face in her mother's skirt; while the rest of the children shrunk around their father, grasping his legs for safety, and even *he* seemed much discomposed. Not liking the idea of being regarded as a bugbear, Ronald, in the grey day-light, finished his breakfast as speedily as possible, and was hurried in doing so by the warning bugles for the march.

Ronald Dhu and his six pipers blowing the gathering, in concert with the drums of other corps beating the 'assembly,' in the Plaza, soon followed, and he left the house of the hospitable but superstitious potter, who would not accept a single maravedi for the entertainment he had given,—a circumstance which Ronald did not regret, his pecuniary affairs not being then in a very flourishing condition, as the troops were three months pay in arrear.

When the second division approached Almendralejo, they found that it had been abandoned by the enemy in the night. As on the march of the preceding day, the troops suffered greatly by thirst and the intense heat of the weather; and as the regiments passed through in succession, the inhabitants were employed for hours handing water through their barred windows[*] to the soldiers, while crowds in the streets were kept running to and fro from the fountains with all sorts of vessels, as if a general conflagration had taken place.

[*] The lower windows in Spain are all barred.

"*Viva Ferdinando! muera Napoleon!*" cried a soft voice from the balcony of a house near, the *Casa de Ayuntamiento*, the tall spire of which is visible for leagues around.

"Who can that handsome girl be,—she with the tight boddice and braided hair?" asked Stuart of Alister, as the corps halted, for the usual rest of five minutes, in front of the town-house.

"Handsome girl! How should I know, Ronald. Where?"

"Leaning over the antique stone balcony: she has tossed a chaplet among the men at the other flank of the company."

"And one fellow has placed it on the point of his bayonet. That is the Senora Maria I told you of."

"What! the daughter of the *abogado*?"

"The same. I used to meet her often at the Prado and at church, when we lay here. Her true knight, Angus Mackie, has obtained the wreath, I perceive."

"A handsome girl indeed! The flowers were intended for him, doubtless."

"And there is the *abogado* himself," exclaimed Macdonald. "What the devil is the old fellow about?"

While they were speaking, a fierce-looking little Spaniard, with a bald head and large grey moustaches, wearing an old-fashioned doublet of black cloth slashed on the breast with red, rushed into the balcony, and grasping the young lady by the arm, drew her roughly into the house, dashing to the casement with such violence that several panes of glass were shattered,—a damage, which he was observed a minute afterwards to be inspecting with a rueful countenance, glass being an expensive article in Spain. He withdrew with a fierce aspect, as a loud laugh of derision arose from the companies of Highlanders in the street.

To describe the wearying marches performed by the troops under Sir Rowland Hill's command in that province of Spain, would be at once useless and uninteresting. Scouring the country of the enemy, they had many a march and counter-march between Merida, La Zarza, La Querena, Medellin, and Don Benito. From the last two the enemy were driven, but not without some fighting, especially at Don Benito. During that week often on the march, as they traversed the lofty sierras or level plains, they heard, mellowed by distance, the roar of the far artillery, which announced that the strong city of Badajoz had been besieged by Lord Wellington, by whose orders Sir Rowland's division advanced towards that place, to form the covering army.

On the evening when it was known the fortress would be stormed, while the greatest anxiety pervaded every breast for the success of the great attempt,

Hill's division halted and encamped near the village of Lobon just about sunset. Making a corresponding movement to form a junction with the second division, Sir Thomas Graham, "the hero of Barossa," hovered with his troops in the direction of the heights of Albuera, ready to concentrate and repel together any attempt which the great Duke of Dalmatia with his legions might make to relieve the beleaguered garrison of General Phillipon at Badajoz, which was a few miles distant, in the rear of the hamlet of Lobon.

Although the troops encamped, all were in readiness to march at a moment's notice to sustain the besieging army, if they should fail in carrying the place. Scarcely had they halted, before the grand guards of cavalry were formed, and the out-picquets, to be furnished from the first brigade, paraded and despatched to their several posts where pointed out by the major of brigade.

With some other officers this exciting duty fell upon Ronald, who, with a picquet of twenty Highlanders, was directed to march to a given distance into the plain in front of Lobon, halt his party, and throw forward his chain of advanced sentries, extending them so that they could keep up the line of communication with those of other picquets on the right and left, and to double them, should the weather thicken during the night.

"By what shall I know where to halt the main body of my picquet, major?" asked Ronald, looking rather blankly towards the waste expanse of desert plain, which extends for more than seven leagues around Badajoz. "It is as level as the very sea: nothing bounds it but the distant heights of Albuera."

"March *on* that star," said W—— technically, as he raised himself in his stirrups, and pointed towards a bright planet which was twinkling where the lingering streaks of yellow edged the dark horizon, glowing like heated bars of gold through openings in the dusky masses of clouds, which appeared to rest o'er Albuera, the position of Graham. "You will march straight upon it, and halt your picquet where you find a man's head stuck upon a pole."

"Upon a pole!"

"Ay. Queer mark, is it not?"

"Very. I am to halt there?"

"A dismal thing to have beside one for a whole night,—in a place as dreary, and eerie too, as the pass of Drumouchter."

"Is it the head of a murderer?"

"Yes. His body is buried beneath it,—a common practice in this part of the country, I believe."

"A man's head used to be quite a common mark when I was in Egypt with Sir Ralph Abercrombie," chimed in Campbell, who had stretched himself on the dewy grass near. "I have seen a corps of turbaned Turks, reviewed near Alexandria, using the spiked heads of Frenchmen as we do our red camp-colours, as

points to wheel on."

"You had better take up your ground, Mr. Stuart," said the brigade major, to cut short any intended story, "and remember carefully to make yourself master of your situation, by examining, not only the space you actually occupy, but the heights within musquet-shot, the roads and paths leading to or near the post, ascertaining their breadth and practicability for cavalry and cannon, and to ensure a ready and constant communication with the adjoining posts and videttes,—in the day by signals, in the night by patrols," &c.; and the old fellow did not cease his long quotation from the "Regulations," which he had gotten by rote, until compelled to do so by want of breath.

When he made an end, and had ridden off, Ronald marched his picquet in the direction pointed out, keeping as a guide the star already mentioned. He soon found the halting-place, and there, sure enough, was a human head placed upon a pole about ten feet high; and a more grisly, hairy, ferocious, and terrible face than it presented, human eyes never beheld. In ferocity its expression was that of Narvaez Cifuentes, but it was fixed and rigid,—the eyes glassy and bursting from the sockets,—the jaws wide and open, displaying a formidable row of large white teeth. It was much decayed by the heat of the weather, although it had been only three days exposed; and as the breeze blew swiftly past, it caused the long damp tresses of black hair to wave around the livid brow with an effect at once strange and terrible.

Having posted his line of sentries to the best advantage, showing them in what direction they were to keep a "sharp look-out,"—the direction where Marshal Soult lay,—he returned to the spot, where, stretched upon the turf among the rest of the soldiers, he lay listening to the distant thunder of artillery, and watching the lurid light which filled the horizon, continually increasing and waning as the tide of conflict turned on the battlements of Badajoz. More vividly at times the red light flashed across the sky, and louder at times came the boom of the heavy cannon, as the salvoes were discharged against the walls of the doomed city; and while the soldiers looked and listened, they thought of the blood and slaughter in which they might soon bear a part, should the present besiegers fail in the assault. Although at that hour hundreds—ay, thousands, were being swept into eternity, the soldiers cared not for it, apparently; many a tale was told at which they laughed heartily, and many a reminiscence narrated of Bergen-op-Zoom, Egmont-op-Zee, Mandora, Coruna, and other fields and countless frays, in which some of them had borne a part.

It was a fine moonlight night: the most distant part of the plain could be distinctly seen, and the myriads of stars shone joyously, as if to rival the radiance of their queen, while every blade of grass, and every leaf of the scattered shrubbery, so common on Spanish plains, glittered as if edged with liquid silver. From

the dark village of Lobon, and the white glimmering tents of the encampment, arose the hum of voices; from the plain through which wound the Guadiana, came the murmur of its current; and save these, no sound broke the stillness of the hour but the roar of Badajoz, which growled and sounded afar like thunder among distant hills.

While Ronald was regaling himself upon a mess, consisting of a few ounces of ration-beef fried in a camp-kettle lid, with a handful of garbanzos or beans, which Evan had brought him from the adjacent village, his attention was aroused by the glitter of steel on the plain, advancing, as he imagined, from the direction where Soult was known to be, and from which he was expected to make some demonstration to relieve General Phillipon's garrison.

Ronald was instantly on the alert. He sprang to his feet,—ordered the picquet to "stand to their arms," himself advancing a little to the front, to reconnoitre.

Perhaps there is no situation more exciting to any officer, especially a young one, than out-picquet duty: he is left to act entirely for himself,—to rely on his own judgment, and so much depends upon him in many ways, that he is apt to grow bewildered. The responsibility is indeed great, when the very fate of a kingdom may depend on the alertness of his sentinels, and the posts he has assigned to them.

Fully alive to all the duties of his situation, Ronald moved anxiously to the front, and beheld a dark group advancing furiously along the plain at full gallop, making straight for his post, with steel casques and tall lances glittering; but that they were only six armed horsemen he could see distinctly, and the cry of "*Amigos! amigos a la guerra de la Independencia! Viva España! Viva España!*" in pure Castilian, assured him that they were Spaniards; and he sprang forward just in time to arrest the arm of his advanced sentinel, who had levelled his musquet to fire, a circumstance which would have caused the whole encamped division to get under arms.

Another moment, and the strangers came up, the hoofs of their panting steeds shaking the earth, and tearing the turf as they were suddenly reined in, while the white foam fell from their dilated nostrils. A glance showed Ronald that they were six lances of Don Alvaro's troop, escorting a party of Spanish ladies, who to his no small surprise were all mounted like men, wearing wide trowsers and broad flapping sombreros, with veils and long waving plumes. Although this mode of riding surprised the Scot very much, it is one extremely common in some parts of Spain. Raising his hand to his bonnet, he inquired which way they had come?

"Ah! Don Ronald,—have you quite forgotten me, and the sad night we spent in the diabolical cavern at La Nava?" exclaimed Pedro Gomez, dropping the point of his lance, and causing his mettlesome steed to curvet in a style more like unto

a knight of chivalry than a serjeant of dragoons.

"How! Pedro, my bon camarado, is this you? Why—how—which way are you riding?"

"Commanding an escort, *senor officiale*; travelling with four ladies of our regiment from Segura de Leon to Idanda Nova, to keep them out of harm's way."

"And the *senoritas*—"

"*Senoritas? Pho! Somos todos hombres*," said one contemptuously in Spanish.

"All men?" reiterated Ronald in surprise.

A burst of laughter from the fair speaker followed; and bending her face close to his,—so close that her soft curls fell upon it, she added, "Inesella de Truxillo. I knew not that my features were so easily forgotten, even by the admirers of my cousin."

"Senora, how happy am I to see you here, and in safety! The ravages at Merida led me to expect the worst. And your cousin, Donna Catalina,—she is of course, with you?" said Ronald, looking anxiously at the faces of the other three ladies.

"O most unfortunate Catalina!" exclaimed Inesella, beginning to weep, "I fear she is for ever lost to us."

"How, Donna Inesella! Speak for Heaven's sake!" said Ronald, while his heart fluttered with agitation.

"O *Juan de Dios*! be her protection. She was carried off by the enemy, while I escaped in consequence of the Count d'Erlon's mandate. The house was destroyed by fire, and our miserable uncle, the poor dear old padre, perished in it."

A deep malediction was growled by the escort, who reined their horses back a few paces.

"The demons! and by whose order was that done?"

"Their *chef d'escadre*, the Baron de Clappourknui, or some such name."

"He is now a prisoner in the castle of Belem; but Catalina—"

"Was torn from my arms by force. A field-officer of the French guards carried her off across the bow of his saddle; I heard her fearful cries as he swam his horse across the Guadiana, on the night that the British returned and attacked Merida. I have been wandering about in several places since then, and am anxious to reach Idanda Nova, Idanha a Velha, or any place of safety, until all this terrible work is over. Mother of God! look towards Badajoz! The sky seems all on fire! Alas! the poor soldiers—"

"Has Don Alvaro heard of his sister's fate?"

"O yes, senor. Poor Alvaro! I have had sad work cheering him under the misfortune. He is now my husband," added the graceful donna, blushing deeply, while her usually soft voice sunk into a whisper.

"Oh, indeed! I am most happy, Donna Inesella, to hear—— But how could you celebrate so joyous an event while so great a mystery hangs over the fate of poor Catalina?"

"O Don Ronald! I know not," replied the young lady, confusedly. "What a very strange question to ask."

"Pardon me, senora!"

"*Santa Maria!* I am not angry with you; but Don Alvaro is so very impetuous, and fearing the chance of war—— But ah! senor, we must bid you adieu if we would reach the city of Elvas before dawn, and 'tis many good leagues from Lobon."

The other ladies, who had become impatient at the delay, now proposed to ride on, and the arrival of the field-officer on duty, to visit the out-picquet, put an end to the conversation. Ronald briefly pointed out to them, to the best of his knowledge, the safest road to Elvas, and the one by which bands of roving guerillas were least likely to be met with; and then hurried off to his post, while the ladies and their escort galloped in the direction of Lobon.

Ronald watched the helmets and spears of the troopers, and the waving feathers of the ladies, as long as they were in sight; and so negligent was he during the inspection of his picquet, that, to use a mess-room phrase, he gained a hearty rowing from old Lieutenant-colonel Macdonald, the senior major of his regiment, who was mighty indignant at the absence of mind he displayed, and the general answers he gave to questions asked of him. But it was not to be wondered at: his thoughts were with Catalina, and his bosom was a prey to a greater degree of anxiety and uneasiness than he had felt for a very long time. That Catalina, the proud, the gentle, and the beautiful, should be a captive in the hands of so unscrupulous an enemy as the French, subjected to their insolence, and perhaps barbarity, filled him with thoughts that stung him almost to madness; and, finding it impossible to sleep, although the grass was soft as velvet, and the bright moon was shining gloriously, he remained walking to and fro between the piles of arms until daylight, watching the waning blaze of Badajoz, and listening to the noise of the assault as the night-wind, sweeping over the plain, brought it to his ear. Intently he watched the light; and when, towards morning, the boom of "the red artillery" died away, he almost hoped that the assault had failed, and that an order would arrive for the second division to advance to support the besiegers, that he might have an opportunity of meeting hand to hand the enemy, against whom he had conceived a peculiar feeling of detestation; or that he might have the desperate honour of leading a forlorn-hope, an affair, by the by, of which he had as yet but a very slight conception. The din of war, which had lasted the live-long night, ceased at day-break, and the flashes of cannon and musquetry were no longer seen on the ramparts of the capital of Estremadura, in the direction of

which all eyes were anxiously turned, although it is not distinctly visible from Lobon.

About sun-rise a British staff-officer spurred his horse furiously into the encampment. He was covered with dust, and even blood; his plumes were gone, and his whole appearance told of the part he had acted in the dangers of the past night, and the speed with which he had ridden. It was towards Ronald's picquet that he advanced.

"What news from Badajoz?" cried the latter.

"Glorious! glorious!" replied he, evidently in a fierce state of exultation, full of wild excitement and tumult, as one might be supposed to be who had spent such a night of accumulated horrors, while he checked with some difficulty the headlong speed of his jaded charger. "I have not a moment to spare: where are the quarters of General Hill?"

"Our troops have carried the place, then?"

"Again, again, and again the columns were repulsed with frightful slaughter; but again and again the assault was renewed, fighting as we alone can fight. Badajoz is in ruins,—but it is ours; the breaches and ditches are filled with the dead and the dying. Phillipon, retiring to fort San Christoval, surrendered his garrison prisoners of war this morning at day-break, after doing all that mortal men could do!" A cheer arose from the picquet, who crowded round.

"And our loss—"

"Four thousand killed, wounded, and missing,—rough calculation; that of the enemy five thousand."

"Nine thousand in one night!"

"A strange trade is war, truly! but a night such as the last is an era in a man's life-time. Sir Rowland's quarters, where are they?"

"The cottage yonder—"

"With the vine-covered chimney and broad eaves?"

"Under the chesnuts."

"Thanks. Fighting is in store for you in the neighbourhood of Truxillo; you will know it all in good time. Adieu."

Dashing his gory rowels into the flanks of his horse, he galloped towards the tented camp. Immediately on his reaching it, a tremendous cheer arose among the soldiers, who came rushing from their tents and cantonments in the village. Infantry chakoes, grenadier caps, and Highland bonnets were tossed into the air,—caught, and tossed up again. The regimental bands played "Rule Britannia," and other national airs; while, amid the shouts, cheers, and rolling of drums, were heard the pipers of the Highland regiments blowing, "There's nae folk like our ain folk," as they paraded to and fro before the quarters of the general, who, to increase the rejoicing, ordered an extra ration of rum to be served out to every

man on the occasion by the commissary.

CHAPTER V. THE FLAG OF TRUCE.

"Yet, be it known, had bugles blown,
Or sign of war been seen,
Those bands, so fair together ranged,
Those hands, so frankly interchanged,
Had dyed with gore the green."

Last Minstrel, canto v.

About a fortnight after this, Sir Rowland Hill reviewed his division of the army near the town of Almendralejo, so often mentioned in preceding chapters. In the evening, a strong detachment, consisting of the first brigade of infantry, part of the second brigade, a body of British cavalry, artillery, and Portuguese caçadores, were selected from the division, and marched an hour before day-break next morning, pursuing the road to Madrid under the command of the general himself, who left Sir William Erskine in charge of the remainder of the division, which continued in cantonments at Almendralejo.

That some great enterprise was on foot there could be no doubt, from the secrecy maintained by the general as to the object of the march, the solitary places through which their route lay after leaving the Madrid road, and the deserted places, cork woods, chesnut thickets, &c. in which they concealed their bivouacs at night. Great excitement existed among the troops, and many were the surmises as to what might be the ultimate object of this sudden expedition, until it became known that to force the pass of Miravete, and destroy certain forts erected at the bridge of Almaraz on the Tagus, were the intentions of the enterprising leader.

On the evening of the 15th May, the troops destined for this particular service entered the city of Truxillo, the place from which Don Balthazar[*] takes his title. It is, like most Spanish cities, situated on a rocky eminence, contains about four thousand inhabitants, a handsome Plaza, and several churches. Ronald was billeted on the very house in which the famous conqueror of America, Pizarro, was born, and the mouldered coat-armorial of whose noble family yet appeared

over the entrance-door. He had just finished a repast of hashed mutton and garlic,—time had reconciled him to the latter,—and was discussing a few jugs of *Xeres seco* with his host, when the serjeant-major of the Gordon Highlanders, tapping at the door with his cane, warned him to join Captain Stuart's out-picquet as a supernumerary subaltern.

[*] The Condé is still alive. I saw his name mentioned in a French paper some months ago.

His host, Don Gonzago de Conquesta, a lineal descendant of Pizarro, was detailing the once great honours of his now decayed house when this unwelcome intelligence was brought to Stuart, who, snatching his cloak and sword, vented a malediction on the adjutant, and departed in no pleasant mood, bearing with him a couple of bottles of the *Xeres seco*, which were pressed upon him by Don Gonzago, who said that he never went on duty (he was a *Capitan de Cazadores*) without plenty of liquor. It was a lesson he had learned in his campaigns "under the great General Liniers, at Buenos Ayres, in 1807." The out-picquet, which Ronald departed to join, was posted near the river Almonte, at the base of the large mountain, on the summit and sides of which appeared the three divisions of Truxillo,—the castle, the city, and the town, as they are styled. And often, as he hurried down the hill, he looked back at the picturesque Spanish city, with its gothic spires and belfries, its embattled fortress, lines of frowning ramparts built on masses of rock, and its thousand casements, gleaming like burnished gold in the light of the setting sun.

It was a beautiful evening: the air was cool and balmy,—the sky blue and cloudless, and the clear atmosphere showed vividly the various tints of the extensive landscape, where yellow fields, green thickets, and the windings of the Almonte stretched away far in the distance.

The chain of sentinels were posted along the sedgy banks of the river, and on a green grassy knoll beside it, amid groves where the yellow orange and clustering grape were ripening in the sun, sat Ronald and the officer commanding the picquet, Captain Stuart of the 50th regiment, discussing the flasks of *Xeres seco*. While they were conversing on the probable issue of the intended attack on the castle of Miravete and the French forts at Almarez, a sentry by the riverside passed the word of alarm, that some of the enemy were in motion on the other side of the stream.

Far down the Almonte, advancing over the level ground from the direction of the Madrid road, appeared four figures on foot, and the glitter of polished metal showed that they were armed men.

"Mr. Stuart," said the captain of the picquet, "take with you a file of men and a bugler, and see who these may be. You may cross here,—I suppose the river is fordable. Should you see any thing suspicious further off, let the bugle-boy sound, to warn us."

"This promises to be an adventure," said Ronald, fixing his sword in his belt, and preparing to start. "A flag of truce, probably, sent from the castle of Miravete."

"Most likely: they have come from that direction. Sir Rowland will be ill pleased to think the enemy know of his vicinity. But as these communications are generally only for the purpose of reconnoitring and gaining intelligence, you must be careful to frustrate any such intentions by answering reservedly all questions, and beware that their cunning does not out-flank your caution."

"Fear not: man to man, if they—"

"Nay: should it be a flag of truce, you must receive it with all attention and courtesy; but you had better move off, and meet them as far from here as possible."

"There are two stout fellows of my own company here; I will take them with me. Ewen Macpherson Mackie, unpile your arms, and follow me. Look sharp, there, men!"

Accompanied by two sturdy Highlanders, and a bugler of the 50th foot, he crossed the Almonte, which took them up to the waist, and scrambling over the opposite bank, advanced towards the strangers without feeling much discomfort from the wetting,—fording a river being with them a daily occurrence.

Four French soldiers appeared to be coming straight towards them, through the middle of a waving field of yellow corn, treading it down in a remorseless manner, that would have put any bluff English farmer or douce gude-man of the Lothians at his wits' end, had he seen them. It appeared to be a toilsome pathway, as it rose breast-high, and in some places hid them altogether, save the tops of their grenadier caps. On gaining the skirts of the field, they broke their way through the lofty vine-trellis which covered the road like a long green arbour, and could now be perfectly discerned; and as they neared each other, Ronald felt a degree of excitement and pleasure roused within him for which it was not difficult to account, this being his first meeting with the enemy in arms.

Two of them were tall French grenadiers in dark great-coats, adorned with large red worsted epaulets, wearing heavy bear-skin caps and hairy knapsacks, and had their bayonets fixed on their long muskets.

In front advanced an officer wearing the same sort of cap, and the rich uniform of the old Guard. A little tambour, with his brass drum slung on his back, trotted beside him.

"Halt!" exclaimed Ronald, when they were about four hundred yards off.

"With ball-cartridge prime and load!"

The performance of this action was seen by the strangers. The little tambour beat a long roll on his drum, and the officer, halting his file of grenadiers, displayed a white handkerchief and advanced alone. Ronald did so likewise, and they met at an equal distance from their respective parties. The officer (whose brown cheek bore witness of service) wore the little gold cross that showed he was a *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur*, and raising his hand to his grenadier cap in salute, he pulled from the breast of his coat a long sealed despatch.

"*Monsieur officier*," said he, "here is a communication from Marshal Soult to General Sir Rowland Hill, which I have the honour to request you will see forwarded."

Ronald bowed and took the letter, surprised to hear such pure English spoken by a Frenchman; while the latter unslung a metal flask which hung at his waist-belt, to share its contents in friendship.

"*Croix Dieu!*" he exclaimed, starting back with a look of recognition and surprise. "Ah, Monsieur Stuart, *mon ami*, have you forgotten me quite? Do you not remember Victor D'Estouville and the castle of Edinburgh?"

Ronald gazed upon him in astonishment.

"D'Estouville! is this indeed you?"

"I am happy to say it is; who else could it be, monsieur? I was very tired of being a *prisonnier de guerre* in that gloomy bastille in the Scottish capital; but an exchange of prisoners took place soon after you left it, and now I am again a free man, fighting the battles of the Emperor with the eagle over my brow, and wearing my belted sword. Brave work it is,—but I am as miserable now, as I was then."

"Hard fighting and no promotion, perhaps?"

"We have plenty of both in the service of the great Emperor. I am now major in the battalion of *the Guard*."

"Allow me to congratulate you. And—and—what was the lady's name? Diane de Montmichel?"

"*C'est le diable!*" muttered he, while his cheek grew pale as death; but the emotion instantly passed away, and a bold and careless look replaced it.

"D'Estouville, you did not find her faithless, I hope?"

"I found her only *Madame la Colonelle*, as we say in our service."

"The wife of your colonel! How much I regret to hear it. The devil! I think women are all alike perfidious."

"Perfidious indeed, Monsieur Stuart, as many a husband and lover, on his return from captivity, finds to his cost. But I mean to revenge myself on the whole sex, and care no more for the best of them, than for the meanest *fille de joie* that ever was horsed through a camp on the wooden steed. On my return to France,

I hastened to the valley of Lillebonne, but it was no longer a paradise to me. My sisters were all married to knaves who cared nothing for me, and a grassy grave in the church-yard was all that remained to me of my dear mother. But *miséricorde! la belle Diane* was no longer there,—she had become the wife of my colonel, the Baron de Clappourknuis, forgetting poor Victor D’Estouville, her first love, (that which romancers make such a fuss about); he who had preferred her before all the maidens of the valley of Lillebonne,—and there they are numerous and as beautiful as the roses.”

“Learn to forget her, D’Estouville; you may find it—”

“She is forgotten as my love. *Croix Dieu!* nay, more; she is forgiven.”

“And she is now Baroness Clappourknuis?”

“*Oui, monsieur*,—such I suppose she would rather be, with the boorish old colonel for her husband, than the wife of Victor D’Estouville, a poor subalterne as I was then.”

“Certes, you have got rapid promotion. And you are really now a major?” said Ronald, feeling a little chagrin. “I am still only an ensign, sub-lieutenant, I believe you style it.”

“*Diable!* your promotion is long of coming, especially in these times, when heads are broken like egg-shells. But I would rather have my peace of mind, than promotion to the baton of a marshal of the empire.”

“Then you have not forgotten her, although you so often protest you have?”

“I have forgotten to love her, at least. *Peste!* I am quite cured of that passion. I can regard her, and speak of her with the utmost nonchalance; and as a proof, I volunteered to bring this letter from the Duke of Dalmatia to your general, relative to procuring the release of the Baron my *chef*, by exchanging him for some British prisoners captured at Villa Garcia, where, by some misadventure, our rear-guard was so severely cut up by your heavy cavalry under Sir Stapleton Cotton. You see, Monsieur Stuart, I am so calmed down in this matter, that I can, even without a pang, negotiate for the restoration of her husband to her arms.”

At that moment a bugle from Captain Stuart’s post sounded, as if warning Ronald to retire.

“A bugle call,” said D’Estouville; “the officer commanding the out-picquet has lost his patience.”

“I must now bid you farewell; we may soon meet again, but in less pleasant circumstances.”

“Then you *do* mean to carry Miravete?” said the Frenchman with sudden animation.

“I have not said so,” replied Ronald coldly. “I merely said we might meet—”

“Not unlikely, if your general comes further this way. The forts of Napoleon and Ragusa, covering the bridge of the Tagus at Almaraz, and the town

of Miravete, defended as they are by the bravest hearts of the old Guard, might bar the passage of Xerxes with his host."

"But surely not against the capturers of Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo?" said Ronald gently, with a smile.

"*Peste! oui.* These were misadventures, and the great Emperor will soon make us amends. There was something wrong in this last affair at Badajoz; yet the soldiers fought well, and Phillipon, their general, is, as we say, *guerrier sans peur et sans reproche*," replied the Frenchman, while a flush of indignant shame crossed his bronzed cheek, and he twisted up his heavy moustache with an air of military pride and ludicrous confusion.

Again the bugle sounded from the other side of the river, warning them to part. D'Estouville uncorked his flask, and filling up the stopper, which held about a wine-glass, with brandy, presented it to Ronald, and they drank to each other. The two grenadiers of the Guard, their tambour, the two Highlanders, and the young bugler, were now beckoned to advance, and D'Estouville shared the contents of his flask among them, while they shook hands all round heartily, and regarded each other's uniform, accoutrements, and bronzed visages with evident curiosity.

"We have drunk to the health of your General Hill. *C'est un vieux routier*, as we Frenchmen say," observed D'Estouville, replacing his empty flask. "As for your leader, Monsieur Wellington, I cannot say I admire him: he is not the man to gain the love of the soldier. No medals,—no ribands,—no praise in the grand bulletin,—no crosses like *this* won under his command. *Vive l'Empereur!* The great Napoleon is the man for these,—the man for a soldier to live and die under. But I must bid you farewell—without returning what you so kindly lent me in the castle of Edinburgh."

"I beg you will not mention it."

"There is little use in doing so, all the gold I have being on my shoulders. *Nom d'un pape!* never will I forget your kindness. But I hope your general has no intention of beating up our quarters at Almaraz?"

"I have not heard that such is his intention," said Ronald, colouring at the equivocal nature of his reply.

"We are very comfortable there at present; quite country-quarters, in fact."

"How! are you stationed there?"

"I am commandant of the forts of the bridge. A wing of my own battalion of the Guard form part of the garrison. But we must part now, monsieur. How dark the evening has become! Almaraz is a long way off among the mountains, and we shall barely reach it by to-morrow. I am anxious to return and console a certain lady there, who has, I suppose, been pining very much in my absence."

"Indeed! 'Tis no wonder, then, that Diane de Montmichel is so easily for-

gotten."

"*Peste!* I am executing but a part of my grand plot of vengeance against the sex," replied the other gaily. "I am a droll fellow, monsieur, but quite the one for a soldier. The young creature is superbly beautiful. I captured her at a town near this a few weeks ago, and carried her to Almarez, to enliven my quarters there. But *diable!* she is ever drooping like a broken lily, weeping, and upbraiding me in Spanish; but I must make a bold effort, when I return, to carry her heart by escalade. I have half won the outworks already, I believe. *Soldats!*" cried he, turning quickly round, "*portez vos armes; demi-tour à droite,—marche!*"

He touched his cap and went off with his party, saying, in a loud and laughing tone, "Adieu, *mon ami*; when I return to Almarez, I shall speak of you to *la belle Cataline.*"

Ronald, who had listened to his last observations with some emotion, started at the name he mentioned, and would have recalled him; but a long, loud, and angry bugle-blast from the out-picquet compelled him to retire and recross the Almonte, but he cast many an anxious glance after the dark and lessening figures of D'Estouville and his soldiers, as they toiled their way through the field of tall corn.

The evening had now given place to the night, the last trace of day had faded from the mountainous ridge of the Lina, and the waning moon was shining coldly and palely above the spires and castle of Truxillo.

"Mr. Stuart," said one of the soldiers, as they marched along under the dark shadows of the thick and gloomy vine-trellis, "if I micht daur to advise, it wadna be amiss to ask that chield with the sark owre his claes, what he means by followin' us aboot, as he has dune, glintin' and glidin' here and there in the gloaming."

"Who—where, Macpherson?"

"Under the vine-trees, on your richt hand, sir."

Ronald now perceived, for the first time, a priest in a light grey cassock or gown, which enveloped his whole body, keeping pace with them—taking step for step, at a short distance.

"He has been close beside ye, sir," continued the soldier, "the haill time ye were speaking to the Frenchman,—listening and glowering wi' een like a gosshawk, although he aye keepit himsel sae close among the leaves o' the bushes, that you couldna see him as we did."

"Do you really say so? What can the fellow's object be? By the colour of his robe, he looks like one of the Franciscans of Merida," said Ronald, considerably interested while he watched the priest narrowly, and saw that he was evidently moving in time with them, but keeping himself concealed as much as possible among the poles of the trellis-work, and the vines which were twisted around

them.

"Holloa, Senor Padre, holloa!" cried Stuart.

But no sooner did he speak, than the mysterious padre glided away, and, as any monk of romance would have done, disappeared, and no further trace could they find of him at that time. Many were the surmises of the soldiers about the matter, and Ewen Macpherson, a Gael from Loch Oich, gave decidedly his opinion that "it was something no cannie." But the affair passed immediately from the mind of Ronald, whose thoughts were absorbed in the idea that Donna Catalina was a prisoner in the hands of the French. It roused a thousand stirring and harrowing emotions within him; and forgetting that he was observed, he often muttered to himself, and grasped his sword with energy, as they hurried along.

Fording the Almonte again, they clambered up the bank, and on gaining the grassy knoll Ronald presented Soult's letter to Captain Stuart, from whom he endured a very disagreeable cross-questioning as to what his long conversation with the Frenchman had been about. He found his sentiments of regard for D'Estouville very much lessened when he appeared in the new character of a rival, and eagerly he longed for the assault on Almarez, that he might have an opportunity of distinguishing himself, and, if possible, freeing Catalina at the point of the sword. Often he repented not having followed D'Estouville at all risks, and commanded him, on his honour, to treat the lady with the respect which was due to her rank and sex.

It was a clear moonlight night, and he lay awake on the grassy sod, musing on these matters, and thinking of Alice Lisle and the relation in which he stood to her. Old Stuart, the captain of the picquet, after having drained the last drop of the *Xeres seco*, had wrapped himself up in his cloak, and went to sleep under a bush, with a stone for a pillow. From his reverie Ronald was aroused by seeing, close by, the same figure of the monk in the grey tunic, evidently watching him, and with no common degree of interest, as his eyes seemed to sparkle under the laps of his cowl, in a manner which gave him a peculiar and rather uncomfortable aspect.

"Ho! the picquet there!" cried Stuart, springing to his feet, and making a plunge among the orange foliage where the figure had appeared. "Holloa, sentry! seize that fellow! Confound it, he has escaped!" he added, as the appearance

vanished again, without leaving a trace behind.

CHAPTER VI.

ALMAREZ.

"Hark! through the silence of the cold, dull night,
 The hum of armies gathering rank on rank!
 'Lo! dusky masses, steal in dubious light,
 Along the 'leagured wall and bristling bank
 Of the armed river——"

Don Juan, canto vii.

It was Sir Rowland Hill's intention, in order to keep his movements concealed from the enemy, to march his troops in the night, and halt them before dawn in the wood of Jarciejo, situate about half way between Almaraz and Truxillo.

On the night of the intended departure from the latter place, Ronald sat late with the worthy descendant of Pizarro, Captain Don Gonzago, listening to his long stories about that "famous and noble cavalier General Liniers, and the campaigns of Buenos Ayres," until the shrill bugles at the hour of midnight sounded 'the *assembly*' through the echoing streets of the city. In ten minutes the whole of the troops destined to force the strong places of the French were under arms, and the snapping of flints, the ringing of steel ramrods, the tramp of cavalry and clash of artillery guns, travelling caissons and clattering tumbrils carrying the tools of sappers, miners, pioneers, &c., gave token of the coming strife.

Many a flickering light from opened casements streamed into the dark street on the bronzed visages and serried files of the passing troops, whom they greeted with many a viva! or hurrah!

Departing from the ancient house of Pizarro, Ronald hurried through the dark and strange streets towards the muster-place, and twice on his way thither was his path crossed by the priest mentioned in my last chapter; but the pale outline of his figure eluded his search,—the first time by disappearing under the black piazzas of the townhouse, and the second time in the deep gloomy shadow of the cloisters of San Jago de Compostella; and although Ronald eagerly longed to follow him, so much was he pressed for time that he found it impossible to do

so.

Without the sound of drum or horn, they began their midnight march, descending from Truxillo towards the Almonte,—the soldiers carrying with them, in addition to their heavy accoutrements, axes, sledge-hammers, and iron levers, to beat down stockades and gates, and scaling-ladders to aid the assault; which cumbersome implements they bore forward by turns during the dreary night-march.

Oh, the indescribable annoyances and weariness of such a march! To feel one self overpowered with sleep, and yet be compelled to trudge on through long and unknown routes and tracts of country,—seeing with heavy and half-closed eyes the road passing by like a running stream, no sound breaking the monotonous tread of the marching feet,—to drop asleep for a moment, and be unpleasantly aroused by your nodding head coming in contact with the knapsack of a front file,—to trudge on, on, on, while every limb and fibre is overcome with lassitude, and having the comfortable assurance that many will be knocked on the head before day-break, while your friends at home are lying snugly in bed, not knowing or caring a jot about the matter.

Before dawn the detachments were secreted and bivouacked in the wood of Jarciejo, where they remained the whole day, keeping close within its recesses, as they were now in the immediate neighbourhood of the enemy, upon whose strongholds a night-attack was determined to be made. Before morning broke, Ronald had an opportunity of bringing to a parley the monk, who appeared to dog him in so mysterious and sinister a manner.

Standing under the dark shade of a large chesnut, as if for concealment, he suddenly espied the glimmer of his long and floating grey cassock. The young Highlander agilely sprung forward, and caught him by the cope, when, as usual, he was about to fly.

"Well, reverend Padre, I have caught you at last! How now, senior?"

"What mean you, caballero?" asked the priest gruffly, turning boldly upon him.

"Priest! I demand of you," replied the other angrily, "your intentions? Your following me about thus cannot be for good: answer me at once, if you dare! I will drag you to the quarter-guard, and have you unfrocked,—by Heaven, I will! if you answer me not instantly."

"Hombre, I understand you not," said the priest insolently. "Unhand my cope, *senor officiale*, or *demonio*! I have a dagger—"

"A dagger! How, you rascally padre! dare you threaten me?"

"Why not, if you grasp me thus?" answered he in a tone, the deepness and ferocity of which caused Ronald to start. "Unhand me, senior cavalier, or it may be the worse for you in the end. I am a holy priest of *el Convento de todos Santos*,

at Merida, and bear a letter from the corregidor to Sir Rowland Hill, who has employed me as his guide."

"I believe you not; you are no priest, but some cursed spy of Soult's, and if so, shall hang before sunrise. Draw back his cowl!" said Stuart to the soldiers, who thronged round.

"*Santos-Santissimus! O Madre de Dios!*" cried the other, evidently in tribulation, "touch it not, lest ye commit a grievous sin. I am under a vow, which ye comprehend not. Unhand me, noble cavalier! I am but a poor priest, and may not contend with armed soldiers."

The gruff voice of the priest died away in a whining tone; and at this crisis, up came the brigade-major, saying that Sir Rowland wished to speak with the guide, adding that he was astonished to find an officer brawling with a monk, and expounded, for Ronald's benefit, the whole of the prosy passages in general orders relating to 'guides,' 'conciliation of the Spaniards,' &c. &c. all of which he had at his tongue's-end, to use an inelegant phrase.

The priest broke away, and followed him through the wood, bestowing as he departed a hearty malediction on Ronald as a sacrilegious heretic, who, although he valued it not a rush, was surprised at such an ebullition of wrath from a friar,—a character in Spain generally so meek, humble, and conciliating.

The dagger, too! The mention of it had aroused all his suspicion, and he resolved to watch the reverend father more narrowly in future; and yet General Hill must have been well assured of his honour and veracity, before he would trust to his guidance on so important an occasion as the present.

Arrangements having been made for a night attack upon the enemy, the troops were again under arms at dusk, mustered and called together from the dingles of the wood, as noiselessly as possible by voices of orderlies, and not by note of bugle or bagpipe. Formed in three columns, they quitted the forest of Jarciejo, and followed the route pointed out by their guide.

Another long and weary night-march was before them,—a night that might have no morning for some of them; but they entertained not such dismal reflections, and remembered only a high spirit of emulation, which the recent captures of Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz called forth. The night was intensely dark, not a star lit the vast black dome of heaven, and each column, guided by a Spaniard who knew the country well, set out upon its separate march. The first, composed of the gallant 28th (familiarily known as the *slashers*) and 34th regiments, with a battalion of Portuguese *caçadores*, under the orders of General Chowne, were directed to take by storm the tower of Miravete,—a fortress crowning the summit of a rugged hill, rising on one side of the mountain pass to which it gave its name, and through which the road to Madrid lies.

The second column, commanded by General Long, was directed to storm

the works erected by the garrison of Miravete across the pass, which consisted of a strong gate, with breast-work and palisadoes, loop-holed for musquetry and defended by cannon.

General Howard's, or the first brigade, formed the third column, composed of the 50th regiment, the 71st Highland Light Infantry, and the Gordon Highlanders, together with some artillery. These marched by the mountains; the priest acting as their guide to the forts at the bridge of Almarez, which they were ordered to "take at the point of the bayonet." Sir Rowland Hill accompanied them, riding beside the grey padre, who had been accommodated with a mule, with a dozen bells jangling at its bridle.

The night, as I have already said, was intensely dark; a general blackness enveloped the whole surrounding scenery, and the summits of the gloomy mountains among which they marched, could scarcely be discerned from the starless sky that closed behind them like a vast sable curtain. Many hours more than the general had ever calculated upon were spent on the way, and numerous suspicions of the guide's knowledge or veracity were entertained; yet to all questions he replied with some monkish benediction, muttered in a snuffling tone, and insisted that the route he led them was the nearest to the village of Almarez.

But many a malediction did the heavily-armed soldiers bestow on their monkish guide, and the desolate and toilsome way he led them. Struggling through dark defiles and narrow gorges, encumbered with fallen trees and rugged masses of rock, twisted brushwood and thickets, every one of which might, for aught they knew, contain a thousand riflemen in ambush,—through toilsome and slippery channels of rushing streams,—over immense tracts of barren mountainous waste, they were led during the whole of that night, the priest's grey cope and cassock waving in the gloom as he rode at the head of the column, appearing like the *ignis-fatuuus*, which led them about until, at last, when morning was drawing near, the column halted in the midst of a deep swamp, which took some ankle deep, and others above their leggins or gartered hose, in water,—the reverend padre declaring, by the sanctity of every saint in the kalendar, he knew not whereabouts they were. A scarce-smothered malison broke out from front to rear, and the soldiers stamped their feet in the water from pure vexation. Close column was now formed on the 50th regiment, and Sir Rowland questioned the padre in so angry a tone, that the whole brigade heard him.

"Hold the bridle of his mule, and cut him down should he attempt to fly," said he to his orderly dragoon. "And now, *senor padre*, answer me directly, and attempt not to prevaricate; for by Heaven if you do, you will find your cassock no protection from the halberts or a musquet shot,—one or other you shall feel without ceremony."

"Noble caballero," urged the padre.

"Silence! This night you have played the traitor to Ferdinand, to Spain, and to us. Is it not so?"

"No, senor general," replied the other stoutly.

"Through your instrumentality, the attack on Almarez has failed."

"*Ira se en humo!*"[*] replied the priest, doggedly.

[*] It will end in smoke,—a Spanish saying.

"Do you mock us, rascal?"

"No, cavalier; but no true Spaniard likes to be questioned thus imperiously."

"You speak somewhat boldly for a priest. But daylight is already breaking, and we must retire into concealment, or abandon the attempt altogether. Point out some track by which we may retreat, or, priest and Spaniard as you are, I will order a drum-head court-martial, and have you shot as a traitor and spy, or leaguer with the enemy."

"*Gracios excellenze!*" urged the padre.

"Your entreaties are of no avail. You have deceived us with the usual treachery of your nation, false monk!"

"By *San Juan* I have not, general! The robe I wear, and the letter of the cor-regidor of Merida, sufficiently attest my veracity. I have erred through ignorance, not intention."

"I pray it may be so," said Sir Rowland in a kinder tone. "God forbid I should wrong an honest man! But where lies the village of Almarez—"

At that moment the flash of a cannon a long way down the mountains, among whose shattered peaks the report was reverberated, answered the question.

By the time which elapsed between the sight of the flash and the sound of the report, it seemed to be fired about a mile distant. "The morning gun,—that is Almarez," muttered the soldiers.

"*Caballeros y soldados!*" cried the priest with sudden energy, "I have been no traitor, as you seem to suppose me. In truth I knew not the road,—by San Jago de Compostella I did not! To-morrow night, without fail, I will guide you to the gates of Almarez. I tell you this as truly as that every maravedi of my reward shall go to the shrine of my good Lady of Majorga, whom some rogues have lately plundered of her robes."

"Unhand his bridle," said Sir Rowland; "I must believe him. Major, what think you?"

"There is no alternative," replied the major of brigade; "but as the regula-

tions say, 'Guides cannot be too jealously watched;' and again in page—"

"'Tis a waste of time to expound the regulations to a man, whose knowledge is confined to his bible and mass-book," replied the general with a smile. "We will retire up the mountains, and lie concealed till favoured again by the darkness. Let the column break into sections, and move off left in front. Colonel Cameron, your Highlanders will lead the way."

A solitary place of concealment was gained among the rugged mountains of the Lina, where the bivouac was hidden from the sentinels on the castle of Miravete.

The officers anxious to lead that most desperate, but gallant of all military enterprises, the *forlorn hope* in the intended assault, were requested to send their names to the general. In spite of all that Macdonald and his more cautious friends could say to dissuade Ronald from so heedlessly exposing himself to danger, the fiery young Highlandman offered to lead the storming-party. He well knew how great was the danger, and how little the chance of escape, attending those who headed the forlorn band; but he was animated by no ordinary feelings, and spurred on by the most powerful of all human passions,—love and ambition. With these inspiring his soul, what is it that a brave man feels himself unequal to encounter and overcome? Ronald was also eager to distinguish himself, to gain the favour of the general, the applause of the troops, the freedom of Catalina, and the admiration—alas! he could no longer look for the love of Alice Lisle.

The brigade-major informed him (not forgetting to add a stave of the regulations thereto) that his namesake, Captain Stuart of the 50th regiment, had likewise sent his name as a candidate for the desperate honour, and had been of course accepted in consequence of his superior rank, adding that Sir Rowland would not forget Mr. Stuart in the next affair of the same kind, and that on the present occasion he might, if he chose, attend the storming-party as a supernumerary, as it was very likely the first fire would knock its leader on the head. With this Ronald was obliged to be contented,—rather chagrined, however, to find that he had exposed himself to the same danger, without a chance of obtaining the same honour.

During that day the ground was carefully examined and reconnoitred. The rugged bed of a dried-up stream, which led from the summits of the Lina to the Tagus at Almarez, was chosen as the surest line of route on the next occasion.

Almarez was a miserable little Spanish village, consisting of two rows of huts or cottages, leading to an ancient bridge, which had been recently blown up, but the want of which the French supplied by a strong pontoon, extending between their forts on each side of the river,—the one named Ragusa, and the other Napoleon. The latter *tête-du-pont* was strongly intrenched, and defended by nine pieces of heavy cannon and five hundred men: Ragusa was a regular

work, defended by an equal number of men and iron guns. A large square tower, rising in the midst like a keep, added greatly to the strength of the place.

After remaining for three days bivouacked among the solitary mountains of the Lina (a ridge or sierra which runs parallel with the Tagus,) about ten o'clock on the evening of the last the third column got under arms; and making a circuit among the hills under guidance of the priest, to avoid Miravete, arrived at the bed of the stream, which, in the darkness, was their surest guide to Almarez. But before reaching this place, either by the ignorance or treachery of their guide, they were again led astray, and spent another night marching about in the darkness and solitude of these dreary sierras. It was close on dawn of day before they gained the village of Almarez at the base of the hills, by descending the rough channel of the rill, a long and toilsome path, admitting but one file abreast, as the rocks rose abruptly on each side of it, and the passage was encumbered by large stones, projecting roots and trunks of fallen trees, which caused many of the soldiers to be hurt severely, by falling in the dark as they toiled on, bearing in addition to their arms the scaling-ladders, the hammers, levers, and other implements for the assault on the gates of the *tête-du-pont*.

The intention of taking Almarez by surprise was frustrated by the garrison in the castle of Miravete. General Chowne's column having made an assault on the outworks of the place, its soldiers, to alarm the forts at the bridge, sent off scores of rockets in fiery circles through the inky black sky; beacons of tar-barrels blazed on every turret, and red signal-lights glared in every embrasure of the embattled tower, purpling the sky above and the valley below, flaring on the hideous rents, yawning chasms, and precipitous fronts of the huge basaltic rocks among which it is situated, and some of which, covered with foliage, overhang the dark blue waters of the Tagus. In some places the basaltic crags reared their fronts to the height of several hundred feet above the straggling route of the third column. The scene was wild, splendid, picturesque, and impressively grand, such as few men have looked on,—the dark sky, the tremendous scenery, and the tower blazing with its various lights and fires, while the peals of musquetry from the assailants and the assailed reverberated among the hills, the outlines of which were now distinctly visible,—their sides dotted here and there by flocks of Merino sheep, goats, &c. which had escaped the forage-parties of the enemy.

General Hill was now perfectly aware that an attempt to carry the forts by surprise was frustrated, as the assault upon them all should have commenced at once; yet, relying on the mettle and chivalry of his gallant troops, worn out as they were by their night-marches, he did not hesitate to make the effort, although he knew that the garrisons of the *têtes-du-pont* would be under arms for his reception. Within an hour of day-break the three regiments had quitted their path, and formed in order at some little distance from the scene of intended operations.

All was still and dark. Before them lay the quiet little village of Almarez, with its orange trees and vineyards, and with its ruined bridge, the broad abutments and piers of the centre-arch of which hang over the Tagus, whose deep dark waters swept sluggishly on, rippling against the jarring and heaving boats of the pontoon bridge which the foe had thrown across the river a little lower down, and at each end of which appeared the rising mounds, crowned—the nearest by fort Napoleon, and that on the other side by the extended trenches and lofty tower of Ragusa.

All was singularly and ominously still within the forts: none appeared stirring except the sentries, whose figures against the sky were discerned moving to and fro on the bastions, or standing still to watch the lights of Miravete, which were yet blazing afar off among the dark mountains of the sierra.

Preparations were now made for the attack. The colours were uncased and thrown upon the breeze; the flints and priming were examined. The 6th regiment of the Portuguese line, and two companies of German riflemen under Captain Blacier, were ordered to form the *corps-de-reserve*, and moved behind a rising ground, which would cover them from the enemy's fire; while the three British regiments, formed in two columns, pressed forward pell-mell upon the *têtes-du-pont*. Now indeed was the moment of excitement, and the pulsation of every heart became quicker. But the soldiers placed the utmost reliance upon the skill and gallantry of their leader and colonels. At the head of the 50th regiment was Stuart, a man whose perfect coolness and apathy in the hottest actions surprised all, and formed a strong contrast to the enthusiastic spirit of gallant Cadogan of the Highland Light Infantry, and to the proud sentiments of chivalry, martial fire, and reckless valour which animated Cameron of Fassifern.

CHAPTER VII.

D'ESTOUVILLE.

"I have seen thee work up glacis and cavalier
 Steeper than this ascent, when cannon, culverin,
 Musquet, and hackbut shower'd their shot upon thee,
 And formed, with ceaseless blaze, a fiery garland
 Round the defences of the post you stormed."

The Ayrshire Tragedy. Act 1.

The storming-party, with their broad scaling-ladders, passed forward double-quick to the front.

"Heaven guide you, Ronald!" whispered Louis Lisle hurriedly, pressing the hand of Stuart as he passed the flank of his company.

"God bless you, Lisle! 'tis the last time we may look on each other's faces," replied the other, his heart swelling with sudden emotions of tenderness at this unexpected display of friendship, at such a time, and from one to whom he had long been as a stranger.

"*Maniez le drapeau! Vive l'Empereur! Apprêtez vos armes! Joue—feu!*" cried the clear voice of D'Estouville from the fort; and instantly a volley of musquetry broke over the dark line of breast-works, flashing like a continued garland of fire, showing the bronzed visages and tall grenadier caps of the old French Guard, while the waving tri-colour, like a banner of crape in the dark, was run up the flag-staff.

"*Vive l'Empereur! Cannoniers, commencez le feu!*" cried a hoarse voice from the angle of the epaule, and the roar of nine twenty-four pounders shook the Tagus in its bed, while crash came their volley of grape and canister like an iron tempest, sweeping one half of the storming-party into eternity, and strewing fragments of limbs, fire-locks, and ladders in every direction. A roar of musquetry from the British, and many a soul-stirring cheer, were the replies, and onward pressed the assailants, exposed to a tremendous fire of small arms from the bulwarks, and grape and cannon shot from the flanking bastions of the *tête-du-pont*, which mowed them down as a blast mows withered reeds.

When now, for the first time, the sharp hiss of cannon-shot, the groans of dying, and the shrieks of wounded men rang in his ears, it must be owned that Ronald Stuart experienced that peculiar sensation of thick and tumultuous beating in his heart, boundless and terrible curiosity, intense and thrilling excitement, which even the most brave and dauntless must feel when *first* exposed to the dangers of mortal strife. But almost instantly these emotions vanished, and his old dashing spirit of reckless daring and fiery valour possessed him. Captain Stuart had fallen dead at his feet without a groan,—shot through the head and heart by the first fire from the epaule, and Ronald, sword in hand, now led on the stormers.

"Follow me, gallants! and we will show them what the first brigade can do," cried he, leaping into the *avant-fosse*. A wild hurrah was his reply, and the soldiers rushed after him, crossing the ditch and planting their ladders against the stone face of the sloping glacis, exposed to a deadly fire from loop-hole, parapet, and embrasure, while the French kept shouting their war-cry of "Long live the Emperor!" and the voice of D'Estouville was heard above the din, urging them to keep up a rapid fire.

"Soldats,—*joue! Chargez vos armes,—joue! Vivat!*" echoed always by the hoarse voice of the artillery-officer from the bastion.

"Steady the ladder, Evan Bean Iverach," cried Stuart. "Keep close by me, and show yourself your father's son. God aid our steel! Follow me, soldiers,—forward!—Hurrah!" With his sword in his right hand, his bonnet in his left, and his dark hair waving about his face, he ascended the ladder fearlessly, and striking up the bayonets which bristled over the parapet, leaped upon it, brandished his sword, miraculously escaping the shower of shot which hailed around him. With dauntless bravery he sprang from the parapet among them, and instantly the French gave way before the irresistible stream of British troops who poured in upon them, and a desperate struggle took place—short, bloody, but decisive.

"Ah, mon Dieu! Raille—raille! soldats! Diable! Croisez la baïonnette!" shouted D'Estouville frantically,—setting his men the example by throwing himself headlong on the bayonets of the assailants,—but he was driven back, and his efforts were in vain; a score of ladders had been placed against the glacis at other places, and the works were stormed on almost every part at once. The defenders were driven back, but fighting with true French bravery for every inch of ground. The British assailed them with irresistible impetuosity, bearing them backwards with the charged bayonet, the clubbed musquet, the pike, and the sword. By the particular favour of Providence Ronald escaped the dangers of the forlorn hope, while the soldiers who composed his band were mown down like leaves in autumn; but while pressing forward among the enemy, two powerful grenadiers of *les Gardes Français* rushed upon him with their levelled bayonets, putting him in imminent peril. The pike of a serjeant of the 50th freed him of one assailant, and closing with the other, he dashed his head against the breech of a carronade, and passed his sword through the broad breast of a third who came up to his rescue, and the warm blood poured over the hand and blade of his conqueror, who now could scarcely keep his feet on the wooden platform surrounding the inner side of the breast-work, which was covered with blood and brains, and piled with dead and wounded—with drums, dismounted cannon, and broken weapons. The scene which was now presented, is far beyond my humble powers of description. The blaze of cannon and musquetry from Ragusa, at the other end of the pontoon bridge,—where the garrison fired at the risk of killing their comrades,—glared on the glassy bosom of the Tagus, tinging it with that red and golden colour so freely bestowed upon it by poets. But within the inner talus of the breast-work and bloody platform, the scene would have produced horror in one less excited than men contending hand to hand, and who regarded honour rather than life.

There lay the ghastly dead, cold and pale in the grey light of the morning,—across them in heaps the wounded, quivering with intensity of agony, grasping the gory ground with convulsive clutches, and tearing up the earth, which was

soon to cover them, in handfuls, while their eyes, starting from the sockets, were becoming glazed and terrible in death. Others, who had received wounds in less vital parts of the frame, were endeavouring to drag themselves from the press, or stanch their streaming blood, imploring those who neither heard or heeded them for "Water! water for the love of God!" Yells of sudden agony, the deep groan of the severely wounded and hoarse death-rattle of the dying men, mingled and were lost in the tumultuous shouts of the French, the steady and hearty cheers of the British, the clash of steel, the tramp of feet and discharge of musquetry, the notes of the wild war pipes of the 71st and 92nd, which were blown loud enough to awaken the heroes of Selma in their tombs. Many acts of personal heroism were performed on both sides before the enemy were fairly driven from their works, for which they fought with the characteristic bravery of their gallant nation.

But longer contention would have been madness. The right wing of the Highland Light Infantry, and the whole of the 50th regiment, poured in upon them like a flood: the whole place was captured in the course of *fifteen minutes*, and its garrison driven into the little square formed by their barracks, and into the bastion from which their imperial tri-colour flung its folds over the conflict.

"On! Forward! Capture the colours before they are destroyed!" was now the cry; and hundreds, following Colonel Stuart of the 50th, pressed forward into the bastion, across the demi-gorge of which the enemy had cast bundles of fascines, composed of billets of wood, baskets of earth, &c., over which they presented their bayonets, and kept up a rapid fire.

Still eager to distinguish himself, Ronald pressed on by the side of the colonel of the 50th, and while endeavouring to break the hedge of steel formed by the enemy's bayonets, he was thrust in among them and borne to the ground, and his campaigns would probably have ended there, had not Evan Iverach, at the peril of his life, plunged over the fascines after him, and borne to the earth a French officer, whose sabre was descending on his master's head.

The athletic Highlander pinned the Gaul to the earth, and unsheathing a skene-dhu (black knife), drove it through the breast of his discomfited foe.

"*Nombril de Belzebub! Les sauvages Ecossais! Sacre bleu! Camarades, sauvez-moi!*"—but his comrades had barely time to save themselves from the tide of armed men, who poured through the gap which Evan and his master had formed.

"Hurrah, Highlanders!" cried the stentorian voice of Campbell from another part of the works, where he appeared on foot at the head of his company (he was major by brevet) armed with a long Highland dirk in addition to his formidable Andrea Ferrara. "Hurrah! brave hearts! Give them Egypt over again! Mount the platform, lads! slue round the cannon, and blow their skulls off!" A hundred active Highlanders obeyed the order. The twenty-four pounders were

reversed, loaded, pointed, and fired in a twinkling, sending a tremendous volley of grape-shot among the dense mass which crowded the dark square, from which arose a yell such as might come from the regions of the damned, mingled with the gallant cry of "*Vive l'Empereur!*"

"Well done, brave fellows! Load and fire again! there's plenty of grape! Another dose! Give it them!—hurra!" cried the inexorable Campbell again. The effects of the second volley were indeed appalling, as, from the elevation of the platform, the shot actually blew off the skulls of the unfortunate French in scores. This was the decisive stroke. The bastion and square were alike abandoned, and all rushed towards the Tagus, to cross and gain the tower of Ragusa; but the garrison of that place, on finding that fort Napoleon was captured and its guns turned on them by the German artillery, to ensure their own retreat destroyed that of their comrades, by cutting the pontoon bridge. D'Estouville's troops had now no alternative but to surrender themselves prisoners of war.

So enthusiastic were the soldiers while flushed with excitement and victory, that, following the bold example of Evan Bean, numbers swam the Tagus, and from the other side fired after the fugitive garrison of Ragusa.

"Surrender, noble D'Estouville! Resistance is unavailing," cried Ronald to his old acquaintance, who with his back against the colour-staff, surrounded by corpses and scattered fascines, stood on his guard, with his proud dark eyes flashing fire under his grenadier cap. He was resolute apparently to die, but never to surrender to force.

"Halt! keep back, soldiers!" said Stuart, striking down a ridge of threatening pikes and bayonets. "He will surrender to me. Yield, gallant D'Estouville! you may now do so without a shadow of dishonour."

But he seemed to have forgotten the speaker, as he only replied by a blow and a thrust.

"He is a gallant fellow!" said Fassifern, tossing the bridle of his horse to an orderly, and making his way through the press. "Save him, if possible, Stuart! *Monsieur, rendez votre épée, vos armes?*"

"*Monsieur*, permit me to retain my sword, and I will surrender; 'tis but *le droit de la guerre?*"

"Certainly, sir, if it is your wish."

"*Croix Dieu!* Cursed fortune! So soon again to be a captive! Surely, I was born under some evil star!"

"*Monsieur*," replied Cameron, "you have behaved most nobly in this affair. The glory of the vanquished is scarcely less than that of the victors." The Frenchman was subdued by the well-timed flattery, and laying his hand upon his breast, answered by a bow.

"*Mon ami*, to you I render myself. *C'est un aimable roué*," said D'Estouville,

laying his hand familiarly on Ronald's epaulet while sheathing his sword; "I become a prisoner without shame. The great Emperor might yield himself without dishonour to you, my old friend; and in truth I would rather surrender to a descendant of the ancient friends of France than to your southern neighbours, for with them a sea of blood will never quench our enmity. *Croix Dieu!* what is this? The base cowards in Ragusa have cut off the retreat of my soldiers! Ah! false Monsieur de Mesmai, the Emperor shall hear of this. *Diable!*"

A proud and peculiar smile shot over his features as the soldiers pulled down the tri-colour, and bore it off as a trophy from the bastion. He folded his arms, and leaning against the flagstaff, surveyed the ebbing conflict apparently with the utmost coolness and perfect nonchalance; but the quivering of his moustached lip showed the workings of his heart, though he endeavoured to conceal them.

With many a cry of "*Faites bonne guerre, messieurs les Ecossais! Quartier—quartier! Les lois de la guerre, messieurs.*" The discomfited enemy clamorously demanded to be taken as prisoners of war, as the firing had now ceased every where; and they often called aloud on "*les Ecossais,*" probably from seeing that the majority of their conquerors wore the kilt and trews of tartan.

"*Soldats, vos armes à terre,*" cried the crestfallen D'Estouville over the parapet of the bastion; and, as one man, the shattered remains of the gallant garrison grounded their arms, while a strong party of the Gordon Highlanders, with fixed bayonets, surrounded them as a guard.

CHAPTER VIII.

CATALINA.

"I proclaim,
Through all the silent streets Creüsa's name:
Creüsa still I call: at length she hears,
And sudden through the shades of night appears."
Æneis, book 2.

It was now clear daylight, and over heaps of dead and wounded which were stretched around, lying across each other, as Evan said, 'like herrins in a keg,'

Ronald went in search of Catalina through the buildings composing the barracks, which were arranged in the form of a square. At every turn his passage was encumbered by the miserable victims of the morning's carnage, mostly French, as the majority of the British killed and wounded fell in the *avant-fosse*. Here lay the war-worn and grey-haired grenadier of the Guard, seamed with the scars of Austerlitz and Jena, blowing the bells of froth and blood from his quivering lip, and scowling defiance with his glazing eye at the passer. Beside or across him lay the muscular Highlander, his bare legs drenched in gore, casting looks of imploring helplessness, craving "Maister Stuart, for the love o' the heevin aboon them, to bring the wee'st drop of water, or send some ane to stanch their bluid." Here lay one Frenchman with his skull shot away and brains scattered about,—another cut in two by a round shot, and scores, otherwise torn to pieces by Campbell's terrible volley from the platform, lying in long lines, which marked the lane made by the course and radius of each discharge of grape, and the whole place swam with blood and brains—a horrible puddle, like the floor of a slaughter-house.

All this was as nothing to witnessing the frightful agonies of the wretched wounded and dying, goaded with the most excruciating pain, choking in their blood,—their limbs quivering in extremity of torture, while they shrieked the eternal cry of "water!" and shrieked in vain. Ronald pressed forward almost without heeding them,—war for a time sears and hardens the heart in no common degree, even against the utmost accumulation of human wretchedness; but he certainly was rather appalled at the appearance of a soldier of the 50th foot, who had crawled away into a corner to die unseen. A musquet-shot had passed through his neck, in its way injuring the root of the tongue, which was hanging from his mouth, swollen, livid, and blue like that of a cow, presenting a hideous and disgusting sight, from which young Stuart, although his fiery heart was beating with the tumult of the late fray, and his red blade dripped with the signs of it, turned away in horror. Little know our peaceful and plodding citizens at home of the miseries of war!

In search of Donna Catalina, Ronald wandered every where through the deserted and confused quarters of the enemy, but she was no where to be found; and he was about to cross the river and search the tower of Ragusa, or question D'Estouville, when drums beating in the square called him to the parade of the regiment.

It was now a beautiful morning, and the rising sun shed its lustre on the ridges of the Lina and windings of the bright Tagus. At their base, in the pure bosom of the glassy river, the trees and vineyards, cottages and ruined bridge of Almaraz, the bastions of fort Napoleon and black tower of Ragusa, were reflected downwards as clearly as if in some huge mirror. Above them the morning mist from the cork woods and the smoke of fire-arms from the forts, mingling together

and ascending in volumes, melted away on the thin breezy air. Long and loud blew pipe and bugle, mustering the troops in the square of the *tête-du-pont*; but many who had marched to them merrily yesterday, lay stark and stiff now, and heard their blast no more. The military store-houses of the enemy had been broken open and given over to pillage, and skins of wine, bottles of rum, and kegs of French brandy were to be had for the broaching. Barrels were staved, and hams, rounds of beef, etc. were tossed by the soldiers from one to another, and borne aloft in triumph on the points of bloody bayonets, and every man filled his haversack with such provisions as he could lay his hands on.

When this scene of tumult and disorder was ended, the capturers of the fort Napoleon were mustered in the barrack-square, to receive the thanks of General Hill for the steadiness and dashing gallantry of their conduct throughout the assault. The soldiers burned to give the fine old fellow three hearty cheers, but discipline withheld them.

Addressing himself to Ronald in particular, he thanked him for the dauntless manner in which, on Captain Stuart's fall, he had led the assault. While the general spoke, Ronald felt his heart glowing with the most unalloyed delight, and the reward of being thus publicly thanked before his comrades, was sufficient for the dangers he had dared and overcome. "How proud," thought he, "will the people at the old tower of Lochisla be, when they hear of this day's work! And Alice Lisle—surely she—"

Here the soft and plaintive voice of one well known to him broke the chain of his thoughts.

"*O Señor Don Ronald! O por amor de Dios!*" exclaimed Catalina with sudden joy, "for the love of the holy Virgin protect me!"

"For the love of yourself, rather, fair Catalina," said he, advancing from the flank of his company to where he saw her kneeling on the ground between the close ranks of German rifles, who beheld her distress with sullen apathy. How beautiful she looked then! Her white hands were clasped in an agony of terror, and her long glossy hair rolled in dishevelled ringlets about her fine neck and shoulders. He raised her from the ground.

"Catalina," said he, "I cannot leave my post to see you from the fort; but do me the favour to take my arm,—and pray do not be so agitated. There is no danger now."

"O no,—with you I am safe," she replied with a delightful smile of entire confidence, which caused a thrill to pass through Ronald's heart as she placed her arm in his. "*O amigo mio!* what a terrible morning this has been! How terrified I have felt since the roar of the cannon roused me from bed. And you have escaped! Praise be to the Virgin for it! she heard my prayers. Ah! how I trembled for you, when I saw from a loop-hole the black plumes of your regiment."

Ronald pressed the little hand which lay on his arm, but he knew not what to say. A tremor of softness and joy filled his heart, causing him to turn with disgust from the objects of bloodshed and strife that lay every where around, and his eyes rested on the donna's radiant features with a pleasure which he had never known till then. How agreeable it was to hear the frank girl talking in this way!

"*O santa Maria!*" she exclaimed with a shudder, after a pause, "I can scarcely look around me, so many fearful sights present themselves everywhere to my eye,—sights of which we knew nothing at happy Merida, before the false Napoleon crossed the Pyrenees."

"With God's help, and our good steel, Catalina, we will drive his legions back again,—or into the sea at Bayonne; and then again at Merida the fandango, the bolero and waltz—"

"*Amigo mio*, señor! you speak as might become the Cid Rodrigo; but although your hand may be as stout, and your sword as long as his, why be so rash? How you leaped over the parapet, among the horrid bayonets of the French—"

"You saw me, then," said Ronald with delight. "And trembled for you."

"How fortunate I am to have your good wishes! I dare say you are very happy at being freed from this place?"

"O very—very! But surely it was not on my account that all this frightful work has been made. Perhaps you have heard how I was carried off from Merida?"

"Yes; and I cannot express the uneasiness the relation gave me."

"A French officer, a Major D'Estouville, carried me off across his saddle a captive maiden, by force, as any fierce Moor of Grenada would have done long ago. I have been since a prisoner here."

"Well, but this D'Estouville—"

"Such a gay cavalier he is! But I was very tired of him, and longed to be at pleasant Merida with its sunny Prado and orange groves, instead of this dull, guarded fort, with its bulwarks and ditches, cannon and gates. I was much annoyed by Monsieur D'Estouville's speeches and protestations; but 'tis all at an end now, and I trust he has escaped, though I wish not to see his face again. Do you know if he is safe?"

"I saved his life but an hour since," replied Ronald, the pique which he felt at her first observations disappearing. "But I do not see him among the prisoners," he added, examining the sullen and disarmed band as they marched past out of the fort, surrounded by their armed escort commanded by Louis Lisle, from whose cheek the blood was trickling from a sabre wound, which he heeded not.

The officers on parole uncovered their heads on passing the young lady, who now, when her terror was over, began naturally to feel abashed and confused

to find herself leaning on an officer's arm on a military parade, exposed to the gaze of several regiments.

"Oh, I trust he has escaped; 'twere a thousand pities if so sprightly a soldado should be injured."

"On my word, if you take so great an interest in this rash Frenchman, I shall feel quite jealous."

"You have no reason, senor. I tell you I never wish to see his face again, though it is a very handsome one," responded the donna with an air of pique, while a purple blush crossed her features. "Holy Mary, would I had my veil here! To be thus gazed at—"

"Here comes one may give us some information. Macdonald, where is the French commandant,—D'Estouville; the young man with the bear-skin cap and crimson feather?"

"With his fathers, I believe, poor fellow. He was a gallant soldier as ever drew sword," replied Alister, who at that moment came past and paid his respects to Donna Catalina, whom he was not a little surprised to see amidst the ranks of the Highlanders leaning on Ronald's arm, while her long beautiful tresses streamed about like those of some wood-nymph or goddess.

"I rejoice to see you in safety, senora. I heard of your being in the hands of the enemy,—indeed it made so deep an impression on my *bon camarade*, that he could not keep it a secret. Faith, Stuart," he added in a whisper, "you have picked up something more precious than a skin of Malaga, or a keg of French *eau de vie*."

"Stay, Alister," replied the other, with an air of displeasure; "a truce to raillery. I am sorry to see you wounded."

"A few inches of skin ripped up,—a mere nothing," said Macdonald, whose arm was slung in his sash. "I received it from the bayonet of a fine old grenadier, whom Angus Mackie has sent to his long home."

"Well, but the commandant—"

"Poor fellow! I am sorry for his fate,—he seemed so gallant and reckless."

"The devil, man! what has happened?"

"Have you not heard?"

"No: he yielded himself to me, with permission to retain his sword."

"Better had he tossed it into the Tagus! Scarcely had you left him, when up came that fiery borderer Armstrong, of the 71st, (at least I have heard that it was Armstrong,) demanding his sword, not being aware of the terms on which he had rendered himself prisoner. The Frenchman, D'Estouville I think you call him, either could not or would not comprehend him; and Armstrong, by a single stroke of his sword, cleft his skull through the thick grenadier cap."

An exclamation of rage and impatience broke from Ronald, and of pity from Catalina, who clasped her hands and raised her dark melancholy eyes to heaven,

while he cast an angry and searching glance along the ranks of the Highland Light Infantry.

"Sir Rowland Hill," continued Alister, "regrets this unfortunate circumstance very much, and has sent him off in a bullock-car to Merida, in charge of a French medical officer liberated on his parole. But I must bid you adieu, as our company is ordered to assist Thiele, the German engineer, to destroy the tower and bastions of Ragusa. Heaven knows how we shall accomplish it:—it looks as massive as the old pile of Maoial in the western isles."

"What is that villanous priest about?" said Ronald when Macdonald had withdrawn, and he saw their guide, with the grey cassock bedaubed with blood, busying himself about the prostrate dead and wounded. "Surely he is not plundering. Prick him with your bayonet, Macpherson, and drive him off."

"O no, senor, Heaven forbid!" said the young lady hurriedly. "He must be confessing, or endeavouring to convert some, before they die and are lost for ever."

"Scarcely, Catalina," replied Ronald, seeing they were men of the 71st. "These are true Presbyterians, from a place called Glasgow in my country, and would as soon hearken to the devil as a Roman Catholic priest."

"How good must be the priest who endeavours to gain the dying soldier from the hot grasp of *Satanas*!" said the lady, not comprehending him. "Call him, Don Ronald; I have not confessed since I left Merida."

"What sins can you have to confess, Catalina? Besides, I do not like this fellow. But since you look so imploringly, and desire it so much, I will bring him to you. But let him beware. Ho! reverend *gobernador*! *Senor padre* of the *Convento de todos Santos*, let alone the havresacks of dead men, and come hither."

The priest, starting from his occupation, crossed his hands upon his breast, and came stalking slowly towards them, with his head enveloped in his cope, and his cross and rosary dangling before him.

Catalina, wearied with excess of agitation and the want of sleep, was anxious to procure a female attendant, and to be sent to the village of Almarez, from which she hoped to find some means of travelling to the residence of her cousin and sister, Donna Inesella. And as Ronald's duties at that time required his being alone, he sent her off on Major Campbell's horse, accompanied by the priest and Evan Iverach, whom he desired to see her safe in the best house of the village, and to remain with her until he could come in the evening. Immediately on means being procured to convey the suffering wounded to the rear in blankets, bullock-carts, hurdles of branches, crossed pikes, etc., the forts were ordered by Sir Rowland Hill to be completely destroyed. Eighteen pieces of cannon were spiked and cast into the Tagus. The dead British and French, friend and foe, the victors and the vanquished, found one common grave. About four hundred

corses were tossed into the *avant-fosse*—arms, accoutrements, and every thing, for burial, and a horrible pile they formed, lying heaped over each other like fish in a net. The heavy stone parapets, the *revêtement* and earthen works were thrown over on them, for the double purpose of covering them up and to dismantlement the place. Gates, palisades, and bridges were destroyed, and barracks and store-houses given to the flames, consuming in one universal blaze of destruction every thing that could not be carried off.

Ragusa was destroyed by the German artillery, who lodged a quantity of powder in the vaults of the tower, to demolish it effectually by explosion. Lieutenant Thiele, a German officer of engineers, having fired the train, and found that the powder in the vaults did not explode, entered the chamber where it lay, to ascertain the reason. At that instant it blew up, carrying the unfortunate man into the air, amidst a cloud of dust and stones.

From battlement to foundation the massive stone tower, burst and rent, tottered for an instant, and then sunk like a house of cards, but with a mighty crash, which shook the frail cottages of the adjacent village. A shower of stones and mortar was scattered in every direction, and the mangled corse of Thiele fell into the river many yards off, and sunk to the bottom unheeded and uncared for.

Such was the storming of Almaraz, which took place on the 18th May, 1812; and for the capture of which Sir Rowland, afterwards Lord Hill, received the title of Baron Almaraz of the Tagus.

As soon as the laborious work of destruction was completed, the troops were marched from the ruined forts, with their colours flying and drums beating; and ascending the hills of the Lina to the distance of about half a league, bivouacked on their grassy sides. As they retired, Ronald looked back to the place where so many had found a tomb, and where, but for another destiny, he might have found his. Under the mounds made by the levelled ramparts lay the mangled remains of men, who but a few hours before were in life, and in the full enjoyment of health and spirits. A cloud of dust and smoke yet hung over the ruins, between which the glassy Tagus was flowing still and clear, with its surface glowing in the full splendour of the meridian sun,—flowing onwards as it had done a thousand years before, and as it will do a thousand after those who fought and died at Almaraz are forgotten!

Leaving the bivouac on the mountain-side, where fires were lighting and preparations making to regale on what had been found in the stores of the enemy, Ronald, immediately on arms being 'piled,' returned to the village, which he found almost deserted by the population, who were rummaging and searching about the ruins of the forts for whatever they could lay their hands on, heedless of the lamentations made by the widows of some of the slain, who hovered near the uncouth tomb of their husbands.

At the door of a dilapidated cottage, the walls and roof of which appeared to be held together solely by the thick masses of vine and wild roses clambering about them, Ronald found Evan busied in cleaning his musquet and harness, which were, of course, soiled with the morning's strife, and chanting the while his favourite "Keek into the draw-well," &c., to drown the monotonous Ave-Maria of an old blind village matron, who was telling over her rosary while she sat on a turf by the door, warming herself in the rays of the bright sun.

He entered softly the desolate earth-floored apartment in which Donna Catalina was awaiting his return. In one corner, with his hands as usual meekly crossed over his bosom, stood the burly and disagreeable figure of the priest,—disagreeable because there was a sort of mystery attached to him, which the shapeless appearance of his garments, and the custom of wearing a cowl instead of a scull-cap or shovel-hat, tended not a little to increase; and Ronald, as a Scotsman and thorough Presbyterian, was naturally not over-fond of any one connected with

"The Palp, that pagan fu' o' pride,"

and consequently he bestowed on the apparently unconscious padre a stern look of scrutiny and distrust. At a little square opening, that served the purpose of a window, and around which the clustering grapes and roses formed a rural curtain, Catalina was seated with her soft pale cheek resting on her hand, which was almost hidden among the heavy curls, the hue of which contrasted with its whiteness. Her dark eyes were intently fixed on the green mountains of the Lina, where the British bivouac was visible. The scabbard of Stuart's claymore jarring on the tiles of the floor, roused her from her reverie, and a rich blush suffused her face, from her temples to her dimpled chin, as she advanced towards him in her usual confiding and frank manner, and passed her arm through his.

"The reverend father will perhaps retire, and keep the old patrona at the door company in her devotions," said Ronald after some conversation and the monk immediately withdrew.

"Ah! *senor mio*," said Catalina in a gentle tone of deprecation, "why do you treat the poor priest so haughtily?"

"I do not like him, Catalina—on my honour I do not; and I believe there is no love lost between us. I could have sworn I saw the cross hilt of a dagger glitter under the cope of his cassock, as he withdrew just now."

"His crucifix, perhaps."

"He told me he carried a dagger, when I confronted him in the wood of Jarciejo."

"Well, 'tis very probable he bears it in these sad times for protection; he can

scarcely gain any from cross or cope now. He says he is Father Jerome, of the convent of All Saints at Merida. I think I have heard his voice before: he has not shown his face, as he says a vow compels him to conceal it. But indeed you *must* be respectful to him. The noblest hidalgos and cavaliers in my country respect the poorest Franciscan."

"The meanest clown in mine, Catalina, cares not a rush for the Pope and all his cardinals."

"*Madre-Maria!* I will not listen to you," said she, placing her hand on his mouth. "You must not talk thus; 'tis very sinful. But, alas! you know not the sin of it. Ah! senor, if you love me," she added, blushing deeply, "if you love me as you have said you do, speak not so again."

"Love you, Catalina!" replied the young man, intoxicated with the tenderness of the expression, while he drew her towards him.

"Oh, stay,—what—who is that?" said the lady hurriedly, as the room became suddenly darkened.

"'Tis only that cursed priest."

"Surely it was a British officer; his epaulets glittered among the vine leaves."

"Was I to find the padre eaves-dropping, his cassock would scarcely save him from a good caning."

"Alas! that would be most foul sacrilege. But speaking of him, reminds me of a plan we had formed just before you came in. I mean to put myself under his escort, and to travel to Truxillo, where the alcalde, or my mother's brother, Don Gonzago de Conquesta, will find me a proper escort to Idanha-a-Velha, where you say my cousin Inesella resides."

"And think you I will entrust you the length of Truxillo with this dubious character,—a priest with a poniard in his robe?"

"*Amigo mio,*" said she, pouting prettily, "surely I can dispose of myself as I please?"

"Catalina, a thousand times I have told you that I prize your safety before my own," said Ronald, kissing her forehead. "I will myself travel with you to Idanha-a-Velha."

"I thank you, but it may not be. I may travel with a padre; but the rules of society would not permit the cavalier or soldado to be my patron or guardian."

"But this priest—"

"You judge of him harshly, indeed. I assure you that he prays very devoutly, and I can trust myself with him without fear, especially for so short a distance as from this to Truxillo. I have no fear of the French, and neither robber nor guerilla in Spain will insult the relative of so famous a cavalier as Don Alvaro de Villa Franca. Ah! had Alvaro lived in the days when Spain was most glorious, when her chivalry were the first in Europe, his deeds would have out-vied even

those of the Cid."

Ronald's indecision in this matter was ended by the arrival of an orderly, saying that the colonel wished to see him as soon as possible.

"What a confounded predicament!" exclaimed the impatient Ronald when the Highlander was gone. "I do not half like entrusting you with this cunning priest; and yet I must,—there is no alternative. I believe I am selected by Sir Rowland Hill to carry the account of this victorious morning to Lord Wellington; and as I cannot protect you myself, I must resign you to him."

Ronald racked his invention to find other schemes, but the young lady had made up her mind, and was obstinate in consequence; therefore her cavalier had to submit, and make such arrangements for her departure as would enable him to repair immediately to Fassifern.

A few *duros* procured D'Estouville's splendid black charger from a Portuguese caçadore, whose share of plunder it had become, and a side-saddle was placed upon it for the lady. The priest had his stout mule, and another was procured for a ruddy brown-cheeked *paisana* or young peasant girl, whom Catalina had engaged to accompany her by the way as a female attendant, and who, although she had a proper saddle, thought it did not in the least savour of want of *vergüenza* (modesty) to ride, *à la cavalier*, in the Spanish manner.

Ronald having got all these matters arranged satisfactorily with promptitude and dispatch, returned to bid adieu to Catalina, who drooped upon his shoulder, and gave way to a passion of tears.

He was so much agitated by this display of affection and tenderness, that he could scarcely persuade himself to separate from her, and with difficulty restrained a strong inclination to make some rash and formal proposal. But, as he pressed his lip to her pale cheek, he assured her that he would in a very short time obtain leave of absence, and visit her at Idanha-a-Velha.

But for some faint hopes and lingering love for Alice Lisle, Ronald would at this exciting moment have brought matters to a climax with the beautiful donna; and if it is possible for the heart to have *two* loves at once, his was certainly in that singular predicament. His case is truly described in the words of the Scottish song,—

"My heart is divided between them,
I dinna ken which I wad hae;
Right willingly my heart I wad gien them,
But how can I gie it to twae?

My heart it is rugged and tormented,
I'd live wi' or die for them baith;

I've dune what I've often repented,
To baith I have plighted my aith."

They were reclining in the recess of the opening or window, through which

the vines straggled. Poor Catalina, as the hour of departure drew nigh, no longer cared to conceal the sentiments of her heart, but hung on Ronald's breast; while he returned her embrace with ardour, and their glossy hair mingled together in the bright sunshine. At that moment the door was opened, and Louis Lisle entered abruptly.

Having delivered over his prisoners to a cavalry guard among the mountains, he had returned hastily to Almarez, anxious to see Ronald Stuart, and bring about that long-delayed reconciliation and explanation for which he so much yearned,—the few words spoken before the forts were stormed having, to use a common-place phrase, 'broken the ice between them.' Full of this frank intention, Lisle, after searching the village, had found the cottage where Ronald was; and entering with that unceremonious freedom, which is learned by a residence in camp or quarters, found, to his no small surprise and indignation, that there was one more there than he expected.

Catalina started from Ronald's arm, and hid her blushing cheek in arranging the masses of her luxuriant hair. Ronald eyed the unwelcome intruder with a look of surprise, which he was at no pains to conceal; while the latter gave him a fierce glance of impatience, anger, and dislike; and muttering,—"Pardon me. I am, I believe, under a mistake, which will be explained when I have a fitting time and place," he withdrew as hastily as he had entered.

Scarcely had he retired, when the monk of Merida brought his mule and Catalina's horse to the door of the cottage. The lady fastened on her sombrero, with its long veil and white feather. Ronald tied the ribbons of the velvet mantilla, and leading her to the door, assisted her to mount.

Her new attendant, the black-eyed paisana,—all blushes and smiles of pleasure at the prospect of a Badajoz hat with a silver band, a pelisse and frock of the best cloth from Arrago-de-Puerco, trimmed with lace, etc., which her lady had promised her,—appeared mounted, as we have before described, upon a mule, the housings of which were better than the friar's, which consisted entirely of rope.

Poor Victor D'Estouville's black war-steed still had its embossed bit and military bridle, with the outspread wings of the Imperial eagle on its forehead and rich martingale,—which, with the saddle-cloth, embroidered with the badges of the old Guard, formed a strange contrast with the faded side-pad of coarse Zafra leather, which was girthed on it for the lady's accommodation.

When they had departed, he watched their retiring figures as long as they

were in sight, until a turn of the road, as they entered the now deserted pass of Miravete at a gallop, hid them from his view, and he turned towards the bivouac on the mountain side, feeling a heaviness of heart and presentiment of approaching evil, caused probably by a re-action of the spirits after the fierce excitement of the morning, but for which, at that moment, he could not account. His distrust of the padre Jerome, the guide, increased when he recalled and reviewed many suspicious and singular points of his character.

Communing with himself, he was slowly ascending the slope towards the bivouac, forgetting altogether the orders of the colonel, and turning now and then to view the little village of Almarez, embosomed among the umbrageous groves that grew around it, and far up the sides of the undulating Lina behind; the winding Tagus flowing in front, and the vast expanse of landscape and blue sky beyond, were all pleasing objects, and he gazed upon them with the delight of one who knew how to appreciate their beauty. He was aroused from his reverie by hearing his own name called, and on looking about, saw, to his surprise, Major Campbell, reposing his bulky frame in a little grassy hollow. His neck was bare, his coat was unbuttoned, and his belt, sash, etc., lay scattered about. Near him his horse was grazing quietly, but the major seemed inflamed by the utmost anger and excitement. Ronald advanced hastily towards him, and perceived that his servant, Jock Pentland, was dressing a wound on his neck, which was covered with blood.

"What has happened, Campbell?"

"Such an affair as never happened before, even in Egypt," replied the other furiously, with a mighty oath—sworn in Gaelic, however.

"Nothing very bad, I hope?"

"Only a stab in the neck, three inches by one!"

"I knew not that you were wounded. Surely I saw you safe and sound after the mine was sprung at Ragusa. But I had better send the surgeon, or Stuart his assistant, to you."

"Oh, no! 'tis a mere scratch, which I would not value a brass bodle, had I received it during the brush this morning; but to gain it as I did,—d—n it! it excites all my fury. Did you see that blasted friar?"

"The guide? I left him but an hour ago. But who wounded you? Surely not the priest?"

"An old acquaintance of yours."

"Of mine!"

"Of yours, by the Lord! The rascal is disguised as a priest of the *Convento de todos Santos* at Merida. A short time ago I met the rogue leading a mule this way: his face was bare,—I knew him instantly and strove to capture him, that the provost-marshal might in time become acquainted with his throat, which I

grasped. Quick as lightning he unsheathed a poniard, and dealt a blow at my neck, which alighting luckily on my gorget, glanced upwards, giving me a severe cut under the ear."

"Misery! You have not yet told his name."

"Are you really so dull as not yet to have guessed who he is? Tighten the bandage, Jock! I knew the cheat-the-woodie as well as I would have done old Mohammed Djedda, Osmin Djihoun the shoe-maker at Grand Cairo, or any queer carle it has been my luck to meet in campaigning. But come to the bivouac, and I will give you a detailed account of the matter over the contents of a keg of especial good *eau de vie*, which it was my luck to capture this morning."

"Tis Cifuentes! Powers above! and to him—a bandit and murderous bravo, have I entrusted the guidance of Don Alvaro's sister! I must follow and rescue her from this monster, ere worse may come of it."

"What is all this? Of what do you speak?" said the major, struck with wonder at the other's vehemence and emotion.

"How shall I follow them? Withered be my hand, that it struck not the cowl from his accursed visage, and discovered him ere he outwitted me in such a manner!"

"By the tomb of the Campbells, he has a bee in his bonnet!" continued the major with increased wonder; while even Jock Pentland (a hard-featured Lowlander with high cheek-bones) stayed his employment to stare at him.

"What tempted the villain to come hither, disguised as a priest?"

"The reward offered by Sir Rowland for a guide,—and perhaps he had some design against your life. He bears you no good will."

"As he has failed in that by my vigilance, the brunt of his hate will fall with double fury on Donna Catalina, to whose noble brother he is an especial foe. This caused the presentiment, the secret feeling of coming evil, which has haunted me this whole morning; and truly, it was not for nought. Major, my resolution is taken: I will set off across the hills in pursuit of them this instant. You must lend me your horse, and make the best excuse for me you can to the colonel, as I shall not be back till to-morrow perhaps. Ho! now for the chase! Narvaez is likely to find a cairn among the mountains, if he comes within reach of my sword."

He leaped upon Campbell's horse while speaking, and urging it towards the hills was away in a moment, while the proprietor sprung from the ground, exclaiming hastily, "Holloa! ho, man! What, the devil, is the fellow mad? Halt, Stuart! By heavens! he will break his neck, and the horse's wind, if he rides at that rate. And what shall I do without my horse? I must visit the guards to-night on foot. What on earth can the fellow mean? Surely the uproar of this morning's assault has crazed him! You remember, Pentland, that two of the *Tow-rows*[*]

went mad outright after the battle of Alexandria, when we were in Egypt with Sir Ralph.”

[*] A familiar name for the grenadiers, as *Light-bobs* for the light infantry, and *Flat-foots* for the battalion men. These old mess-room phrases are going out of the service now.

Heedless alike of the cries, threats, and entreaties which the major sent after him in a voice of no measured compass, on went Ronald, flying at full speed through the bivouac of the 50th regiment, plunging right through a large fire, scattering burning billets, camp-kettles, cook's ration-meat, &c. in every direction. Overturning soldiers and piles of arms in his progress, he drove recklessly on with headlong speed towards the pass of Miravete, down the deep dark gorge of which he galloped just when the purple sun was dipping beyond the western horizon, and the notes of the bugles sounding the evening "retreat" died away on the breeze behind him.

Onward he rode along the narrow mountain-path, the hills becoming darker and loftier, the overhanging crags more awful and precipitous on each side as they heaved their black fronts over the road, filled with yawning fissures and rents, growing black in the gloom of the evening. But these had no terrors for the Scotsman,—he heeded not the increasing depth of the shadows, or the wild appearance of the basaltic rocks; he kept his eye fixed on the windings of the road, but no trace could he discover of those of whom he was in pursuit. The line of march was dotted with wounded soldiers, straggling on to Merida, (whither they had been ordered to retire,) and some were dying on the road, unable to proceed further, while others had expired outright, and were lying neglected by the way-side.

Ronald returned not that evening, and when the troops were paraded next day he was still absent; and the major's account of the singular manner in which he galloped off among the mountains in no way tended to lessen the anxiety which his friends felt at his unaccountable absence. Cameron, who was a strict disciplinarian, was very indignant, and resolved that the moment he did return, he should be deprived of his sword and put under arrest. The despatch and captured colours of the fortress, together with General Hill's earnest recommendation of Ronald, which it was intended he should have carried to Lord Wellington himself, were sent in charge of Captain Bevan. The same day the victors of Almaraz retired, to rejoin the rest of the division at Almendralejo, where Sir William Erskine (who had been left in command) expected hourly to be attacked by Marshal Soult, whose troops, however, never appeared, but kept close within their

cantonments in the neighbouring province.

Nine days elapsed before the regiments rejoined the division, and no word was yet heard of the missing Stuart, although every inquiry was made at Villa Maria, San Pedro, and Medellin, where they made long halts. He was given over by his friends as a lost man, and poor Evan Iverach was well nigh demented.

CHAPTER IX. THE MATADOR.

"Her neck is bared, the blow is struck,
The soul has passed away;
The bright, the beautiful is now
A bleeding piece of clay."

Summer and Winter Hours.

Ronald rode at a rapid gallop along the wild mountain-path which I have already described. The evening was growing dark, and in that solitary place the sound of the horse's hoofs alone broke the death-like stillness, and awoke the echoes of the frowning rocks.

In one place lay dead a poor soldier of the 50th regiment. His wife and three little children were clinging to his corpse, and lamenting bitterly. Night was closing around them, and the desolate creatures seemed terrified at its approach in such a wild spot, and called to Ronald loudly as he rode past; but he was too eager to overtake Catalina and her dangerous companion, to waste time unnecessarily. But he made an involuntary stop a little further on, where a soldier of his own company, a smart young fellow, named Archibald Logan, lay writhing in agony across the road, with the dust of which his blood was mixing as it oozed in heavy drops from a wound in the breast,—a musquet-shot having passed through his left shoulder-belt. Ronald reined-in the animal he rode, to stay for a moment and gaze upon him. He was the same young soldier whose aged mother had accompanied him with such sorrow to the beach at Leith, on the morning Major Campbell's detachment embarked, and Ronald (under whose notice this circumstance had brought him) had always admired his soldier-like smartness and steadiness. He was dying now, and evidently in a state of delir-

ium; broken sentences and wild observations fell from his clammy lips. Ronald spoke to him:

"He heard it, but he heeded not; his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away."

"O mother! mother!" said he in piercing accents, "dinna upbraid me wi' enlisting and leaving ye. Ye ken weel for what I did it,—to pay my puir auld faither's debt to Peter Grippy, and to free him frae the tolbooth o' Edinburgh. But he wadna allow me, and ca'ed the bounty his bairn's bluid siller. Put yer face close to mine, mother; for I hear yer greetin' and moanin', but I canna see the face I fain would look on. Tell my faither to lay me in the sunny side o' the kirk-yard,—ye ken the place weel. I aye loed to pu' the gowans and blue-bells that grew there in simmer. Menie Ormelie lies there, amang the lang green deid grass; lay me—lay me close to her. O mother! ye ken I loed her weel; we herded the same kye, and—" His voice sunk away into a whisper, and Ronald became deeply affected. After a pause, he continued in the same tone of agony, "Bonnie Menie,—Menie wi' the gowden hair! She lies between the muckle deid-stane o' the lairds o' Glen-corse, and the vault o' the auld folk o' Castle-Outer. Lay me close by her side, and plant some o' the broon heather frae the bonnie Pentlands—the Pentlands I loe sae weel—on the heavy howme that covers me." This was the last effort. A gush of blood spouted from the wound, and he died without a groan.

Stuart could scarce refrain from tears at witnessing the fate of this poor private soldier. Death, amidst the fierce excitement and tumult of battle, where "the very magnitude of the slaughter throws a softening disguise over its cruelties and horrors," is nothing to death when it comes stealing over a human being thus, slowly and gradually, having in it something at once awful and terribly impressive; and Ronald Stuart, blunted and deadened as his feelings were by campaigning, felt this acutely, as he turned away from the corse of his comrade and countryman.

His attention was next arrested by a monstrous raven, or corbie, which sat on a fragment of rock, watching attentively the scene as if awaiting his coming banquet; but Ronald compelled it to take to flight, by uttering a loud holloa, which reverberated among the rocks of the mountain wilderness. It was now night; but the moon arose above the summits of the hills, glowing through openings in the thin clouds like a shield of polished silver, and pouring a flood of pale light along the pass of Miravete, casting into yet deeper shadow the rifted rocks which overhung it. The speed at which he rode soon left the mountains far behind him, and about midnight brought him close to the gloomy wood of Jarciejo; but on

all that line of road he had discovered no trace of Donna Catalina, or the ruffian who had deceived her; and as the country thereabouts was totally uninhabited, he met no one who could give him the slightest information, and his mind became a prey to fear and apprehension that some act of blood or treachery might be perpetrated before he came up with them.

"There they are! Now, then, Heaven be thanked!" he exclaimed on seeing figures on horseback standing at Saint Mary's well, a rude fountain at the cross-road leading from Truxillo to Lacorchuela, which intersects that from Almarez to Jarciejo. He loosened his sword in the scabbard, but on advancing found that he was mistaken. He met a stout cavalier of Lacorchuela escorting two ladies, whose singular equipage would have inclined him to laugh, had he been in a merrier mood. They were seated on two arm-chairs, slung across the back of a strong mule, and facing outwards, rode back to back. They were enveloped in large mantillas, and their bright eyes flashed in the moonlight, as they each withdrew the *antifaz*, or mask of black silk, which covered their faces to protect them from the dust, the heat of the sun, or the chill night-air when travelling.

Ronald hastily saluted them, and asked their escort if a priest and two females had passed that way? The cavalier, who was mounted on a fine Spanish horse, raised his broad beaver, throwing back his heavy brown cloak as he did so, as if to show that he was well armed by displaying the glittering mountings of the pistols, long stiletto, and massive Toledo sabre, which for protection he carried in the leathern baldric encircling his waist. He said, that when he had first stopped at the fountain to rest, about an hour ago, a priest and two ladies had passed, and taken the road directly for the forest of Jarciejo.

Ronald waited to hear no more, but hurriedly muttering his thanks, urged the good animal he rode to a gallop in the direction pointed out, regardless as to whether or not the whole band of desperadoes recognising Narvaez Cifuentes as their leader might be in the wood. He had not ridden half a mile further when the horse of D'Estouville passed him at a rapid trot, with its bridle-rein trailing on the ground and the saddle reversed, hanging under its belly, girths uppermost. Some terrible catastrophe must have happened! A groan broke from Ronald; and in an agony of apprehension for the fate of the fair rider, he madly goaded onward the horse he rode, using the point of his sword as a substitute for spurs, which as a regimental infantry officer he did not wear.

The mules of the priest and paisana, grazing the herbage at the entrance of the wood, next met his view. The light-coloured garments of a female form lying on the road, caused him to spring from the saddle in dismay. It was not Catalina, but the poor peasant-girl of Almarez: her gilt crucifix, which she had worn ostentatiously on her bare bosom, was gone, as was likewise the trunk-mail which she had carried. She was lying dead, stabbed by a dagger in the

throat, where a ghastly wound appeared. The feathers and veil of Catalina's hat lay fluttering near, and the bruised and torn appearance of the grass and bushes bore evidence that some desperate struggle had taken place here. These outrages seemed to have been committed recently, as the cheek of the dead girl was yet warm and soft, when Ronald touched it.

"God help you, Catalina! My thoughtlessness has destroyed you: 'tis I that have done all this!" he exclaimed, as he struck his hand passionately upon his forehead, and reeled against a tree.

"*O gracias caballero!*" said a decrepit and wrinkled old man, arrayed in the garb of some religious order, emerging as if from concealment among the trees; "a most horrible scene has been acted here. I saw it from among the olive bushes, where I lay sleeping till the noise awoke me."

"The donna, *mi amigo*,—the young lady, where is she? Tell me, for the love of that Virgin you adore so much!"

"*O los infidelos!* and dost not thou adore her?" asked the old man querulously, while his sunken and bleared eyes kindled and lighted up.

"Trifle not, old man, but tell me instantly!" cried Stuart, in a hoarse and furious voice.

"'Twas done in a moment,—*en quitam alia essas pajas*, as the proverb says."

"Curse on your proverb—"

"'Tis no business of mine, *senor soldado*, and I will have nought to do with it. *A otro perro con esse hueso*, says the proverb."

"Wretch! you will drive me distracted! Tell me what you have seen, or, in despite of your grey hairs, I will cleave you to the teeth. The senora—"

"Was dragged into the forest about an hour ago, and horrible noises have come from it ever since, disturbing me and keeping me from sleep. 'Tis hard for an old man to be annoyed: the proverb says—"

"Silence!" replied the other, placing his hand on the toothless mouth of the poor dotard. "Surely I heard something!"

At that moment a despairing cry, such as it is seldom one's lot to hear, arose from the dingles of the wood, and seemingly at no great distance. Stuart waited to hear no more, but rushed with his drawn weapon towards the spot, making the forest ring with threats, cries, and the bold holloa with which he had learned to awake the echoes of his native hills and rocks. His Highland habits as a forester and huntsman, acquired under the tuition of Donald Iverach, when tracking the fox and the deer, gave him good aid now, and unerringly he followed the direction of that terrible cry.

He had not penetrated above a hundred yards among the beeches and cork wood, when, on breaking into a narrow pathway, he found lying motionless on the sod and bedabbled with blood, from a wound in her bosom, the unfortunate

of whom he was in search.

"Catalina of Villa Franca! Adored Catalina!" he exclaimed, in accents of horror and affection, as he tossed his sword from him and sunk down beside her on his knees; "this—this is all my doing. I have brought you to destruction by entrusting you, in an evil hour, to a bandit and matador!"

He had no idea of pursuing the assassin. His whole soul was wrapt up in the sad spectacle before him, and he thought only of endeavouring to save her, if possible, before she perished from loss of blood, which was flowing freely from a deep dagger-wound in her pure and beautiful neck, evidently from the same weapon which had struck Major Campbell, and slain the *paisana* by a blow in the same part of the frame. Her bosom was exposed and covered with the red current, which stained the moonlit leaves and petals of the forest-flowers where she lay. Unflinchingly had Ronald that morning beheld men weltering and wallowing in blood; but he shrunk in agony at the sight of Catalina's.

"Catalina de Villa Franca! dearest, hear my voice! Speak to me. Never until this moment of horror and woe did I know how much I loved you." He rent the silk sash from his shoulder[*] and endeavoured to stanch the blood, while the unfortunate girl opened her lustrous eyes, and gazed upon him with a look which, while it told of exquisite pain—of love and delight, too surely convinced him, by its terrible expression, that she was—dying.

[*] The crimson sash is worn over the left shoulder in Highland regiments.

"You have come, Ronald. I expected you many—many months ago," she whispered in broken accents, while her wild black eyes were fixed on his with an expression of tenderness. "Hold me up, dearest—hold me up, that I may look upon you for the last time,—on the face I have loved so long, and used to dream about in the long nights at Merida and Almarez. O that my brother, Alvaro, was here too! Holy—holy Mother of God! look on me—I am dying!"

"Ah, Catalina! speak not thus: every word sinks like a sword into my heart. Dying! oh, it cannot be! You shall live if the aid of art and affection can preserve you. You *shall* live," he added frantically, "and for me."

"O no—never—not for you!" she said bitterly, in tones gradually becoming more hollow, "it may not be. Alas! I am not what I was an hour ago. I cannot,—I cannot now be yours, even should I escape death, whose cold hand is passing over my heart."

"Almighty Power, preserve my senses! What is this you say?" he replied, raising her head upon his knee, and gathering in his hand the soft dishevelled

curls which streamed freely upon the turf. "What mean these terrible words, Catalina?"

Before she replied, a shudder convulsed her frame, and drops of white froth fell from her lips. A strange light sparkled in her eyes: there was something singularly fearful and beautiful in the expression of her pale countenance at that moment.

"I need not shrink from telling you the dreadful truth,—I need not deceive you," she added, speaking more fluently as a passionate flow of tears relieved her. "I feel in my heart a sensation, which announces that the moment of dissolution is at hand. I hail it with joy,—I wish not to live. The wretch who deceived us has robbed me of that which is most precious to a woman, and then with his dagger—"

A moan escaped the lips of Ronald, and he gnashed his teeth with absolute fury, while big drops, glittering in the moonlight, stood upon his pale forehead, and his throat became so swollen that he was almost choked. He snatched up his sword, and with difficulty restrained the inclination he felt to rush deeper into the wood, in search of Cifuentes. But how could he leave Catalina, the torn and disordered condition of whose garments, together with the wounds and bruises on her delicate hands and arms, bore evidence that a desperate struggle had taken place before the first outrage was accomplished. Stuart reeled as if a ball had passed through his brain, and the forest-trees seemed to rock around him as if shaken by an earthquake. The fierce emotion passed away, and was succeeded by a horrible calmness,—a feeling of settled and morbid desperation. He passed his hand once or twice over his brow, as if to clear his thoughts and arrange them before he again knelt beside Catalina, who had closed her eyes and lay still, as if in a deep slumber. He thought that the spirit had passed from her; but the faint beating of her heart, as he laid his cheek on her soft breast, convinced him that she yet lived. Raising her from the ground, he endeavoured to make his way through the wood to where he had left the aged priest, to the end that some means might be procured to save her life, if it was yet possible to do so. But he had not borne her a dozen yards, when the branch of a tree tore off the sash with which he had hastily bound up the wound, and the blood gushed forth with greater violence than before.

"Mother Mary, be gracious unto me! and forgive me if I think of aught else than heaven in this awful moment!" murmured Catalina in a soft and plaintive voice. "Ah, the pangs, the torments I endure! Oh, *mi querida*, carry me no further; 'tis useless,—I am dying. Alas! dishonoured as I am, I would not wish to live. Lay me down here, where the grass is soft and green. Ronald, here ends our love and my hope together!"

In Stuart's face there was an expression which pen can never describe, as

he laid her down gently on the turf, and sustaining her head upon his arm, bent over her in silent sorrow and misery.

"Are you near me still, *mi querida*?" she murmured tremulously.

"Catalina, I am yet with you,—my arm is around you."

"Alas! the light has left my eyes: death is darkening my vision."

"Mercy of Heaven! it cannot be thus,—they are bright as ever; but a cloud has overshadowed the moon."

"Ronald, it is the hand of death: I see you no longer. Are you near me?"

"My hands are pressing yours,—alas! they are very cold and clammy."

"I feel them not: the numbness of my limbs will soon extend to my breast. When I am gone, let twelve masses be said for my soul. Alas, you will think them of no use! But promise me this, that I may die more easily and peacefully."

"I do, Catalina, I do."

"O that Alvaro was here, that I might hear the sound of his voice,—that he might hear mine for the last time, before I pass to the world of shadows. He will be lonely in the world without me. Alvaro is the last of his race,—the last of a long line of illustrious hidalgos. Holy Lady of Majorga,—sweet *San Juan de Dios*, intercede for me! Dearest Ronald, kiss me—kiss me for the last time, while I have yet feeling, for death is chilling my whole frame."

In an agony of love and sorrow, he passionately pressed his lips to those of the dying girl. She never spoke again. It almost seemed as if he had intercepted her last breath, for at the moment their lips met, a slight tremour passed over her whole form, and the pure spirit of the beautiful donna had fled for ever.

CHAPTER X.

EL CONVENTO DE SANTA CRUZ.

"The abbess was of noble blood,
But early took the veil and hood;
Ere upon life she cast a look,
Or knew the world that she forsook."

Marmion, canto ii.

Grey daylight was straggling through the mullioned windows of the nunnery

of Santa Cruz de Jarciejo, which stood close on the skirts of the wood, when the portress was aroused from her straw pallet by a loud peal at the bell, which hung in the porch. On withdrawing the wooden cover of the vizzly hole in the outer door, she crossed herself, and turned up her eyes; and instead of attending to those without, ran to tell the lady abbess that a British officer on horseback, bearing in his arms a dead woman, had been led thither by the old padre Ignacio el Pastor, who was demanding admittance. The abbess, who in the convent was known as *El Madre Santa Martha*, had many scruples about opening the gates to them; but another tremendous peal at the bell, seconded by a blow which Ronald dealt with the basket-hilt of his sword on the iron-studded door, put an end to the matter, and she desired the portress to usher them into the *parlatorio*. Entering the gateway in the massive wall surrounding the gardens of the convent, they were led through the formal lines of flower-beds and shrubbery to the main building, where a carved gothic door in a low round archway, on the key-stone of which appeared a mouldered cross, gave them admittance to the chamber called the *parlatorio*, where the sisters were allowed to receive the visits of their friends at the iron gratings in a stone-screen which crossed the room, completely separating it from the rest of the convent. These grates were strong bars of iron, crossed and recrossed with wire, so as to preclude all possibility of touching the inmates, who now crowded close to them, all gazing with amazement and vague apprehension at the corpse of the young lady, which the officer deposited gently on a wooden bench, and seated himself beside it in apathetic sorrow, unmindful of the many pitying eyes that were fixed upon him. Meanwhile the lady abbess, a handsome woman about twenty, with a stately figure, a remarkably fine face, and soft hazel eyes, entered the apartment, and advanced to where Catalina lay with the tenderest commiseration strongly marked on her features, which, like those of the sisterhood, were pale and sallow from confinement.

For an explanation of the scene before her, she turned to the decrepit old priest Ignacio el Pastor, or *the Shepherd*, a name which he had gained in consequence of his having become a guardian of Merino sheep among the mountains of the Lina on the demolition of his monastery, which had been destroyed by the French troops when Marshal Massena was devastating the country in his retreat.

Interlarding his narrative with many a Spanish proverb, he related the tale of Catalina's assassination. The querulous tones of his voice were interrupted by many a soft expression of pity and pious ejaculation from the sisters at the grating, gazing with morbid curiosity on the fair form of the dead, whose high bosom was covered with coagulated blood, and the long spiral curls of whose ringlets swept the pavement of the chamber.

The lady abbess, who was far from being one of those sour ancient dames that the superiors of convents are generally reputed to be, seated herself by

Ronald's side, and seeing that, although his proud dark eyes were dry and tearless, he was deeply afflicted, she prayed him to be comforted; but he hid his face among the thick tresses of the dead, and made no immediate reply.

"She is indeed most beautiful! As she now lies, her features wear a sublimity which might become an image of Our Lady," observed the abbess, passing her hand softly over the cold white brow of Catalina. "She seems only to sleep,—her white eyelids and long black lashes are so placidly closed! And this is the sister of the noble Cavalier de Villa Franca, of whom we hear so much? If man can avenge, Don Alvaro will do it amply."

"Avenge her!" muttered Ronald through his clenched teeth. "Noble senora, that task shall be mine—"

"Alas! cavalier," interrupted the abbess, "we commit a deadly sin in talking thus."

"*Echemos pelillos a la mar*, says the proverb; we must forget and forgive," chimed in El Pastor. "Vengeance belongs not to this earth,—'tis not ours, miserable reptiles that we are. What sayeth the holy writ? Lo, you now—"

"Peace, Ignacio; I would speak. You are getting into the burden of some old sermon of yours, and it is a wonder you put so many words together without another proverb," said the lady abbess, as she took Ronald's hand kindly within her own, which indeed was a very soft and white one. "El Pastor's account of this affair is somewhat confused. Tell me, senor, how long it is since this dreadful deed was perpetrated?"

"But yesternight—only yesternight. To me it appears as if a thousand years had elapsed since then, and the events of years ago seem to have passed but yesterday. All is confusion and chaos in my mind."

"The noble senora was, perhaps, some relation of yours?"

"No. She is of Spain,—I of Scotland."

"Your wife, possibly, senor?"

"My wedded wife indeed she would have been, had she lived; but that resolve came too late!" he replied in a troubled voice, as he pressed the hand of Catalina to his lips. "But, senoritas, I must not spend longer time in childish sorrow," he added, starting up and erecting his stout and handsome figure before the eyes of the sisterhood, who, in spite of their veils and hoods knew how to admire a smart young soldier with a war-worn suit of harness. "It would not become me to do so, and my duties call me elsewhere. Every means must be taken to bring retribution on the head of the demon Narvaez, and I trust that the great Power which suffers no crime to pass unpunished, will aid me in discovering him one day before I leave Spain. Divine vengeance will again place him at my mercy as he has been twice before, when, but for my ill-timed interference, Don Alvaro had slain him, and my heart leaps within me at the thought of having his

base blood upon my weapon. Yes, señoritas, his blood, shed with my own hands and streaming hot and thick upon them, can alone avenge the death of Catalina. Some fatality seems continually to throw this monster in my way, and if ever we cross each other again, most fully, amply, and fearfully shall this unfortunate be revenged; for I have sworn a secret oath—an oath which may not be broken, that wherever I meet Cifuentes within the realm of Spain—on moor or mountain, in city, camp, or field, there will I slay him, though the next moment should be my last!”

His form appeared to dilate while he spoke, and his eyes sparkled with a keen and fiery expression, which attested the firmness of his determination and the bold recklessness of his heart. The excitement under which he laboured imparted a new eloquence to his tones and grace to his gesture; but he panted rather than breathed while he spoke, and the fierce glitter of his eye, together with the strange ferocity of the words which his love and sorrow prompted, caused the timid nuns of Santa Cruz to shrink back from the iron gratings.

“Ah! señor,” said the abbess, laying her hand upon his shoulder, “I have already said vengeance is not ours. But you have spoken gallantly!”

“A noble cavalier! Viva!” cried El Pastor, in a chuckling tone; “Hernandez de Cordova could not have spoken more bravely. *Bueno como el pan*, as the old proverb tells us.”

But when this burst of passion evaporated, he was again the sad and sorrowful young man that he had at first appeared. As he refused to partake of any refreshment, although pressed by the abbess to do so, the padre El Pastor led him out to the convent garden, while the nuns made preparations for the entombment of Catalina in their oratory, or chapel. It was a bright sunshine morning; but Ronald was careless of its beauty and of the fragrance of the flowers freshly blooming in the morning dew; the beautiful arrangements of the place, the arbours, the sparkling fountains, the statues of stone and marble,—he passed them all by unheeded. Hobbling by his side, El Pastor, instead of endeavouring to console him for his loss, poured into his unheeding ears, with a string of old proverbs and wise saws, a tough lecture for the irreverent manner in which he had treated the name of Madre-Maria the evening before, until the impatient Highlander strode away, and left him to commune alone.

That night Catalina was buried in the chapel. The building was brilliantly illuminated with coloured lamps, the softened lights of which were reflected from the gilded columns,—from the organ, with its tall row of silver-trumpet like pipes,—from the rich altars and statues of polished metal placed in niches, where golden candlesticks bore tall twinkling tapers, which from their recesses cast a strange light on the marble tombs of knights and long-departed warriors, whose rusty swords, spurs, and faded banners were yet in some places hung over them,

and whose deeds were represented on the ancient pieces of mouldy and moth-eaten tapestry which hung gloomily on the side walls of the chapel, contrasting strongly with the glittering images and gorgeously coloured Scripture-pieces, many of them said to be the productions of Alonzo Cano, the Michael Angelo of Spain, who flourished during the seventeenth century.

Ronald Stuart, the only mourner there, walked by the side of the shell, or basket of wicker-work, which contained all that remained of Catalina, and which was borne through the chapel and deposited on the high altar by six of the youngest nuns,—three on each side, carrying it by handles projecting from the sides of the frame.

The requiem for the dead was now chanted, and the dulcet notes of the lofty organ, blending in one delightful strain with the melodious voices of the nuns, ringing among the pillared aisles, echoing in the hollow vaults, and dying away in the distant arches of the cloisters, produced such heavenly sounds as subdued the heart of Stuart, softening and soothing his sorrow. He listened in a sort of ecstasy, almost deeming that the thrilling voice of Catalina was mingled with the inspiring harmony he heard. He was moved to tears, tears of sadness and enthusiasm, and almost involuntarily he sunk on his knees at the marble steps of the altar, an attitude which raised him immensely in the estimation of El Pastor and the sisterhood, while the bright eyes of the mitred abbess sparkled as she stretched her white hands glittering with jewels over him, as if welcoming him to that church, the tenets of which he had never yet inquired into. He had knelt down thus merely from excess of veneration and a holy feeling, with which the sublime service of the Roman Catholic church had inspired him. The music arose to its utmost pitch at that moment; the voices of the nuns and choristers mounted to the full swell; the trumpets of the organ pealed along the groined roof, and caused the massive columns and the pavement beneath them to tremble and vibrate with the soul-stirring grandeur of the sound.

In the chancel, before the great altar, a pavement stone had been raised and a deep grave dug, the soil of which lay piled in a gloomy heap on the lettered stones around its yawning mouth.

On the chant being ended, four priests bore the bier of Catalina to the side of the grave which was to receive her. The wicker-coffin or shell had no lid, and Ronald now looked upon her pale and still beautiful features for the last time. She was not enveloped in a ghastly shroud, but, after the fashion of her own country, had been arrayed by the nuns in a dress of the whitest muslin, adorned with the richest lace and edgings of needle-work. Her fine hair was disposed over her neck and bosom. A large chaplet of freshly gathered white roses encircled her forehead, giving her the appearance of a bride dressed for the bridal rather than a corse for the tomb; and, but for the mortal paleness of her complexion, one

would have supposed that she only slept, so placidly did her closed eye-lashes repose upon her soft cheek.

While a slow, sad, but exquisitely melancholy dirge arose, the bare-footed priests proceeded to lower her into the cold damp grave, but in a manner so peculiar and revolting, that the lover, who had never witnessed a Spanish interment before, almost sprung forward to stay their proceeding. Instead of lowering the coffin into the grave, they took out the body, permitting it to sink gently into its narrow bed without other covering than the lace and muslin, part of which El Pastor drew over her face and ringlets, to hide them from mortal eyes for ever. Each monk now seized a shovel, and rapidly the coffinless remains were covered up with dry sand, provided for the purpose.

The feelings of poor Ronald were sadly outraged at the barbarous mode of interment common in Spain for those not of the families of *grandees*, but remonstrance would have been unavailing. The scraping and jarring of the iron shovels on the pavement, as they hurled in decayed bones, damp red clay, stones, and sand on that fair and unprotected form, grated horribly on his ears; but how did he shrink and revolt from the *pummeling* of the body! A stout padre, seizing a billet of wood, shod with an iron *ferule* like a pavier's rammer, began to tread upon the grave and rapidly beat down the earth into it, so that all that had been taken out should be again admitted. He had not given a dozen strokes in this disgusting manner, before Ronald shook off his apathy; and grasping him by the cope, dragged him fiercely backwards, commanding them at once to desist from a proceeding so distressing. Two priests, with the aid of iron levers, deposited a slab of marble above the tomb, and it was closed for ever. It bore the hastily carved legend,—

Agui yace Catalina de Villa Franca.

The slab probably remains yet in the chapel, if the convent of Santa Cruz has escaped the wars of the Carlists and Christinos. As soon as this sad ceremony was concluded, Ronald retired.

Two-and-thirty years have now elapsed since the tomb closed over Catalina, but time has not yet effaced from Stuart's memory the emotions which he felt when hearing the sound of the dull cold earth falling on her unshrouded bosom! In the *parlatorio* he composed himself to write a long letter to Donna Inesella, giving an account of her cousin's destruction, and bitterly upbraiding himself as being the leading cause in the affair, although in reality he was not. The reader will remember, that it was her own desire and determination to confide herself to the care of the pretended priest at Almarez.

Owing to the tumult in his mind, Ronald found the composition of the letter no easy task, especially as that garrulous old man, El Pastor, remained at his elbow, chattering away on unconnected subjects, and bringing out now and then some musty Spanish proverb.

"Look ye, señor," said he, regardless of the blots and blunders that his interruptions caused Stuart to make; "do you see that image of our Holy Lady in the niche yonder?"

"Well, padre?"

"'Tis the work of Alonza Cano."

"Pshaw! what is that to me? I never heard of the gentleman before."

"He was the first of Spanish architects and painters, and with his own hands adorned many of our finest churches and palaces. He was born at Grenada in the year 1600, and as the proverb says—"

"Never mind what it says. For Heaven's sake, *mi amigo*, leave me to write in peace."

"Did you but know that he lost the woman he loved by a dagger-stroke from a matador, you would probably care more for the story of his singular misfortunes."

"Pardon me, padre," said Ronald, with a melancholy interest; "what were they?"

"The full career of Alonza's glory was cut short thus. One evening, on returning home, he found his wife, a most beautiful woman, lying dead, with a dagger planted in her heart. His servant, a vile Italian, the perpetrator of the deed, had fled, and by order of the alcalde Mayor, Alonza was arrested, and charged with having slain the lady in a fit of jealousy. The dagger which the assassin used, was known to be that of Alonza; he was a man naturally of a fierce and jealous temper, and had kept watchful eyes on the senora, who was the handsomest woman that ever promenaded on the Prado, or Plaza, at Madrid; and the compliments paid her by the gay cavaliers and guardsmen of the capital were as molten lead poured into the heart of her husband, though of course very proud of her, for she was a fine creature,—*Como un palmito*, as the old proverb says."

"Is this all the story, Ignacio?"

"The rest is yet to come. The *tail* is the worst, señor; as the old saw says,—*Aun le falta la cola por desollar*."

"The devil take your saws and proverbs! You are as full of them as your countryman Sancho Panza."

"Well, señor; Alonza was racked without mercy to extort confession, and he endured the most horrible torments without uttering a word to criminate himself. By the king's order he was set free, and died at a great age, a poor priest like myself. In his dying hour, when a brother held the crucifix before his glazing

eyes, he desired him to remove it, saying the image of our Saviour was so clumsily done, that the sight of it pained him; as the proverb says, *senor, De paja—*"

But Ronald did not permit him to finish the adage, requesting him to retire in a manner that was not to be disputed. Early next morning he was despatched to Idanha-a-Velha, bearing the letter for Donna Inesella. He resolutely refused to take a single maravedi to defray his expenses, although the journey was a very long one. So simple were his habits of living, learned while a shepherd among the mountains, that he could easily subsist on charity and what he could pick up by the way-side, where ripe oranges, luscious grapes, and juicy pumpkins grew wild, or by chanting songs to the sound of the rebeck,—a primitive kind of guitar, having only three strings.

"I am accustomed to a wandering life, *senor,*" said he, as he bade Ronald adieu; "it suits and squares with me perfectly,—*Quadrado y esquinado*, as the proverb has it. Frail and withered as I appear, I can well bear fatigue, and am as tough as an old toledo, and will undertake to reach Idanha-a-Velha almost as soon as if mounted on the best mule that ever bore the sign of the cross on its back."

To keep his promise, pledged to Catalina, Ronald paid into the treasury of the convent two golden onzas, to obtain masses for her departed spirit. Let it not be imagined for a moment that he believed in their efficacy; but he remembered that it was Catalina's wish—indeed almost her last request, that such should be done, and he paid the onzas rather as a duty of affection than religion. This act left him in indifferent pecuniary circumstances, as it carried off the whole month's subsistence which he had received from the regimental paymaster, after the storm of Almaraz. Pay was a scarce matter with the Peninsular troops, who, at the time the battle of Vittoria was fought, had not received a single farthing for upwards of six months.

An apartment opening off the *parlatorio* had been fitted up for Ronald, by the orders of the lady abbess, and perhaps this was the only occasion ever known of a man sleeping under the roof of the Convent of the Holy Cross,—an event which, had it happened during the days of the terrible Inquisition, would probably have been the means of dooming the abbess to death, and her nuns to some severe penance.

It was a gloomy little chamber, with a grated window, through which came the rays of the moon, and the rich fragrance of flowers from the garden. A gaudily painted Spanish bedstead, without curtains, stood in one corner, and a solitary chair resting in another constituted its furniture, unless I include a large wooden crucifix reared against the wall, and a skull, ghastly and grinning, placed near it on a bracket. Ronald scarcely slept during all that night. His mind was alternately a prey to the deepest sorrow and wildest longings for vengeance, that

the human heart is capable of feeling. Many were the plans which his fertile imagination suggested for the discovery of the matador; but owing to the totally disorganized state of the country, the subversion of its laws, and the weakness of its civil authorities, he was aware that his attempts would be alike fruitless and unavailing, and that the cavalier, Don Alvaro, from the rank of his family, his known bravery, and favour among the populace, would be more likely to have him brought to justice.

At times, when the outrage which Catalina had suffered came vividly into his imagination, his blood boiled within him, and his heart panted with a tiger-like feeling for revenge—deep, deadly, and ample revenge; and nothing short of the blood of Cifuentes, shed with his own sword, could satisfy the cravings he felt for retribution. The next moment he was all-subdued in grief and tenderness, when he remembered the happy days he had spent with Catalina at Merida, the soft expression of her eyes, the sweet tones of her voice, their rambles among the ruins and rich scenery of the city, its sunny streets and shady public walks, where she was the leading belle, and the glory, delight, and admiration of the cloaked and moustached cavaliers, and the envy of the veiled and stately donnas who frequented the green Prado in the evening, or promenaded under the cool arches of the *paseo* during the hottest part of the day. While the recollections of these departed moments of transitory enjoyment passed in quick succession through his mind, Alice Lisle was not forgotten; but the remembrance of her only added to the tortures of that mental rack, on which Stuart appeared to be stretched.

Thoughts of the days that were gone—days spent in perfect happiness with her,—thoughts that he strove in vain to repel, arose at times, causing his divided heart to swell within his bosom till its cords seemed about to snap. Love struggled strongly with love in his breast. He unclasped the miniature of Alice, and gazed upon it by the light of the moon. He had not looked upon it for many, many months, and his eyes filled with tears while he did so now, and recalled the joyous expression of her hazel eye and merry ringing of her girlish laugh; but when he thought of Lord Hyndford, the newspaper paragraph, and the cold conduct of her brother, he closed it with vehemence, and looked upon it no more that night. Even a long wished-for slumber, when it came at last, was disturbed by dreams no less painful than his waking thoughts.

He imagined that he was in the splendid chapel of Santa Cruz, and that Catalina stood beside him in all her dignity and beauty, arrayed as he had seen her last in a profusion of white lace and muslin. She yet lived! The idea of her death was but a horrible dream. O what ecstasy was in that thought! No black tomb was yawning in the chancel, but the aisles were crowded by a gay party, whose forms appeared wavering, indistinct, and indescribable. But Ronald recked not of them; Catalina was there, with her eyes sparkling, her cheek blushing, and her

tresses flowing as of old, and orange-buds were entwined with the white roses of her coronal. He embraced her,—but, lo! a change came over the features of the Spanish maiden, and they became the softer, but equally beautiful features of Alice Lisle! A low and heavenly melody stole upon his ears,—he started, and awoke.

The music he had heard in his sleep was filling every part of the convent, announcing that morning matins had begun. Stuart sprang from the couch, troubled with his visions and unrefreshed by his slumbers. He hastily donned his regimentals, and entering the chapel, seated himself in that part which was separated from the nuns by a strong, but richly gilt iron railing. He was surveyed with no small interest by the sequestered sisterhood, to whom it was an uncommon event to have within their walls a male guest, so different from the bearded and shorn priests who came as privileged individuals. A handsome young soldado, wearing the martial garb of a land which was, in their ideas of geography, at an immense distance, and of which they had strange notions, especially of the ferocity and wildness of its mountaineers, was an object of thrilling interest to these timid creatures, who trembled at the very mention of the dangers which their military guest had seen and dared. He was very different from Pietro, their deformed gardener, or El Pastor, that budget of proverbs, who was their daily visitor; and many bright and beautiful eyes, though screened by hood of serge and veil of lawn, were fixed searchingly upon him from the organ-loft and altar-steps; but their presence was unheeded and uncared-for by Stuart, whose eyes were bent on the grey slab in the centre of the chancel, while his thoughts were with the cold and coffinless form that lay beneath it, bruised and crushed down in that dark and gloomy hole under a load of earth. It was not until the matins were ended and the sisters had withdrawn, that he remembered where he was, and that the sooner he prepared to rejoin his regiment and apologize for his singular absence the better. Indeed he had begun to feel some most unpleasant qualms and doubts as to the issue of the matter, with so strict a commanding-officer as Cameron of Fassifern,—*the chief*, as he was named by the mess; and visions of a general court-martial,—a formidable array of charges, and a sentence to be cashiered, "a sentence of which His Majesty is most graciously pleased to approve," arose before him.

He knew not whither the troops might have marched from Almarez; and he feared that by crossing the Lina hills, which were many miles distant, he might fall into the hands of the French, who he knew occupied the adjacent country. For some time he was at a loss how to act; but, after due consideration, was led to believe that he might fall in with some of the British troops at Truxillo, for which place he determined to depart immediately, remembering at the same time that he should have to appease the wrath of the Buenos Ayrean campaigner Don Gon-

zago, who would undoubtedly be very indignant at his niece's interment without his knowledge; but, in fact, Ronald Stuart had totally forgotten the existence of her uncle, which was the reason of the oversight. As he left the chapel, he was met by the demure and starched old portress, who invited him to breakfast with the lady abbess in an arbour in the garden. It would have been inconsistent with courtesy and gallantry to have refused, and contrary to his own inclination, for in truth he was half famished, as he had not 'broken bread' since the night before the capture of Almaraz, and nature demanded nourishment. In the arbours of the garden, which were formed of heavy masses of blooming rose-trees, honeysuckle, and vines, supported by green painted trellis-work, the nuns were seated at their simple repast, which was no sooner over, than they commenced their daily occupation of making pincushions, embroidered shirt-collars, tinting fans, and working brocade dresses, all of which were sold for the benefit of the poor, or of the funds of the convent.

In a large arbour, at the back of which a cool spring of sparkling water bubbled up in a marble basin, the smiling abbess was seated, awaiting her guest. The table was covered with a white cloth, wrought over with religious emblems, variously coloured, and in elaborate needle-work. A Spanish breakfast is usually a very simple one, but the abbess had made an unusual display this morning. There were platters filled with grapes and oranges, freshly pulled from the branches that formed the roof of the arbour. A vase of boiled milk, flanked by two silver cups of chocolate—so thick that the spoons stood in it, bread, butter, eggs, jellies, and marmalade, composed the repast; to which was added a flask of the wine of Ciudad Real, a place long famous for the quality of its produce.

The abbess did the honours of the table with a grace which showed that, when in the world, she had been accustomed to the best society in Spain. There was a sweetness in her tones and an elegance in every movement, which could not have failed to charm one less absorbed in other thoughts than Ronald Stuart. However, he could not help remarking the fine form of her hands, the dazzling whiteness of her arm, and the beauty of her dark brown curls, which she wore in unusual abundance, and showed rather more than was quite in character with one of her profession. Stuart was too full of thought to prove an agreeable companion, and behaved, I dare say, so very inattentively, that the gay abbess thought him a very dull fellow, notwithstanding his Highland uniform, and the lively account he gave of his own distant home and what he had seen on service in Spain.

After paying a last visit to the tomb of Catalina, he departed from the convent. The abbess made a sign of the cross on his forehead, kissed him on both cheeks, gave him her solemn blessing in Latin, and dismissed him at the back gate of the building, which stood on the Truxillo road.

As he rode along, mounted again on Campbell's horse, many a glance he gave behind him, not at the figure of the abbess, who waved her kerchief from the gate, but at the gothic pinnacles and high stone-roof of the chapel, beneath which lay the mortal remains of the once-generous and ardent Catalina.

CHAPTER XI.

A SINGLE COMBAT.

"And lang they foucht, and sair they foucht,
 Wi' swords of mettyl kene;
 Till clotted bluid, in mony a spot,
 Was sprynkelit on the grene."
Gilmanscleugh.

It was a delightful summer morning: there was an exhilarating freshness in the air, which raised the spirits of Stuart, as the distance increased between him and the scene of his sorrows. The merry birds were hopping and chirping about from spray to spray; the wild flowers which blossomed by the way-side were giving forth their richest perfume, and expanding their dewy cups and leaves to the warmth of the rising sun. Behind him lay the dark wood of Jarciejo, and above it arose the curved ridges of the Lina,—their bright tints mellowed by distance as they stretched away towards New Castile. Before him lay a long tract of beautiful country, tufted woods and vineyards, with here and there yellow cornfields, rocks surmounted by old feudal strongholds, most of them ruinous; and in many places by the road-side, the blackened remains of the cottages of the paisanos marked the ruthless devastations made by Massena in his retreat some time before.

Ronald would have contemplated with delight the varying of the landscape as he rode along, but for the sorrow which pressed heavy upon his heart, intermingled with certain fears of what his reception might be at the regiment after so unaccountable a desertion, and in what light it might be viewed by his brother-officers. Full of these exciting ideas, at times he drove his horse furiously forward, as if he strove to leave his thoughts behind him, and shorten as much as possible the distance between himself and his comrades. He longed to behold the embattled towers, the slender spires and belfries of Truxillo, where he hoped to find his

comrades, and explain his singular disappearance; but Truxillo was yet leagues distant. As the road plunged down among the green woodlands through which it wound, he enjoyed the cool shadow which the tall chesnuts cast over the otherwise hot dusty road, which shone glaring and white in the rays of the meridian sun.

A faint chorus came floating on the breeze towards him as he rode along, and swelled out into a bold and merry strain on his nearer approach. The cracking of whips and jingle of innumerable bells announced a train of muleteers, who came in view a few seconds afterwards, and gave a boisterous cheer at sight of the scarlet uniform. According to the custom of the muleteers during hot weather, they all wore large cotton handkerchiefs, knotted round their heads, under their sombreros; their tasselled jackets were flying open, and their broad shirt-collars, stiff with flowers and needlework, were folded over their shoulders, displaying every bare and brawny neck. The train halted, and Ronald recognised his old acquaintance Lazaro Gomez, the master muleteer, who took off his beaver with one hand, while he reined-in the leading mule with the other. Lazaro's speculations appeared to have been successful. His jacket was now of fine green velvet, covered with tinsel lace and garnished with about six dozen of those brass bell-buttons, with which the muleteers are so fond of adorning their garments.

"Well, Micer Lazaro," said Stuart, "why do you drive your cattle so fast during the heat of the day, when they should be enjoying a *siesta* under the green-wood? They are likely to drop before you reach the forest of Jarciejo."

"*Par Diez!* I hope not, senor," replied the muleteer, in evident trepidation at the idea. "They shall reach Jarciejo,—we are ruined else; and I trust, in this perilous time, that the gracious senora, our Lady of Majorga," crossing himself and looking upwards, "will not forget the honest muleteer, that never passed her shrine without bestowing on it a handful of maravedis. She will put mettle in the legs of his mules, and enable them to save his hard-earned goods and chattels."

"How, Micer Gomez,—what is the matter? You seem much excited."

"*Santissima Casa!* is it possible that you know not the reason, senor. *El demonio!* I thought you had ten thousand British at your back. The whole country round about is in possession of the French, and hard work we have had since we left Truxillo to escape being plundered of every maravedi. And only think, senor, what a loss I should have suffered! Why there are thirty skins of the best wine of Ciudad Real on the black mule,—*Capitana* we call her,—she takes the lead; as many skins of the olive oil of Lebrija, the best in Spain, on the pad of the second,—*Bocaneyra*, or 'the black muzzle,' as we name it."

"The French—the French at Truxillo!" exclaimed Ronald in astonishment. "Where, then, is Sir Rowland Hill with his troops?"

"On his march for Merida, senor; and by this time many a league beyond

Villa Macia. On the third mule—*Castana* we name her, from her colour, there are twenty arrobas of corn from the Huerta of Orihuela,[*] all for the nuns of Santa Cruz, and worth in reals—”

[*] The fertility of Orihuela has become a proverb among the Spaniards: “Whether there is rain or not, there is always corn at Orihuela.” *Llueva, o no llueva, trigo en Orihuela*. An arroba is a measure containing a quarter of a hundred weight.

“Are the enemy in great force hereabouts?” asked Ronald, who felt considerably concerned for his own safety.

“Truly, senor, I know not; but their light cavalry are riding in every direction. Some say that Marshal Soult, and others that the Count D’Erlon, has entered Estremadura, and that the British are all cut to pieces.”

“That I do not believe.”

“Nor I;—no, by the bones of the Cid Campeador, ’tis not likely. But as I was saying, senor, twenty arrobas of corn—”

“Twenty devils! Halt, Micer Lazaro; if you stay to tell over the inventory of your goods, you are not likely to escape the claws of the enemy, a party of whom I see on the top of the hill yonder.”

A volley of curses broke from the muleteers at this intelligence. A party of cavalry in blue uniform appeared on the road, descending an eminence at some distance; and the glitter of their weapons, as they flashed in the sun, was seen between the branches of the trees. Crack went the whips.

“*Ave Maria—demonios—par Diez!* we are plundered and ruined!” cried the mule-drivers, as they lashed their long-eared cattle into a trot. “The rich oil, the wine and corn—*carajo!*—to be pillaged by the base French! But what is to be done? Were they under the roof of the Santissima Casa, which the blessed angels brought from Galilee to Loretto, they would not be safe. Forward, Capitana! gallant mule, sure of foot and long of wind. Hoa, Pedro de Puebla! keep up your black-muzzled sloth; we will flay its flanks with our whips else. Farewell to you, senor! Our Lady del Pilar aid us! we are in a sad pickle.” And off they went, without farther ceremony, at their utmost speed, running by the side of their mules, and lashing them lustily, leaving Stuart looking steadily at the advancing party of horse, but dubious what course to pursue.

He could not stoop to have recourse to a deliberate flight; and as the enemy was between him and his friends, it was necessary to elude them by any means. Reining back his horse, he withdrew beneath the cover of a thicket beside the road. He was scarcely ensconced among the foliage, when about twenty *chasseurs*

à cheval, with their short carbines resting on their thighs and their officer riding in front, wheeled round a corner of the road, and passed his place of concealment at an easy pace. As soon as they were hidden by the windings of the road and the heavy green foliage which overshadowed it, Stuart emerged from his cover, and continued his route at a hard gallop towards Truxillo, which, however, he determined to avoid by a detour, in case of falling in with more of the French. He had not ridden a quarter of a mile, before a sudden angle of the path, which now passed under the cool shade of several vine-trellises, brought him abruptly face to face with two French officers, whose horses were trotting along at a very ambling rate. On seeing him they instantly drew up, while their faces assumed an expression of unmeasured surprise. They were not above twelve yards distant. Ronald likewise drew his bridle, and unsheathing his sword, reconnoitred the Gauls, between whom a few words passed. One was a pale and thin man, in a staff uniform embroidered with oak-leaves. He carried his right arm in a black silk sling. The other was a dashing officer of cuirassiers, a man of singularly fine and muscular proportions; he was mounted on a powerful black war-horse, and wore a high brass helmet, with the Imperial eagle on its crest, and a plume of black horse-hair floating over it. He was accoutred with a bright steel cuirass and backplate, and leather jack-boots which came above the knees. Both wore splendid epaulets and aiguillets, and were covered on the breast with medals and military orders of knighthood,—indeed there were few French officers who were not so.

Ronald saw at a glance that the heavy dragoon would be his opponent, and he felt some unpleasant doubts as to the issue of a conflict with a practised cavalry officer, and one thus sheathed in a panoply of steel and leather, while he himself had nothing to protect him from the blade of his adversary but his thin regimental coat and tartan plaid.

The officer with the wounded arm moved his horse to the road-side, while the cuirassier twirled his moustaches with a grim smile, and unsheathed his glittering weapon—a species of long and straight back-sword, worn by the French cavalry, and desired Ronald imperiously to surrender without striking a blow.

"Rendez sans coup férir, Monsieur Officier."

Finding that he was not understood, and that Stuart prepared to defend himself, he reined his steed back a little way; and then dashing his spurs into its flanks, came thundering forward at full speed, shouting "*Vive l'Empereur!*" with his long blade uplifted, intending to hurl his adversary into eternity by a single stroke. But Stuart, by an adroit management of his horse's bridle, made a *demi-volte* or half-turn to his left, at the same time stooping his head till the plumes of his bonnet mingled with the mane of his horse, to avoid the Frenchman's sweeping stroke, which whistled harmlessly through the air; while he in return dealt

him a back-handed blow on the crest of his helmet as he passed him in his career, which at once tumbled him over his horse's head and stretched him senseless in the dust, while his sword fell from his grasp, and broke in a dozen pieces. Elated with this sudden and unlooked-for success, Ronald brandished his claymore aloft, and rushed on to the next officer; but drew back, and lowered the point of his weapon, on perceiving the startled and indignant look of the veteran, who held up his wounded arm.

"Pass on, sir!" said Ronald, substituting Spanish for French, of which he scarcely knew above a dozen words. "I might, if I chose, make you prisoner; but I wish not to take advantage of your being wounded. Pass on, sir; the road is open before you."

The Frenchman appeared to understand him imperfectly, but raising his cocked hat, he prepared at once to take the benefit of the permission.

"Adieu, Monsieur de Mesmai!" said he, on passing his fallen comrade, adding something in a whisper, fragments of which only reached Ronald.

"*Malheurs, mon ami—à la guerre—comme à la guerre—retournez et reprenez-vous—chasseurs à cheval*," and he galloped off. Ronald was half tempted to ride after and cut him down, and thus securely stop his intention of returning with the twenty light-horsemen, as he supposed he meant to do, for the disjointed fragments he had heard implied an understanding between them.

"*Ah, la malice du diable!*" cried the cuirassier, as he endeavoured to rise.

"Come, Senor Cuirassier," said Ronald in Spanish; "I believe I am to consider you a prisoner on parole?"

"*Diablement!*" muttered the Frenchman, rubbing his sore bones.

"Come, to horse. Get into your saddle, and without delay. Do not imagine I will parley here long enough to permit your cunning old comrade to bring up the light dragoons to your rescue."

The Gaul still delayed to move, declaring that so severe were his bruises, he was unable to rise.

"Monsieur," said Ronald sternly, placing his hand in his basket-hilt, "I believe you not; 'tis a mere trick! And if you do not instantly mount, I shall be tempted to try if that iron harness of yours is proof against a stab from such a blade as this."

Thus angrily urged, the cuirassier with a sullen look, and some trouble evidently, mounted his horse, gave his parole of honour, and tossing the flints from his pistols, threw away with a curse his empty scabbard, and prepared to follow his captor, who inquired about his hurts and bruises with a frank kindness, to which the other replied by cold and haughty monosyllables; and his displeasure appeared to increase, when Ronald, instead of continuing on the Truxillo road, struck at once across the country to make a detour, thus cutting off any chance

which the Frenchman had of being rescued by the chasseurs, should his companion bring them back for that purpose. Stuart was secretly well pleased at the capture he had made, and doubted not that the French capitain would make a very timely peace-offering to Cameron, who would be the reverse of well-pleased at his long absence.

"Cheer up, Monsieur de Mesmai,—I think your friend named you De Mesmai," said he; "there is no use in being cast down about this *malheur*. Such happen daily to our brothers in arms, on both sides. And it is a wonder our cases are not reversed, when my opponent was so accomplished a chevalier."

De Mesmai twirled his black moustaches, shrugged his shoulders till his epaulets touched his ears, and made no reply,—but gave an anxious glance behind them.

"'Tis no use looking for your friend and his *chasseurs*; they will scarcely find us, since we are so far from the main road. So, I pray you, give yourself no further concern about them."

To this taunting injunction, the Frenchman answered only by a stern military frown. He was a man above forty years of age, and his figure was a model of combined strength and symmetry. Exposure to the sun had turned the hue of his face to something between deep red and dark brown,—the former was particularly apparent in a deep scar across the cheek, which he endeavoured to hide by the curl of his moustache. He appeared to view his captor with any feeling but a friendly one; indeed it was galling, that an accomplished cavalry officer like himself should have been unhorsed and compelled to surrender by one whom he regarded as a raw soldier,—a mere stripling; but, as his head had good reason to know, a very stout one.

"And so Monsieur de Mesmai is your name?" observed Stuart, endeavouring to lead him into conversation. "Surely, I have heard it before."

"'Tis not unlikely, monsieur. I am pretty well known on both sides of the Pyrenees; and permit me to acquaint you, that it was no common feat of yours to unhorse me as you did to-day. But as for my name, it has made a noise in the public journals once or twice. You may have heard it at Almaraz,—I commanded in the tower of Ragusa."

"I now remember; but it was not very kind of you to cut the pontoon, and thus destroy the retreat of D'Estouville and his soldiers."

"Charity begins at home. You know that vulgar adage,—strictly English I believe it is," retorted the cuirassier haughtily. "*Sacre bleu!* 'tis something new for a French officer to be schooled by a British, in the rules of military honour."

"Nothing new in the least, sir!" retorted the other in the same tone of pique. "Military honour! What think you of the poisoned balls, which our troops say yours use so freely?"

"*Sacre nom de Dieu!*" exclaimed the cuirassier hoarsely, while his cheek grew absolutely purple; "'tis false, monsieur; I tell you 'tis false! 'Tis a lie of the base mercenary German Legion, or the rascally Portuguese. Surely British soldiers would never say so of Frenchmen? Think you, monsieur, that we, whose bayonets have flashed at Austerlitz and Jena,—think you, that we now would have recourse to means so foul? *Sacre!* to poison our bullets like the cowardly Indians,—and now, at this time, when under Heaven and the great Emperor's guidance the rustle of the banners of France have shaken the world to its centre? I trow not!"

"It has been rumoured by our soldiers, however; but I rely too much on the honour of Frenchmen to imagine that they would resort to such dastardly means of maiming an enemy."[*]

[*] At one time a report was current among the Peninsular troops that the French used poisoned balls; but it was a malicious story, without any foundation.

"Monsieur, were we otherwise situated, I would put this matter to the sharper test of cold iron," replied De Mesmai, who was much ruffled at the mention of the poisoned balls; "but a time may yet come, and for the present I accept your apology. As for the story of the poisoned balls, doubtless you are indebted for it to the base Germans—mercenary dogs! whom their beggarly princes and little mightinesses sell by thousands to fight the battles of all nations."

"In our service we have a legion of several thousands, and they are excellent troops."

"Monsieur, we have many legions. But the German is without chivalry or sentiment, and fitted only for the mere mechanical part of war. They fight for their daily pay: honour they value not; to them 'tis as moonshine in the water, an unsubstantial glitter."

"You are severe, Captain De Mesmai."

"I cannot speak of them in more gentle terms, when I remember that all the German prisoners you take from us invariably change banners, and enlist in your service. Several battalions have been raised among the Scottish military prisons of late. And these Germans—bah! But to the devil with them!"

"By the by,—who was your friend, with his arm in the sling? An officer of some rank, evidently?"

"Truly he is. I am glad you did not take him instead of me. Ah, monsieur, you have outwitted yourself confoundedly. What a prize he would have been to present to your general! That officer was Monsieur le Comte D'Erlon."

"D'Erlon!" exclaimed Ronald; "would to Heaven he would return."

"With the sabres of twenty *chasseurs à cheval* glittering behind him?"

"No, certainly. But, oh! had I only guessed his rank and fame, he should not have escaped me. I would either have taken, or cut him down in his saddle."

"That would have been a pity, for he is a famous old fellow; but it would have left the comtesse a widow, with I know not how many thousand livres in the year. I know she looks with favourable eyes on me,—but, *sacre bleu!* 'tis all in vain. I don't like ladies that are verging towards forty years."

"You seem to have recovered your equanimity of temper now."

"Oh, perfectly; but my head rings like a belfry, with that cut you gave me."

"So that old officer with his arm slung, was really the famous D'Erlon, of whom we have heard so much."

"The gallant old count himself. He received a stroke from a spent pistol-ball a day or two past, which disabled his sword-arm; otherwise you would have had an encounter with him also."

"I shall ever curse my thoughtlessness, in having permitted him to escape."

The cuirassier laughed exultingly.

"I am,—*diable!* I was his aide-de-camp; and we had merely crossed the Tagus last night with a sub-division of *chasseurs*, to make a reconnoissance; and we were returning leisurely in the rear of our party, when you so unluckily fell in with us, like some wandering knight-errant."

"Excuse me, monsieur; but as I perceive that your *sabre-tache*[*] is very full of something, if you have any of the Count d'Erlon's despatches or papers, I must consider it my duty to request that you will entrust them to my care."

[*] A leather case hanging to the waist-belt of a dragoon. It is meant for carrying military papers.

"Excellent, by the bomb! That you may present them to your general?"

"Undoubtedly, monsieur."

"I believe he is every inch a true soldier; and were he here, would be welcome to share the contents of my *sabre-tache*; but as he is not, we will divide them honestly at the kettle-drum head. Here, you see, is a roast fowl, famously stuffed with sage and garlic, which yesterday afternoon I carried off from the dinner-table of a fat canon of Torbiscoso, when just about to carve, and very much aghast the padre looked when I seized it unceremoniously. Here also is a bottle of pomard,—rare stuff, as you will find. I took it out of D'Erlon's holsters not above four hours ago. He always keeps a bottle in one, and a pistol in the

other. A knowing old campaigner, *ventre St. Gris!* And now, since you have reminded me of the sabre-tache, let us to luncheon."

The poniard and the fowl were shared together, and had any stranger beheld them as they jogged along, he would never have imagined that they had been engaged in mortal strife an hour before.

"Ah, this horrible garlic! the taste of it would madden a Parisian *chef de cuisine*," observed De Mesmai. "I drink to the health of senor, the reverend canon of Torbiscoso, who has provided for us this especial good luncheon. Come, my friend, you do not drink; you are as melancholy as if you had lost your love, while I am as merry as if I had just buried my wife. But why should I be cast down in spirits? The old count cannot do without me, and will soon get me exchanged; he might as well lose his head as Maurice de Mesmai. I save him a world of trouble by drinking his wine, smoking his cigars, making up his despatches, in which I take especial care that my name is always duly commended to the notice of the Emperor. I study the localities for camps, and always make them in the neighbourhood of convents. A-propos of convents: I love better to capture and sack them than any thing else. 'Tis such delightful hide-and-seek sort of work, to pull the fair garrison from the nooks and niches where they hide from us. I have had a score of nuns across this very saddle-bow; and, but for your cursed interruption,—excuse me, monsieur,—would by this time have had the abbess of the Jarciejo convent. An immensely fine creature, upon my honour, with a neck and bust beautiful enough to turn the heads of messieurs their eminences the cardinals. A glorious creature, in fact, and as kind a one as may be met with on a long day's march. I had marked her for a prize, and D'Erlon had never dared to say me nay; otherwise he would have had to provide himself with another aide."

De Mesmai seemed to have recovered that buoyancy of temper so natural to Frenchmen, and he chatted on in this gay and unconnected manner, and sung snatches of military and tavern songs until they arrived, when evening was approaching, at Villa Macia, where it was necessary that they should halt for the night. Here they received information that Sir Rowland Hill, with the troops returning from Almaraz, had passed through two days before. In so small a village there was no alcalde to order them a billet, and no inn at which they could procure one otherwise; and while standing in the street, irresolute how to act, they were surrounded by a crowd of swarthy villagers, who greeted Ronald with many a hearty *viva!* but regarded the disarmed Frenchman with louring looks of hatred and hostility, to which he replied by others of defiance and contempt. *El cura*, the rector or curate of the place, a reverend-looking old churchman, with a bald head, a few grey hairs, and a wrinkled visage, approached them with his shovel-hat in his hand, and invited them to partake of the shelter afforded by his humble roof, to which the Gaul and the Briton were alike welcome. The horses were ac-

commodated in an out-house behind the cottage, while the curate introduced his guests into his best apartment,—a room floored with tiles, which had just been cooled by the application of a water-sprinkler. Nets of onions, oranges, and innumerable bunches of grapes hung from the rude rafters of the roof, waving in the fresh evening breeze which blew through the open window. Drawings of various kinds, particularly landscapes, adorned the walls of the room, in which, if poverty was every where apparent, there was an extreme air of neatness and cleanliness, not often to be met with in houses of such a class in Spain.

CHAPTER XII. THE CURATE'S STORY.

"Loose me, sire! and ill betide thee!
Curse upon thee! let me go!
Wert thou other than my father,
Heavens! I would smite thee low!"
The Cid: a Spanish Romance.

"*Te Deum laudamus!* we shall have a rest at last!" exclaimed De Mesmai. "I thought I had forgotten my Latin; and yet my old rogue of a tutor rubbed it hard into me with a tough rod." He clattered through the room with his heavy jack-boots and jangling spurs clanking on the floor; and seating himself in the curate's easy chair, stretched out his legs, and half closing his eyes, contemptuously surveyed the place. He threw his heavy casque on the table, crushing the leaves of a large bible, which el cura had been reading.

"*Diable!* my head is ringing like a kettledrum with the violence of that unlucky stroke. Monsieur, the basket-hilts of your Scottish regiments are confoundedly heavy, and their fluted blades give most uncomfortable thrusts," said De Mesmai, passing his hand over his round bullet head and thick and black curly hair, which clustered around a bold high forehead. His features were very handsome, strongly marked, and classically regular. Campaigns in Italy had bronzed and scarred them in no ordinary degree, and there was a bold recklessness in his eye and a fierceness in the curl of his moustaches, which seemed quite to appal the poor old curate, notwithstanding the presence of Ronald Stuart. "*Vive la*

joie! let us drink and be merry. I am a prisoner of war,—*sacre!* a prisoner! 'Tis something new; but thanks to D'Erlon, and Madame his dear little countess, who will never be able to mount horse without me, I will not be long so. *Vive la joie, Monsieur le Curé—Senor Cura*—or what do you style yourself among the rebels of Joseph Buonaparte,—what are we to have for supper?"

"*Gaspacho*—only a dish of *gaspacho*; 'tis all I have to offer you, *gracios senores*."

"*Soupe maigre*, by the Lord! Bah! *senor Espagnol*; 'tis food only for hogs or yourselves, not for a cuirassier of France."

"'Tis all that France and misfortune enable me to offer. They have brought me low enough," replied the curate meekly, while he appeared astounded by the boisterous behaviour of the dragoon, for whom Ronald (though secretly angry at his conduct) endeavoured to apologize, and to re-assure their kind host. "But something else may be added to the *gaspacho*, *senores*, and you will find the latter very good; my grand-daughter is the best preparer of it in the village."

"*Diable!* your grand-daughter? what a merry monk you have been in your young days. But how came you, *senor curé*, to have a family?"

"I was married before I took upon me the scapulary and girdle,—the badges of my holy order," replied the other, while the colour came and went in his faded cheek, and he regarded the Frenchman with a fixed look of indignation, which was replied to by a contemptuous laugh.

"A jolly monk! *Vive la joie!* And is your grand-daughter young and pretty? I hope so, as I feel ennui creeping over me in this dull dungeon. But be not angry, reverend *curé*. Let us have but a measure of decent wine to wash down this same *gaspacho*, and we shall manage pretty well."

"If monsieur knew that I was his countryman," said the curate gently, "he might perhaps treat my grey hairs less insultingly."

"Not a whit, monsieur renegade!" cried the cuirassier fiercely. "What! you are some base emigrant, I suppose. They are ever the bitterest enemies to the great Napoleon, to his faithful soldiers, and to *la belle France*."

"'Tis false, rude soldier!" said the old man, his faded eye kindling up. "We are the only true friends to beautiful France, and the outraged house of Bourbon."

"Beelzebub strangle the Bourbons! Get us our supper, and call a halt to your chattering. Also, take care how you give me the lie, old gentleman, or I swear I will dash—"

"Hold! De Mesmai," said Stuart, interfering now for the second or third time. "I, as a British officer, cannot permit you to persist in insulting a Spanish citizen thus—"

"A dog of an emigrant! I have mown them down by troops,—never yet granted quarter, even to their most pitiable entreaties. DEATH! was the word

wherever we have fallen in with them,—in Holland, Flanders, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. When I served with the army of the Moselle, we once formed a thousand emigrant prisoners into solid squares, and poured in volleys of grape and musquetry upon them; while the cavalry charged them by squadrons, sword in hand, to finish by hoof and blade what the fire of the platoons had left undone.”

The curate clasped his hands and turned up his eyes, but made no reply.

”You have little cause to boast of that exploit,” said Ronald; ”but, Monsieur de Mesmai, we have been very good friends on the way hither, yet we are likely to quarrel, if you abuse our kind host thus.” At that moment the curate’s granddaughter entered, and stole close to his side. The two officers rose at once, each to offer her a seat, and she took Stuart’s, bowing coldly to De Mesmai, who, seating himself in what he thought a fine position, muttered, ”A dazzling creature, really. Upon my honour beats Mariette of the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs quite, and will make amends for the loss of the abbess.” He raised his glass to his eye, and scanned the poor girl with so intent a look, that her face became suffused with blushes. She was indeed a very beautiful creature. She was about twenty years of age; her eyes had a blackness and brightness in them truly continental. Her teeth were perfectly regular, and of the purest white, and the fine proportions of her figure were displayed to the utmost advantage by a tight black velvet boddice, with short sleeves adorned with frills of lace at the elbow, below which her white arm was bare. Her luxuriant black hair was plaited in two gigantic tails or braids, which hung down to the red flounce attached to her brown bunchy petticoat, which was short enough to display a well-turned foot and ankle.

During supper innumerable were the fine things and complimentary speeches which the cuirassier addressed to the Senora Maria, to all of which she listened with a calm smile, and made such careless yet appropriate replies as showed that she knew their true value, and which sometimes confounded the Frenchman, who thought to win her favour thus; while he altogether lost the curate’s by his insolent remarks and sneers at their humble repast—the *gaspacho*, a mess made of toasted bread, water, a sprinkling of vinegar, spices, salt, and oil, to which, as a second course, to De Mesmai’s great delight, was added a dish of stewed meat. After supper the curate rose, and, laying aside his skull-cap, delivered a long prayer, which De Mesmai pronounced to be confoundedly tedious, and for which he showed his contempt by humming ”The Austrian Retreat,” and drumming on the table with his fingers.

A few stoups of the common provincial wine were now produced, and while discussing these, the curate engaged Stuart in a long conversation about Scotland, in the affairs of which he appeared to be much interested, like a true French priest of the old school. His father, he said, had served in Fitz-James’s horse, under the illustrious prince Charles Stuart, in the campaigns of 1745-6.

He spoke also of the famous Scottish wizard Sir Michael Scott, of Balwearie, Escotillo, as the Spaniards name him. Ronald knew little more about this ancient Scottish philosopher than what he had acquired from the "Lay of the Last Minstrel," published a few years before, and was not very well able to answer the interrogations of the curate, who produced from his little book-case a musty old copy of Sir Michael's "Commentary on Aristotle," published at Venice, A.D. 1496, a prize which would have thrown the Society of Scottish Antiquarians into ecstasies of delight, could they have laid their hands upon it. The curate informed Ronald that there was a countryman of his, a Padre Macdonald, who resided in the town of Alba de Tormes, and who had formerly been a priest in the Scots College of Douay,—when a scream from Senora Maria interrupted him.

While Ronald and his host were conversing, the young lady had been explaining the subject of some of her drawings to the dragoon, who bestowed upon them all, indiscriminately, such vehement praise, that the poor girl was sometimes quite abashed, and considered him a perfect connoisseur, though in truth he knew not a line he saw. But he seemed quite enchanted with the young provincial, his companion. "*Vive l'amour! ma belle Marie,*" he whispered; and throwing his arm around her, kissed her on the cheek. Her eyes filled with fire, she screamed aloud, and breaking away from him, drew close to the side of the curate.

"How, monsieur! how can you be so very rude?" exclaimed the old man, rising in wrath. "Do you dare to treat her as if she was some *fille de joie* of the Boulevards or night-promenades of the iniquitous city of Paris?"

"By the bomb! I believe the old gentleman is getting quite into a passion," replied the other, coolly twirling his moustache. "*Marie, ma princesse,* surely you are not so? The women are all devilish fond of me. When I ride in uniform through the streets of Paris, the sweet *grisettes* flock to the doors in hundreds. Marie, or Maria—"

"Insolent!" exclaimed the curate. "By one word I could avenge her, and overwhelm you with confusion and dismay."

"*Peste!*" cried the astonished cuirassier, into whose head the wine he had taken was rapidly mounting; "that would indeed be something new. Overwhelm me with confusion? me, Monsieur de Mesmai, by the Emperor's grace and my own deserts captain of No. 4 troop of the 10th cuirassiers? *Diable!* that would be something rare, and rarities are agreeable. Maria, *ma belle coquette,* come to me, and say that you are not angry. Meanwhile, *Monsieur le Curé,* I should be glad to hear that terrible word."

He advanced again towards Maria Rosat; but Ronald, who was now seriously angry, interposed between him and the terrified girl.

"Shame! shame on you, Captain de Mesmai!" said he. "This conduct shows

me how outrageously you soldiers of Buonaparte must behave on all occasions towards the Spaniards, and that the excesses recorded of Massena's troops were not exaggerated in the London newspapers."

"Massena is a fine fellow, and a soldier every inch," answered the other tartly; "but let us not come to blows about a smatchet like this,—especially as you, monsieur, have the advantage of me. You are armed and free; I am weaponless and a prisoner on parole. But, Monsieur Stuart, I meant no harm. In a soldier-like way, I love to press my moustaches against a soft cheek. No harm was intended, and *ma belle Marie* well knows that."

"Ah, Monsieur Maurice—" began the curate.

"Ha! Maurice?" interrupted the cuirassier sharply. "How came you, old gentleman, to know my name so well?"

"Insolent and libertine soldier!" replied the curate sternly, "I know not if I should tell you. I would,—I say again I can confound and dismay you as you deserve to be."

"A rare blockhead this! rare, as one would meet in a march of ten leagues. Do so, in the devil's name, Sir Curate; but as for Maria—"

"Name her not, *base roué!* She is—she is—"

"*Tête-dieu!* who is she, most polite monsieur? A princess in disguise?"

"Your daughter,—your own child! Maurice de Mesmai of Quinsay," replied the old priest with solemn energy; while the dark features of the cuirassier became purple and then deadly pale, and his eyes wandered from the faces of Ronald and Maria to the calm features of the curate, whose arm he grasped, as, with emphatic sternness and in a tone something very like consternation, he answered,—

"My daughter? Impossible! What have you dared to tell me, old man?"

"Truth, truth! as I shall answer to Heaven, when all men shall stand at the tribunal to be judged on the great day which is to come. I tell you truth,—she is your daughter."

"Her mother?" asked the dragoon, bending forward his dark eyes, as if he would look searchingly into the very soul of the curate. "Her mother—"

"Was Justine Rosat,—the lily of Besançon."

"Poor Justine!" exclaimed the other, covering his face for a moment with his hand. "And, Monsieur le Curé, you are—"

"François Rosat, her father, and grandsire of this poor orphan."

"What! the gardener at my jovial old château of Quinsay, on the banks of the Doubs? Impossible! he was destroyed when I blew up the hall, with all the base republican mechanics who filled it."

"Monsieur, I am he," replied the curate.

Maria, with her hands crossed on her bosom, knelt at the feet of De Mesmai weeping bitterly, and imploring him, if he was really her father, to speak to her,

to look upon her. But the devil-may-care-spirit of the true Parisian roué and libertine was not at all subdued: he turned from her to Ronald, who had been listening in silence and wonder.

"Ah! Monsieur Stuart," said he with a laugh, "I have been a sad fellow when a subaltern. *Tête-dieu!* what would old D'Erlon and his countess think of this?"

"Noble senor," said the kneeling girl, in a soft plaintive voice, "ah, if you are indeed my father, speak to me;" and she pressed his hand between her own. "Father, hear me!"

"Father! *ma belle*. Very good, but something new when addressed to me, and sounds odd. How D'Erlon and his plumed and aiguilleted staff would laugh at this! Maurice de Mesmai of the 10th cuirassiers,—the most dashing aide-de-camp in the Imperial service, to be father of a little Spanish *paisana*. By the bomb! you do me infinite honour. What a very odd adventure! And so, monsieur, my old rebellious gardener escaped the explosion at Quinsay? Excellently planned affair that was! Hand me wine: thank you. Really, 'pon honour, this respectable title of father has in it something very overpowering."

He quaffed a long horn of the wine, which had already begun to cloud his faculties, and he endeavoured by talking in his usually careless manner to hide the confusion that he evidently felt. Maria, who had shrunk from his side, wept bitterly, and covered her face with her hands.

"*Diable!*" said the cuirassier, turning round. "'Tis horrible wine this. Ah! for a single glass of Hermitage, Château Margot, Vin Ordinaire, Volnay, or glorious Champagne, such as old Marcel retails at the Eagle on the Quai d'Orsai, opposite to the Pont Royal, in our good and glorious Paris. But what is the girl weeping about? You should rather laugh, having just found your father, and found him as handsome a fellow as ever stood in jack-boots. All the girls are in love with me,—'pon honour they are. Some of the fairest creatures at the court of the Empress are dying for me; and I mean to act the part of a hard-hearted dragoon, and let them die if they will. I swear to you, Maria, by a thousand caissons of devils, that as you appear just now, with your lashes cast down and your face covered with tears and blushes, like the western sky in a shower, you are pretty enough to turn the brain of monsieur the Pope, to whom I drink that he may have a long and joyful life. But I must retire. My head is buzzing anew with that sword-stroke. *Diable!* my gay helmet, what a dinge you have got. But, messieurs, we will talk over these matters in the morning, when I suppose we shall leap to saddle without blast of trumpet. Adieu! mademoiselle, my daughter; pleasant dreams to you. *Vive la joie—tête-dieu!*" He took up his heavy military cloak and staggered out of the room, withdrawing to the humble attic set apart for himself and Ronald. A long pause ensued.

"There, he has gone with the same swagger as of old,—the polished

gentleman,—the accomplished and gallant soldier, combined with the blustering tavern brawler and the libertinism of the perfect *roué*. He is all unchanged, although twenty years have passed into eternity since I beheld him last,” said the curate in a mournful accent; “and yet, when I remember what he was, I cannot,—no, I cannot implore a curse upon him. I carried him in my arms when he was an infant, and he is the father of this poor weeping girl. Alas! from the day that as a stripling soldier he first buckled on a sword-belt, time has wrought no change upon him. He is the same daring and gallant, but reckless and hollow-hearted man as ever.”

“Senor Cura, to me this has been a most incomprehensible scene,” said Stuart; “so much so, that I trust you will not consider me impertinent or inquisitive in wishing for an explanation.”

“Quite the reverse,—an explanation is, indeed, necessary. But retire, Maria, my poor cast-away; I will speak to you of this afterwards. Be seated, monsieur, and draw the wine-jug towards you.”

He led Maria from the room, and on returning, seated himself at the table and commenced in the following words:—

“Monsieur Officier, I am, as you already know, a Frenchman, a native of the fertile district of Besançon. I succeeded my father in the humble occupation of gardener to the family of this Monsieur Maurice de Mesmai, at the castle of Quinsay, a noble château, built on the banks of the Doubs, which flows through Besançon. The château is of venerable antiquity, and it is said to have been granted to an ancestor of De Mesmai’s by Charles Martel. Ah, monsieur! when I had only my flower-beds and vineries to attend to, no man was happier than I,—François Rosat. With my flowers, my wife and daughter were my sole delights; and when I returned in the evening, after working during the hot dusty days in the garden of the château, what pleasure was mine to be met by my smiling Suzette, with the little laughing Justine in arms, stretching out her hands and crowing with delight at the *bouquet* of violets and roses I always brought her from my choicest beds. And merrily we used to spend our evenings, for Suzette sung while I played second on the flute, and we taught little Justine to dance as soon as she could walk. My life was all humble happiness then, monsieur; but it was not destined to continue long so. Justine was just sixteen when my wife died, and our old lord dying soon after, this sad *roué*, Monsieur Maurice came to take possession of the château, and terrify the poor peasantry by the wickedness he had learned in Paris and the garrison towns where he had been stationed: he belonged to the dragoons of Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul. This dissipated Maurice, arrayed in all the extreme of Parisian dandyism, the first Sunday we saw him in church formed a strong contrast to our venerable old lord his father, who used to occupy the same pew so devoutly, dressed in his old-fashioned way of Louis the Fifteenth’s

days,—his deep waistcoat, silk coat, with its collar covered with powder, and his ruffles and frills starched as stiff as pasteboard; and we soon discovered that if there was a difference in their appearance, there was an equal difference in their hearts and sentiments.

"My little Justine had now become a woman, and a very beautiful one,—more especially so for the daughter of a peasant. She was the belle of the rural district, and the people named her the lily of Besançon. Ah, monsieur! although the child of a low-born man, a vassal, she was surprisingly beautiful; too much so to be happy, as my friend Pierre Raoul told me more than once. Her figure was not the less handsome or graceful because, instead of satin or brocade, she wore our homely brown stuffs; and her long black curls, flowing in freedom, seemed a thousand times more beautiful than the locks of high-born ladies, powdered and pasted into puffs and bows by the hands of a fashionable barber.

"Monsieur, I perceive that you almost comprehend my story, ere it is told. My daughter was charming, and our lord was a libertine. In that sentence are the causes of all my woe. I was kept in a constant state of anxiety lest the debauchee, our young lord, or some accomplished rascal of his acquaintance, might rob me of my treasure, for such she was to me; and what I had dreaded came to pass at last. I had observed that the manners of Justine were changed. She shunned the villagers, and often went out alone; she seldom laughed, and never sang as she used to do; but was ever moody and melancholy, and often I found her weeping in solitary places.

"Never shall I forget the evening when the dreadful truth broke upon me, with all its maddening anguish; when I was told that my daughter was lost,—that the bloom of the lily was blighted! I was no longer François Rosat,—no longer the same man apparently; a cloud of horror seemed to have enveloped me, for although but a poor peasant of Besançon, I held my honour as dear to me as Louis XVI. could have held his. One evening I returned to my cottage, bearing with me a basket of choice flowers for the decoration of Justine, who had been elected queen of a fête which was to be given by the villagers and tenantry of Quinsay on the morrow. I returned to my home, monsieur,—a house which was to be no longer a home for me. Justine was not awaiting me, as usual, under the porch, where I had trained up the honey-suckle and woodbine,—nor was she in our sitting-room; but she could not be far off, I imagined, as her guitar and work-basket lay on the table. I know not how it was, but I noted these little matters anxiously, and I felt my heart beat quicker, as if in dread of coming evil.

"'Justine!' said I, laying down my basket, 'come hither. You never saw such flowers as these for freshness and beauty, and I have been employed the whole day in culling them for you. Here are anemonies, crimson and lilac, and blue and white pinks, carnations, gillyflower, auriculas with eyes of scarlet edged with

green, violets as large as lilies, and tulips and roses such as were never before seen in Besançon. Justine! come here, girl. Why, where are you?’ But no Justine answered my call. Her little room, the room in which her mother died, was deserted, and my heart swelled in my breast with an inward presentiment of evil, as I went forth to seek her by the river side. Here I met the steward of Quinsay, Pierre Raoul, a surly fellow, whose addresses she had rejected. He informed me, with what I thought a grin of triumph and malice, that my daughter, with Monsieur Maurice, had just swept through Besançon in a travelling-carriage, and were off for Paris as fast as four horses could take them. As he spoke the earth swam around me, and I saw his lips moving, although I heard not his conclusion; there was a hissing sensation in my ears,—the cords of my heart felt as if riven asunder, and I sunk on the turf at the feet of Pierre.

”When I returned to consciousness, he was bathing my brow and hands in the cool water of the river; but he soon left me, and oh! monsieur, what a sense of loneliness and desolation came upon me. That my daughter should desert me thus heartlessly,—that the little creature I had cherished in my bosom should turn upon me and sting me thus! I raved like a madman, and tore the hair from my head and the grass from the earth in handfuls. When this fit passed away, all was silence and stillness around me: the moon was shining brightly in the sky, and silvered the boughs of the trees my own hands had trained, and the petals and buds of the flowers that it had been my delight to attend; but they were unheeded now, and I turned to where appeared, in the strong light and shadow, the old château de Quinsay, with its battlemented towers and elevated turrets. I prayed deeply for my erring Justine, and implored Heaven and the spirit of her mother to sustain me under so heavy a dispensation. I would rather have seen the child of Suzette laid dead by her side, than the dishonoured mistress of Maurice de Mesmai. But my prayers were impious, as I mingled them with the bitterest maledictions upon her accomplished seducer. At the château the servants, some with pity, some with the malice felt by little minds, corroborated the blasting information given me by Pierre Raoul, and that very night I set out for Paris in pursuit of my lost sheep. I set out on foot on my sorrowful pilgrimage, almost heart-broken, and without a sous to defray my expenses by the way. How I reached the capital—a distance of two hundred and thirty-five miles from Besançon—I know not. But He who fed the children of Israel in the desert surely assisted me by the way. How great was my misery, when begging as a miserable mendicant, exposed to the insults of the *gens d’armes*, I wandered about that wide wilderness of Paris, with the vague and eager hope of recovering Justine! Once—yes, once—I got a sight of her; only a single glance, but one I shall never forget. In a dashing carriage, the panels of which flashed in the sun with gilding and armorial bearings, she was seated by the side of De Mesmai, tricked out in all the

gaudy and wanton finery that wealth and pride could bestow upon her. But she looked paler, less happy than she was wont to be, and the roses had faded from her cheek, and the lustre from her once sunny eye. They swept past me on the Boulevards, where I was seeking alms as was my wont, and Justine, *mon Dieu!* my own fallen but kind-hearted daughter, threw a demi-franc into my tattered hat, without looking upon my face. I attempted to cry out; but what I would have said expired on my lips. My tongue clove to the roof of my mouth, and when I recovered they were gone! I never beheld them again.

"I was starving at that moment, monsieur; food had not passed my lips for three days, and I looked wistfully, till my eyes became blinded with tears, upon the little coin I had received from Justine. A sudden thought struck me. I spat upon it, and tossed it from me as a coin of hell, as the wages of her infamy. Twelve months,—long and weary months of wretchedness and sorrow, I wandered about the streets of Paris, a woe-begone mendicant, until all hope of seeing her again was extinguished, and I returned to Besançon more heart-broken, if possible, than when I had left it. My cottage had fallen into ruin; but honest Pierre Raoul restored me again to the occupation of gardener, and repaired my old residence for me. Our lord had been absent, no one knew where, ever since he had carried off Justine, and I began to have some faint hope that he might have married her.

"These thoughts stole at length like sunshine into my desolate heart; and I thought so much of the chances and probabilities, that at last it appeared to me to be beyond a doubt that Justine was the wife of De Mesmai. I plucked up fresh courage, and attended from dawn till sunset my loaded orchards and blooming flower-beds as of old. The garden was again my delight and glory, and not even does the great Napoleon survey his troops with more delight, than I did my beds of tulips and anemonies: I had brought to perfection the art of cultivation, and where can it be practised with more success than under the climate of my own beautiful France? In the garden of the château the aloe of Africa, the pine of Scotland, the oak of England, the cypress of Candia, the laurels of Greece and Portugal, the rose-tree of Persia, the palms of India, the figs of Egypt—all blooming together, and at once.

"In my application to my old business, the manifold miseries I had endured in Paris were forgotten, or at least subdued in my remembrance. I pictured bright images of monsieur's returning, with my beautiful Justine to be mistress of his château. But these were doomed soon to end. One evening I sat on the turf-seat at my door, employed as usual building castles in the air, while I made up and dried packages of seed which were never to be sown by me. It was a beautiful summer evening, and all the fertile landscape seemed bright and joyous in the light of the setting sun. Clear as a mirror the river murmured at my feet, sweeping past the old château on its opposite bank, where, above trees a hundred years old,

the slated roofs of its turrets and gilded vanes were shining in the sun. Afar off, between openings in the trees of the lawn, could be seen the fortifications of the citadel and city of Besançon, with its round towers and the tall spires of its colleges and churches reared against the cloudless sky. I desisted from my employment and took off my hat, for the sound of the evening service came floating on the wind towards me from the rich abbey of the order of Cîteaux. The very air was filled with perfume, for the breeze swept over the wide orchards and gardens of the abbey and château.

"We French are enthusiastic creatures, monsieur; and I was filled with delight and ecstasy at the beauty of the evening and the scenery of my native place, where the deep blue river wound among fertile hills, vineyards, and green woods between happy little hamlets clustering round ivy clad churches and the stately châteaux of the old nobility of France,—a nobility, monsieur, in those days not less proud and haughty than those of your own northern country.

"Yes," said I aloud, giving utterance to my thoughts, 'the hand of fate has been in all this. Justine will certainly be the lady of Quinsay, and poor old François Rosat will get a corner in some part of that huge old château to rest in. Let me see, now: the octagon turret which overlooks the orchard will suit me exactly. It has a window to the south, which overlooks the garden. Excellent! I can watch the buds and blossoms in spring,—I will look at them the moment I leap from bed; but, alas! I must no do more. I shall then be a gentleman, and Monsieur François Rosat, father-in-law of the lord of Quinsay, must not be up with the lark, like Maitre François the gardener,—that would never do. This red night-cap I will exchange for a hat of the best beaver, tied up with a silver loop, à la Louis XVI. My coat—'

"The train of my vain but happy thoughts was cruelly cut short by the apparition of a woman standing before me. Her appearance declared her to be sunk to the lowest ebb of misery and degraded destitution. She was tanned by exposure to the weather; bare-headed, bare-footed,—almost without covering, and bore in her arms a poor child, almost as wan and meagre as herself. *Ah, mon Dieu!* how keenly at this distant time can my memory recall the agony of that terrible recognition. Oh, what a moment was that! Disguised as she was, I recognised her; but a mist overspread my vision, and I felt her fall into my open arms, although I could not for some minutes discern her.

"My father! oh, my father!" said she. But, alas! her voice was not so sweet as of old.

"Justine, I forgive you," was my answer. 'Come again to my bosom: the past shall be forgotten.'

"She sunk down between my knees upon the earth, and lay motionless and still. Monsieur, I will not protract this intrusive story of my griefs. She was

dead! she had expired at that moment—the kindness of my forgiveness had killed her! Unrequited love, unkindness, sorrow, shame, and misery had wrought their worst upon her,—she was destroyed! De Mesmai had taken her to Italy, and there, ruthlessly abandoning her for some new victim, she was left to find her way as she best could to Besançon, to place in my charge the infant to which she had given birth on the way. The child of De Mesmai is the Maria to whom he behaved so insolently to-night. Two days afterwards the poor polluted lily of Besançon was laid in her mother's grave; and as I strewed the fresh flowers on the green turf which covered her, I knelt down upon it and solemnly swore a vow,—a vow at once terrible and impious,—to seek revenge upon her destroyer!

"I joined one of those secret bands or societies then so numerous in France, composed of men who were desperate by their characters and fortunes, and the sworn enemies of kings and of nobility. I longed for desperate vengeance, and the hour for glutting it seemed at hand. A bloody standard was soon to wave over France, and destiny had pointed out that, like your own Stuarts, the Bourbons were a doomed race. The spirit of revolution and destruction was soon to sweep over my country, blighting and blasting it like the simoom of the African desert; and, eager as I was for vengeance on De Mesmai, I hailed the approaching tumult with joy, and entered into the wildest schemes of the most savage republicans and heaven-daring atheists. So eagerly did I attend the taverns of Besançon to hear the news from Paris, that the little innocent confided by Justine to my charge was quite neglected. My garden became a wilderness; I became sullen and morose, and forgot even to hang fresh flowers, as had been my custom daily, on the grave of Justine.

"About six months after her return, the once-dreary château was filled with sudden life and bustle. Monsieur Maurice had returned, bringing with him a number of wild and reckless fellows like himself. These were all officers of his own regiment, except one very sad dog, worse even than the rest, Monsieur Louis Chateaufleur, captain of the *Gens d'armes Ecossois*, or first troop of the French gendarmerie. Nothing was heard of now but feasting, drinking, and desperate gambling within the château; hunting, hawking, shooting, frolics, and outrages of every sort committed out of it. The guests of De Mesmai were some of the wildest *roués* about Paris—and the mess of the Duc de Choiseul's regiment had produced many of them,—and a great commotion their appearance made in Besançon and the rural district of Quinsay. All the lamps in the former were sometimes broken in a single night, and the whole city involved in darkness; while these madcaps and their servants possessed themselves of the steeples, where they rang the alarum bells backwards, and rushed through the streets, crying 'Fire! murder! robbery and invasion!' until the peaceable citizens were scared out of their seven senses.

"Nor were their brawls and outrages confined to the night alone. The wig of Monsieur le Maire was dragged off and flung in his face, when he was passing through the Rue de l'Université. Swords were drawn in the lobbies of the theatre every night, and the gens d'armes were always beaten and insulted. Monsieur Chateaufleur, of the *gens d'armes Ecossois*, as a crowning outrage, carried off by force to the château a young milliner or grisette of the Rue de Paradis; and the citizens of Besançon were enraged beyond what I can describe at the insolencies of these young aristocrats, who were at once struck with terror and dismay when news arrived of the revolution which had broken out in Paris, and of the bloody tumults which had ensued there. De Mesmai armed his servants, and the inhabitants of the château kept close within its walls.

"The same wild spirit of uproar and anarchy that prevailed at Paris seemed also to pervade the provinces, which appeared suddenly in a state of insurrection, the people of France seeming to consider their allegiance to Louis XVI. at an end. The spirit of dissatisfaction had spread to the troops. Those in garrison at Besançon laid down their arms, and abandoned the citadel to the bourgeois; who, on becoming thus suddenly armed, assumed the *cockade de la liberté*, and wearing this republican badge, committed the most frightful outrages. No dwelling, sacred or profane, escaped sack and pillage; no age, or rank, or sex did we spare, executing indiscriminately, by the musquet and sabre, all who opposed us. Burning for vengeance against the family of De Mesmai, I had associated myself with and become a leader among the republicans. We ruined the city of Besançon, giving its public buildings, its schools, and university to the flames. Alas, monsieur! deeply at this hour do I repent me of the part I bore in these desperate outrages. We compelled the proud nobles to acknowledge that they had lost their privileges, and we burned to the ground their office of records in the city. We sacked and utterly levelled the rich abbey of the Citeaux,—that place made so famous by the animadversions of Voltaire. The young and beautiful Princess de Baufremont, and the Baroness d'Andelion, who dwelt there, owed their escape from our fury to the interposition of Heaven and the chivalric gallantry of Louis Chateaufleur, who with two of the *Gens d'armes Ecossois* cut his way through us, sword in hand, and carried the noble demoiselles off on horseback. Flushed with success, excitement, ferocity, and the wines found in the vaults of the rich old abbey, we became absolutely frantic, and some, imbruing their hands in each other's blood, slew their comrades; while others daubed themselves with gore or black paint, to make themselves more hideous. Eager for more plunder and devastation, we cried out to, or rather commanded, our leader, the ungrateful Pierre Raoul, to lead us against the stately old château of Quinsay, that its aristocratic guests might be given up to our vengeance. With the dawn De Mesmai was roused from his bed by the beating of drums, the braying of horns, discharge of fire-arms, the yells,

the howls, the shrieks of the frenzied rabble, mingled with shouts of '*Vive la nation! Vive la liberte!* Perish the name of God and the king! Freedom to France! Long live Monsieur Belzebub!' and a hundred other mad and impious cries. The gay lord of Quinsay, and his comrades of Choiseul's horse, beheld, to their no small terror, the gardens, the orchards and parks in possession of a desperate mob, armed with bayonets, musquets, pikes, scythes, and every weapon they could lay their hands on—iron rails and fences where nothing else could be procured. All were full of wine and frenzy: many were only half dressed, blackened with smoke and dust, and besmeared with blood, presenting a frightful troop of hideous faces, distorted by the worst and wildest of human passions.

"You may imagine the surprise of Pierre Raoul and his worthies, when, at the gate of the château, we were met by Monsieur Maurice and his gay companions, bowing and smiling, gracefully waving their hats, while they greeted us with cries of 'Long live the nation! Long live the sovereign people! *Vive le diable!*' We were astonished, and greeted them with the most tremendous yells, while a hundred black and dirty hands wrung theirs in burlesque friendship. The whole band were formally invited to a repast, served up in the hall of the château, from which De Mesmai had hurriedly torn down all the banners and armorial bearings of his house, substituting in their place an immense tri-coloured cockade, that was fastened to the back of the chair of state, in which the insolent Pierre Raoul installed his ungainly figure. Many now strode about, daring and unrestrained intruders into the very hall where they had often stood as humble dependants, trembling and abashed in the presence of De Mesmai, who had been, in the neighbourhood of Besançon, a much greater man than Louis XVI. was at Paris or Versailles. At the hastily prepared feast with which he entertained us, we ate and drank of every thing, gorging ourselves like savages as we were. The richest and most expensive wines in the cellars of the château were flowing at our orders like water. Pipes and puncheons were brought up by dozens and madly staved, until the floor swam with crimson, purple, and yellow liquor, to the imminent danger of those who lay upon it in a state of exhaustion or intoxication. 'Wine! wine!' was the cry, and the contents of well-sealed flasks of *Lachrymæ Christi* and *Côtéroti* were poured down our plebeian throats like the commonest beverage. We ordered all sorts of things, beating and insulting the unoffending servants of the château until they fled from us; and the noise and uproar in the hall, crowded as it was to suffocation with armed and intoxicated madmen, became stunning and appalling.

"A hundred times I had resolved, by a single thrust of my pike, to sacrifice De Mesmai to the shade of Justine; but the hourly massacres I saw committed by my barbarous comrades had glutted my longings for vengeance, and when I remembered that De Mesmai was the father of Justine's little girl, my fierce res-

olution relented. As often as I raised my hand to stab him to the heart, my soul died within me,—and he escaped. Very great however was our surprise at the condescension of this once proud noble, and the gay chevaliers his companions; and while doing the honours of the table, we subjected them to a thousand mortifications and gross insults. We tore the lace and facings from their uniform; transferred their epaulets from their shoulders to those of Pierre Raoul and our leaders; tossed wine in their faces, and fully tried their patience to the utmost limits of mortal endurance; but dire and unheard-of was the vengeance they were meditating!

"While we were thus rioting in the ancient hall, chosen servants of De Mesmai were placing barrels of gunpowder in the vaults immediately beneath it. When all was prepared, our host withdrew, and one by one his guests followed him, and left the château unperceived.

"The train was fired,[*] and the mine sprung. Never shall I forget the expression I read in the faces of the republicans at that moment,—the last of their existence!

[*] For an account of this affair, see any French paper or Journal for July 1789.

"We heard beneath our feet an appalling roar—a noise as if the globe was splitting asunder. All looked aghast, and I cried aloud on that God to help me, whose existence I had denied a moment before; but the unfortunate wretches around me had scarcely time either for prayer or blasphemy. The pavement heaved beneath their feet; the massive walls trembled and sunk inwards; the stone-arched roof descended thundering on their devoted heads,—all was darkness, chaos, and indescribable horror! Of a thousand men who crowded the place, not one escaped save myself: all were buried in the ruins,—the masonry of a whole wing of the château covered them. Yes, monsieur, I alone escaped that terrible explosion. By Heaven's grace, rather than my own deserts, I happened at the instant to be standing in the recess of an oriel window and was blown into the garden, where, when my senses returned, I found myself lying safe and whole on my favourite tulip-bed.

"De Mesmai and his friends had fled to some place at a distance, where they took shipping for Britain. Messieurs the bourgeois were exasperated to madness at the explosion of Quinsay. They rose *en masse* in arms, and the noble old château was razed almost to the foundation, and all the castles in the neighbourhood of Besançon shared the same fate. The populace were even under less restraint than before, and committed excesses, inconceivable to those who beheld

them not, under the banner and sacred name of *liberty*. The National Assembly offered a reward for De Mesmai's head; but he was safe in London, and the British government refused to give him up. Afterwards, when Louis was no more, and the silver lilies of old France were trodden as it were to the earth, De Mesmai made his peace with his countrymen by some means, and fought as a private soldier in the battles of the Republic. He distinguished himself, and has now, in this noon-day of French heroism, risen to the rank of a captain of cavalry under the Corsican usurper,—this self-made emperor, who usurps the crown and sceptre of a better race,—a race now exiled, and finding a refuge in the capital of Scotland. Napoleon has restored to De Mesmai his estate of Quinsay, and as he is a favourite both with the court and army, he may yet become a marshal of the Empire.

"Of myself, I have little more to say, monsieur. Taking with me my granddaughter, the little Maria, I abandoned Besançon, the scene of such tumult and disorder, and wandered I know not why, or how, across the Pyrenees into Spain, where, as I had received a good education in my youth, I was admitted as a brother into the order of *los Capuchinos*, at Truxillo, and soon afterwards received the situation of curate here,—at this peaceful little hamlet, Villa Macia, where, for fifteen years past, I have dwelt in retirement and happiness. Although the memory of my wife and unfortunate daughter is not effaced, time has, in a great measure, softened the pangs I feel when thoughts of them occur to my mind.

"I now consider myself a happy and contented old man. My parishioners, my books, and the fair young girl my grand-child, have been the companions of my increasing years. But I am soon to be deprived of my merry and volatile Maria. A very noble cavalier of Truxillo, Don Gonzago de Conquesta, has not disdained to sue for and obtain the promise of her hand. They will soon be wedded, and I am to perform the happy ceremony.

"This is all my tale, monsieur, in elucidation of the singular scene you saw acted here this evening. I trust I have not wearied you in this sketch of my life: although a humble one, it has been full of sorrows. I never thought again to have recalled them so fully to my mind; but the unexpected appearance of their author under my roof, has rolled back the tide of years to the hour in which we first met,—I knew the fine and noble features of his race the moment he laid aside his helmet. But I will not detain you longer from rest, monsieur. Take another cup of this simple wine, and permit me to bid you, as we say here in Spain, *Buenos*

noches,—Good night."

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ARREST.

"Guerre et pitié ne s'accordent pas ensemble."

French Military Proverb.

The next morning by day-break Ronald and his prisoner quitted Villa Macia.

The young Scot was disgusted with the levity and carelessness with which, at their departure, De Mesmai treated the tears and sorrow of his daughter, and the pious admonitions of the reverend *cura*.

"Body o' the Pope!" said he, as they cantered under the shade of the cork trees which lined the road, "what a rare blockhead has become monsieur my old gardener, now curate of Villa Macia. How D'Erlon and his aiguilleted staff would laugh, if they knew I had become quite a family man! I am always apprehensive that some of my wild pranks will come unluckily to light, as this affair of poor Justine Rosat's has done; but I am too old a soldier to be put to the blush. Blush! I have no blood to spare,—the bleeding of twenty years' campaigning has cured me of that. How the poor girl wept! What the deuce! surely she did not expect me to take her with me? Captain Maurice de Mesmai, of Monsieur le Compte d'Erlon's staff, with a family! *Corboeuf!* the idea is most excellent! 'Tis well Victor d'Estouville and our first major, Louis Chateaufleur, know nothing of this; otherwise they would quiz me out of the service. However, I commend my daughter to the long visaged and noble cavalier Don—Don,—what the devil is his name?—Gonzago de Conquesta; and vow, if he makes not a good husband, affectionate father, and displays not all the good qualities you will find graven on every great man's tomb-stone, I will crop his ears,—I will, by the name of the bomb! Ho, ho! now when I remember it, what a long roll-call Monsieur le Curé made of my early scrapes, last night. I listened to him through a chink in the partition. *Tête-dieu!* how impertinent the old dog was. I own to you I was on the point of cutting short his exceedingly rude harangue a dozen times."

De Mesmai kept talking thus for an hour at a time, without heeding the interruptions of Ronald, who did not hesitate to acquaint him freely with the

opinion he entertained of his feelings and sentiments, at which the other only laughed in his usual loud and boisterous manner.

At San Pedro they were received into the house of the *alcalde*, who showed them every attention and civility. But there an unlucky brawl ensued. De Mesmai, probably to spend the time, paid such close attention to the *patrona*, a plump, rosy, and good-natured-like matron, that the worthy *alcalde*, her lord and master, started up from the supper-table in a sudden fit of jealousy and rage, and would have stabbed the cuirassier with a poniard, which he suddenly unsheathed from his boot,—a place of concealment often used for such a weapon in Spain. Ronald's timely interference quelled this dangerous brawl, and mollified the fierce merchant,—for the *alcalde* was a retailer of Cordovan leather; and Stuart was very glad when he had his troublesome companion once more out on the highway, where his pride and petulance had less opportunities of rousing the ire of the fiery Spaniards.

Near Medellin, a town twenty miles east of Merida, their horses suddenly became dead lame; and Ronald, who was chafed to fury at the delay caused by this accident, lost much more time, as he could not abandon the major's horse, and it could proceed but slowly. Next day, the ninth of his absence, he beheld before him the massive amphitheatre, the gothic spires and well-known bridge of the old Roman city, which was associated with so many sad and tender reminiscences of Catalina, a thousand recollections of whom came crowding into his mind, plunging him into melancholy, from which De Mesmai vainly endeavoured to rouse him by an animated description of the follies and the gaiety of Paris, and biographical sketches of the reigning beauties, with all of whom he was, by his own account, a decided favourite.

It was dark when they reached the bridge, on the centre of which, where the blown-up arch was crossed by wooden planks, they saw two Highland sentinels pacing at their post, the flutter of their plaids and waving folds of their kilts giving to them the appearance of a couple of those ancient Romans who had often kept watch and ward upon the same spot. On hearing the sound of the approaching hoofs they came to their front, and one challenged, in the familiar voice of Evan Iverach, "Stand! Who goes there?"

"*Ronald an deigh nam fiann*," (the last of his race,) answered Stuart in Gaelic, almost laughing.

The two astonished Highlanders set up a loud skraigh, which startled the very leaves of the olives on the other side of the Guadiana, and ringing under the arches of the bridge, died away in the winding rocks of the river.

"Who is the officer on guard here?" asked Ronald, after Evan's extravagant joy at his sudden appearance had somewhat subsided.

"Mr. Macdonald, sir."

"Which? We have six or seven."

"Lieutenant Ronald Macdonuil, sir. The guard-house is close by the first barricade ye'll find cast across the croon o' the causeway, just inside the yetts o' the toon."

Promising to satisfy to-morrow the eager and affectionate inquiries of Evan, who hung on at his plaid very unceremoniously, Stuart, with his prisoner, crossed the bridge; and entering the city gate, found Macdonuil's guard under arms, having been startled by the holloa of the two sentinels.

"Where are the colonel's quarters?" asked Ronald of the officer on duty, when congratulations had ceased.

"Next door to the town-house; you will easily know it,—a large building with a portico. But I would advise you to defer reporting your arrival until to-morrow."

"Why so, Macdonuil? The sooner, so much the better, surely."

"But Cameron is sure, from the direction in which Campbell said you left Almaraz, that you were not in the hands of the enemy; and he is strangely enraged at your singular absence."

"Singular? How! have I not explained to you—"

"Oh, perfectly: I am quite satisfied. But, my dear Stuart, Cameron is such a fiery sort of fellow, that he will not be so easily pleased, notwithstanding your having captured this French officer. You must prepare yourself for something disagreeable, as he is determined to put you under arrest; and it will not put him in a better humour to report your return just now, almost at midnight."

"You are right, Macdonuil. But what shall I do for a billet? Twelve o'clock,—there is the bell-clock of the corporation-house striking."

"We have established a temporary mess-room, and you had better go to it; our fellows are all there still, I have little doubt,—they are never in a hurry to break up. You know the Calle de Guadiana—"

"Lying between the river and the Plaza?"

"Yes. Pass down there, wheel to your left, and you will come to the chapter-house of the San Juan convent, where our temporary mess-house is established."

"But I shall probably find Fassifern there: and if any thing disagreeable—"

"There is no danger. I saw him at sun-set return to his billet in the Calle de Santa Clara, accompanied by his faithful esquire and orderly, Dugald Mhor; so he is without doubt housed for the night."

Ronald followed Macdonuil's directions, accompanied by De Mesmai, who had been so often in Merida that he knew the streets as well as an inhabitant could have known them. On reaching the foot of the street of the Guadiana, the lights shining through the tall traceried windows of the chapter-house, together with the unseemly sounds of midnight roistering and merriment which issued

from it, informed them that this was the place they sought.

"Here we dismount," said Stuart; and alighting, they tied their bridles to the necks of two stone saints, whose weather-beaten heads had for six hundred years sustained the weight of a canopy over the gothic doorway. Before entering, Ronald gave a glance through a window, between the thick stone mullions of which he took a survey of the company. The gloomy old chapter-house was but indifferently lighted by a dozen yellow old commissariat candles stuck on the heads and hands of corbelled saints and angels, shedding a dull and uncertain light on the table, which was composed of a few rough boards nailed together. Around this rude contrivance sat about thirty officers in the Highland uniform, occupying the high-backed oaken chairs which erst were used by the holy fathers of San Juan, when assembled in solemn conclave. Ronald saw that nearly all his brother-officers were present, as few were on guard, and there was not one married man among them.

The general equipage of the table was different from that of a home-service mess, and contrasted strongly with the rich uniforms of the carousers, who were drinking Spanish wine from horns, tin canteens, glasses, and all sorts of vessels fit for the purpose that could be procured.

"*Corboeuf!*" exclaimed De Mesmai, "what a jovial song,—more merry than musical, though. I have a dozen minds to strike up the Marseillois hymn."

"Stay,—hearken a moment."

They were singing a well-known Scottish song,[*] and one which had become so popular at the mess, that it always followed the standing toast of "Here's to the Highlandmen, shoulder to shoulder!" and was chorused in a most methodical manner. By the noisy accompaniments of glasses clanked upon the table, and heels upon the floor, it was evident the company were pretty mellow. Some of the windows being open for the admittance of cool air, the bold chorus, chanted by thirty voices, rolled out into the still night air, and echoed among the deserted streets:

[*] "Donald Macdonald:" a song composed in 1803 by the Ettrick Shepherd, to the tune of "Woode, and married, and a'."

"Sword, and buckler, and a',
 Buckler, and sword, and a';
 For George we'll encounter the devil,
 Wi' sword, and buckler, and a'."

Now Campbell's loud sonorous voice, chanting alone, awoke the echoes of the place:

"The Gordon is gude in a hurry;
And Campbell is steel to the bane;
And Grant, and Mackenzie, and Murray,
And Cameron, will hurkle to nane.

The Stuart is sturdy and wannel,
And sae is Macleod and Mackay;
And I, their gude brither, Macdonald,
Sall never be last in the fray."

"Chorus again, gentlemen,"—(and the thirty struck in):

"Brogues, and brochan, and a',
Brochan, and brogues, and a';
And up wi' the bonnie blue bonnet,
The kilt, the feather, and a'."

As the chorus died away in the aisles and cloisters of the adjacent church, the door was thrown open, and Ronald, leading his French friend, entered. All eyes were turned instantly towards them.

"Stuart! Stuart! Ronald Stuart!" cried twenty voices: but the light glittering on De Mesmai's helmet and breast-plate startled some so much, that their first impulse was to seize their weapons, and many a dirk and claymore were grasped in the expectation of seeing the room filled with Frenchmen. Those members of the company who were sober enough, rose from the table to welcome their newly found friend; but Louis Lisle, taking his sword and bonnet from a stone saint who had them in keeping, abruptly withdrew.

"Introduce me, Monsieur Stuart," said the cuirassier, with a proud smile, "or by the bomb! we will have each other by the throat. Do your comrades thus welcome strangers, by baring sword and dagger?"

Ronald could scarcely get a word spoken as his brother-officers crowded round him, and a truly Scottish shaking of hands ensued; while a hundred questions were asked him by the sober in English,—by the less so in their more natural Gaelic, about his absence, and returning thus accompanied. It was impossible at that time to relate any particulars, so he determined on deferring all explanations

until another time. Though angry at the conduct of Lisle, he was nevertheless much gratified by the friendly reception he met with from the other officers; but as he had no heart to partake in their carousal, he withdrew soon after (to the disappointment of all) with Alister Macdonald to his billet, until another could be procured from an alcalde. De Mesmai remained at the table, and soon established himself as the lion of the company, and although he spoke always in Spanish, or very imperfect English, he became a general favourite, and kept the mess in roars of laughter. Military topics were studiously avoided, but he talked in his usual style incessantly about duels and girls, brawls and debauches, strange adventures and French military frolics, until the morning drums beating reveille through the streets, warned the jovial party to separate; but I believe more than half of them took their repose on the pavement of the chapter-house, which had never before been the scene of such carousing.

Next morning Stuart completed his toilet hurriedly, with the intention of waiting on the colonel.

"Prepare yourself for something disagreeable, Ronald," said Macdonald, who was leaning over a window which looked out on the principal street leading from the Plaza to the river. "Claude A—, the adjutant, is coming here under the piazzas. He wears his sash and gorget, and I have no doubt Cameron has sent him to pay you a visit."

"I expected such; yet *the chief* is somewhat hurried."

"Take care how you style him so: I was nearly put under arrest for it at San Pedro. Come in!" cried Alister, as a smart knock was heard at the room-door.

"Sorry to spoil your breakfast, Stuart, by this early visit," said the adjutant, entering; "but Cameron has sent me for your sword, and desires me to say that you must consider yourself under arrest, until you can state satisfactorily in writing your reasons for absenting yourself for these nine days past without leave. He is in a towering passion; all the blood of Lochiel seems to be bubbling up in him, because you did not report yourself last night. I never before saw his eyes glare as they do this morning."

"Pshaw! Claude, you—"

"A fact, upon my honour. But do not be alarmed; he is too well pleased with your conduct at Almarez to carry this affair to extremities. I believe, but for that night's work, he would bring you to a court-martial instanter."

"The deuce he would! Do you think so, A—?"

"Of course. You know Cameron; there is not a stricter fellow in the service,—a regular martinet. But you had better take your pen, and endeavour to satisfy him by a sheet of foolscap. 'Tis well you left us so soon last night, as you will require a clear head this morning. Mine aches as if it would fall in pieces; but I mean to call at the wine-house, (you know the saying,) 'to take a hair of the

dog that bit me.”

”A very strange fellow, the French cuirassier, Claude?” observed Macdonald.

”A hare-brained spark as ever I met with. He has played sad mischief with all ours. We shall not have one officer to each company on parade this morning. A dozen, I believe, are lying under the table with himself. Campbell, old Macdonald, and our most seasoned toppers were put to their mettle by him. But give me your sword, Stuart; the colonel is waiting for it, but I trust will not keep it long. You must endeavour to make your peace with him as soon as possible, and not be under any fear of being put in Coventry by our mess: we know you too well to do that.”

Ronald felt considerable chagrin as he beheld Claude A—, the adjutant, carry off his weapon and found himself under arrest, and in imminent danger of being arraigned before a general court-martial. He composed himself to indite, for the colonel’s perusal, an account of his absence, which he found a very delicate and difficult matter, as he was unwilling that the mess should get hold of poor Catalina’s name to make it a subject of ridicule, and quiz him about it, which he feared would be done unmercifully, if he took not some stern means to stop them.

Nearly a quire of paper was expended before he could get a despatch worded to his own and Macdonald’s satisfaction,—one giving as brief and concise an account as possible of his adventures, and declaring that the reason of his sudden departure from Almaraz was to free the sister of Don Alvaro, of Villa Franca, from Cifuentes the well-known bandit, who had accompanied the first brigade disguised as a priest. Evan was despatched with the letter to the colonel’s quarters, while Stuart and Macdonald, accompanied by De Mesmai, went to visit D’Estouville,—the unfortunate commandant of fort Napoleon, who was dying of the wound he had received from the officer of the 71st.

An old chapel, situated near the baths of Diana, had been appropriated as an hospital for those wounded at the forts of Almaraz. The design of some gothic architect when the art was in its infancy, it was a low dark building, with short clumsy columns, gloomy arches, enormously thick walls, and dismal little windows, between the thick mullions of which the grey day-light seemed to struggle to be seen. On the worn flight of steps ascending to the great door-way, lay a few dozen legs, arms, hands, and feet, which had been amputated and were lying there until the hospital orderlies were at leisure to inter them. During the last war, the reckless manner in which medical officers hewed off wounded limbs, without attempting to reduce a fracture, has been often reprehended. What a scene of multiplied human misery the interior of the chapel presented! The wounded soldiers, British and French, to the number of some hundreds, lay in

ranks on the damp pavement, over which a little straw was thrown, as no bedding could be given them. Deep and hollow groans of acute agony and suffering sounded from many parts of the building, and the continual rustling of the straw announced the impatient restlessness of sickness and pain. Here lay the gallant and high-spirited conscript, brooding gloomily, and almost weeping, over those visions of glory, which the amputation of a leg had suddenly cut short; and there the stern grenadier of the Imperial guard lay coolly surveying his own blood as it trickled through the straw, and filled the carved letters of epitaphs on the pavement stones. Near him lay his conqueror, the British soldier, shorn of a limb, dejected and miserable, having nothing before him now but a "passport to beg," and the poor apology for a pension which grateful Britain bestows on her defenders, with the happy resource of starving in a parish workhouse. All were pale as death, and all disfigured by blood and bandages,—grisly, ghastly, unwashed, and unshaven. Often as they passed up the aisle, Stuart and Macdonald held the tin canteen to the parched lips of some wounded man, who drank greedily of the hot stale water it contained, and prayed them piteously to adjust his bandages, or by doing some little office to alleviate his pain. Some were dying, and lay convulsed among their straw, with the death-rattle sounding in their throat—expiring, unheeded and uncared for, without a friend to behold them or a hand to close their eyes; and as soon as they were cold, they were seized by the hospital orderlies,[*] and carried off for interment.

[*] Well-conducted soldiers, excused from duty to attend the sick.

A wretched combination of misery, pain, and sorrow the interior of that little chapel presented, and it made a deeper impression on Stuart and Alister than on De Mesmai, who was an older soldier, and had beheld, in twenty years' campaigning, too much bloodshed and agony to recoil at the sight of it there; but he loudly expressed his pleasure at beholding the attention paid to his countrymen. He saw that no distinction was made; the wounded of both nations received the same attendance from the medical officers and their orderlies; and more than one grenadier of *the Guard* allowed his dark features to relax into a grim smile, as his red-coated attendants held up his head, to pour down his throat some dose of disagreeable stuff.

"Ha! Stewart," said Ronald, catching his namesake the assistant-surgeon by the belt as he was rushing past, with a saw in one hand and a long knife gleaming in the other.

"Don't detain me, pray. I have just clapped the tourniquet on that poor

devil in the corner. I have to take his arm out of the socket, at the shoulder, too—a fearful operation: you'll hear his shrieks immediately. Sorry to hear you are under arrest. You will get through it though, doubtless,—being a favourite.”

“Where is D’Estouville, the French major; and how is he?”

“Near his last gasp, poor man. You need not go to him now, as he is dying; and troubling him will not lengthen his life a second. I could do nothing more for him, and so have resigned him to his fate. I must attend to our own people, whose lives are of more consequence,—every man being worth exactly twenty pounds to government, as you will see in—I forget what page of the ‘Mutiny Act.’”

“How can you jest in such a horrid den as this? You surgeons are strangely cool fellows, certainly. But D’Estouville—”

“Is lying yonder at the foot of that marble monument. Do not trouble him now; he will be dead in five minutes. Excuse me: I have to amputate a leg to prevent mortification, and its owner is growling and swearing at my delay.”

Under a gothic canopy lay the marble effigy of a warrior of the days that are gone. It was the tomb of one of the Villa Franca family. He was represented in armour, and lying at full length, with his hands crossed on his bosom. The canopied recess had been made a receptacle for the caps and knapsacks of dead men, which were without ceremony piled above the figure of the Spanish cavalier. A tattered pennon, a rusty casque, and a time-worn sword, hung over the niche, where a marble tablet announced it to be the tomb of the noble knight Don Rodrigo de Villa Franca:—“*Muerto en una batalla con los Moros, a diez de Noviembre, del año de mil y veinte y siete.*”[*]

[*] “Slain by the Moors in battle, the 10th November of the year 1027.”

In front of this ancient tomb lay D’Estouville. Alas! how much ten days of pain and suffering had changed the gallant young Frenchman! He was stretched on a pile of bloody straw, stripped to his shirt and regimental trowsers. A large bandage, clotted and gory, encircled his head, and his once very handsome features were sadly changed; they were sunken and hollow, pale and emaciated to the last degree. He lay motionless, with his eyes closed; but his lips were parted, and he respired through his clenched teeth with difficulty. His head rested on a knapsack, placed under it by an honest Irishman of the 50th, who lay on his left smoking a short black pipe, while he surveyed, with a composed but rueful look, the stump of his right arm. On the other side lay a Gordon Highlander, quivering in the agonies of death: a shot had lodged in his breast, and he too had been given up as incurable by the medical officers. The agony he endured had brought on a

delirium; he was chanting, in low and muttering tones, a sad and plaintive Gaelic dirge,—probably the death-song of his race; and as his voice sunk and died away, the bold spirit of the Son of the Mist seemed to pass with it.

"*Morbleu!* poor Victor!" said De Mesmai. "Ah! messieurs,—surely he is not dead?"

At the sound of the French exclamation D'Estouville opened his eyes, and attempted in vain to raise his head; but a faint smile of recognition passed over his pale features as he beheld Ronald Stuart, and gazed on the well-known uniform of De Mesmai. "Poor fellow!" continued the latter, while a tear glistened in his eye, as he knelt down and took the hand of Victor; "he is evidently far gone. Many a merry bout we have had together at old Marcel's, and many a midnight frolic with the girls and gens d'armes in the Rue de la Conference; but these times have all passed now, and can never be again. Speak to me, my friend! How is your wound?"

"*Les malheurs de la guerre! Ah, De Mesmai, mon ami, les malheurs de la guerre!*" muttered the wounded man, and sunk backward on his miserable bed; then pointing to his head he added, "*A mon camarade—blessure—où—où—plaie mortelle!*"

"They have brought me here too, Victor, those cursed misfortunes of war; but my case is not so bad as yours. The helmet is a better defence than the grenadier cap against the straight-cutting blades of these fiery Scots. Cheer up, D'Estouville; while there is life, hope remains. You may yet lead the old Guard in the charge! the Eagles of the empire may yet flap their wings over you."

"Never," whispered Macdonald; "his race of existence is over. Why, then, inspire him with false hopes of living longer?"

"He is one of those fellows that are very hard to kill. I know Victor," whispered the other in reply; then continued as before, "The Emperor has marked you for his own,—the whole service say so, D'Estouville, and suppose that your promotion will be as rapid as ever was Soult's, Macdonald's, Bernadotte's, or any other marshal's of the empire. Remember these things, *mon ami*, and never think of death!"

"Death's cold hand is upon me. Ah! Maurice, how can I expect to conquer?"

"*Morbleu!* by determining to live, and to earn honour and fame in spite of him. Courage, my friend."

"No, no, De Mesmai!" replied D'Estouville, with that sudden life and energy which often animates the dying when the moment of dissolution draws near, while his pale cheek flushed, and a light sparkled in his sunken eye. "Honour and glory—these are the dreams of every Frenchman, and they once were mine, my constant thoughts, never for a moment absent from my mind. The very visions of my sleep were full of the gloss and glitter of military parade: martial honour

was the idol of my heart. As a gallant young conscript when I left my native home at Lillebonne, as the hardened grenadier, as the dashing subaltern of the Guard, as a wretched prisoner pining in Scotland, and again as a free and daring soldier,—these high hopes, this proud ambition, never left me for an instant,—buoying and bearing me up under all the toils of war and misfortune, until I found myself stretched on the pavement of this chapel, a dying captive! Honour has faded away from me, and the proud sentiments which caused my heart to swell, to bound with rapture at the sharp roll of the drum, now animate me no more. Never again will drum or bugle sound for me!”

“You speak very sorrowfully, in truth,” replied De Mesmai; “but some droning monk has been putting these notions in your head. Take care you do not exhaust yourself, *mon ami*.”

“Ah, Maurice! a thousand times I wish I had fallen sword in hand at Almarez, rather than lingered here, enduring for these past ten days the extremes of mental and bodily agony. Yet had I only received a moment’s warning, I question much if that officer of the Scottish chasseurs could have cut me down so easily.”

“No. In truth you were an excellent swordsman, Victor,—sharp of eye, and sure of hand.”

“I trust, Maurice, you will not be long a prisoner. ’Twas a sad blank in my life, my captivity. Faith! *mon camarade*, I almost shiver at remembrance of the castle of Edinburgh. You will remember me to Louis Chateaufleur and the rest of your regiment; and do so particularly to my own, should you ever fall in with them on service.” He spoke now with more difficulty, and at longer intervals. “Glory to France, and long life to the great Emperor! I trust he will think Major D’Estouville has done his duty. Almarez I defended to the last; and, Maurice, had you not cut the pontoon, we might have effected our retreat. The emperor would have saved four hundred soldiers of his noble old Guard.”

“And your life, Victor.”

“A mere bagatelle! I lay it down in his service.”

“*Vive l’Empereur!*” cried some of his soldiers, who lay within hearing on their pallets of straw. The shout was taken up by many, and echoed through distant parts of the chapel. D’Estouville’s eye flashed brightly; he waved his hand as he would have brandished his sword, and, exhausted with speaking, and the emotions which the gallant battle-cry aroused within him, he again sank backwards, and by the spasms which crossed his pallid features, they saw too surely that the moment of death was nigh. Again rousing himself from his lethargy, he beckoned to Ronald, who knelt down beside him.

“I would speak to you of Diane de Montmichel,” he whispered, in tremulous and broken accents. “Her husband, Monsieur le Baron—de Clappourknuis—the letter I gave you at Truxillo; ah! *mon ami*, do you not understand me?”

"Indeed I do not, D'Estouville."

"The hand of the grim king of terrors is upon me; the sands of life are ebbing fast, and my voice will fail me soon. Monsieur le Baron—"

"Is released from the castle of Albuquerque, and has passed over to the French lines. Think not of these, D'Estouville."

"I—I would give you a message to Diane."

"Alas! how can I ever deliver it?"

"Find means, *croix Dieu!*" muttered he piteously. "Kneel closer to me. I depend on your honour, Monsieur Stuart. Diane—Diane—"

"What of her? Say—say, ere it be too late!"

But there was no reply. What the Frenchman would have said, expired on his lips, and he fell back speechless on the hard knapsack which formed his pillow.

He never spoke again; but in a few minutes died, and without a struggle.

CHAPTER XIV.

DE MESMAI.

"Ah, me! how mournful, wan, and slow,
 With arms reversed, the soldiers come;
 Dirge-sounding trumpets full of woe,
 And, sad to hear, the muffled drum!"
John Mayne.

The death-bed scene of poor D'Estouville, although it made on the witnesses of it a deep impression for the time, was easily passed over when the feelings are blunted and deadened by the continual excitement of campaigning. They had scarcely left the chapel or hospital, before the shade of sorrow which their faces had worn disappeared. Macdonald went away on some duty; Stuart's thoughts reverted to his arrest, and the disagreeable predicament in which he was placed; while De Mesmai began to talk in his usual light and careless style. He placed his scarlet forage-cap very much on one side, tightened his sash, arranging the tassels gracefully, and stuck his glass in his eye to ogle and scrutinize the females who passed.

"Poor Victor!" said he; "a merrier comrade or more gallant soldier than he was, there is not in the imperial service. Many a glorious evening we have had in Paris, flirting with the *jolies grisettes* of the Rue des Trois Maries,—fighting with the gendarmerie, and amusing ourselves by frolicking with messieurs the good-natured bourgeois,—some dozen of whom we have ducked in the Seine. These days are all passed away, and poor Victor is gone to his long home. War leads to death or glory, and his fate to-day maybe ours to-morrow; so, then, what is the utility of being cast down? *Vive la joie!* let us live and be merry while we can. Praised be our stars! here is a wine-house, where we can spend the evening in a jovial style, and scare away from our hearts the gloom cast upon them by the death of D'Estouville. *Diable! mon ami*; for what do you stare so at that old ruinous mansion?"

"'Tis the house of the Villa Franca family. I received great kindness from them, when I came to Merida for the first time."

"A picturesque ruin it makes, with its shattered capitals and empty windows. D'Estouville's grenadiers did all that. I have heard that he carried off a very pretty creature from this place, at least so Chateaufleur of ours told me. He had her at Almarez; but, like a cunning dog, kept her closely out of my sight, lest I might have procured her transfer to the tower of Ragusa, when I was left in temporary command. But we had plenty of girls there, by the Pope! We captured a score of plump young *paisanas*; but their skins were devilish brown, and their hands were all chapped with milking goats and cows. Here is the wine-house,—but, *morbleu!* I have not one infernal sous to clink upon another!"

"I have, *mon camarade*," said Stuart, producing a purse containing forty duros, which he had borrowed from Major Campbell, to procure favour with whom he was obliged to endure two long stories about Egypt.

"*Sacre!* forty duros? A lucky dog and a most gorgeous display,—'pon honour—really. Enter then, and we will drink a long glassful to the continuance of the war."

From the wine-house they adjourned to the Prado, where they strolled about under the shade of the rich orange-trees, or lounged on the wooden sofas. De Mesmai smoked a cigar, and kept up, to use a camp phrase, a running fire of words, and laughed heartily at his own jokes; while Ronald listened in silence, and surveyed with feelings of mortification the regiment on its evening parade, from which for the present he was excluded.

"Fine fellows, these bare-kneed Celts of yours, Monsieur Stuart," said De Mesmai, as he knocked the ashes from his cigar. "A goodly row of most captivating brown legs they have. How pretty the waving tartan seemed, as the corps wheeled from open column into line. They call forth the admiration of the ladies too,—the delightful creatures! Really, 'pon honour, I think they peep more at

the Scottish plaids and plumes, than at this smart uniform and bright steel bourgoinette of mine. A gallant chevalier your colonel is. He gives his orders with that firm tone of authority which marks the true, the bold-hearted soldier, and one born to command. A *soldado* of most goodly proportions is that long-legged field-officer, who last night bored me to death about Egypt, and his campaigns there. Body o' the Pope! look at that girl."

"Which?"

"With the black veil hung over the high comb. What a roguish black eye and most excessively attractive pair of ankles she has! I will speak to her. Ho! *ma princesse*—"

"Beware what you do, De Mesmai," interrupted Ronald hastily. "She is a lady, and one of rank evidently, by the lace embroidery on her stomacher and mantilla. Some officers of the 39th are with her, too."

"*Diable!* so I now perceive; and one of your savage Scots chasseurs, I think."

"Savage!" repeated Stuart, dubious whether to laugh or frown. "He is an officer of the Highland Light Infantry,—that corps with the tartan trews, and bonnets without feathers. By Jove! 'tis Armstrong; the same officer who cut down poor D'Estouville at Almarez. He is flirting with this young lady, and recks no more of the deadly stroke he gave, than if he had killed a muircock. Let us move on. The Highlanders will march past this way, and I little like to be sitting here like an out-cast from them,—and without my sword too, by heavens!"

"A prisoner of war,—*diable! Me voila à votre service.* I will go with you wherever you please. But there are more girls congregated here, to see the troops on evening parade, than in any other part of this ruinous old city of Merida. In France they love, like the butterflies, to be in the sun; but here they promenade under the cold shades of the trees, or sail about beneath their gloomy damp piazzas. By the way, it has a most singularly picturesque effect, a tall graceful figure with a fluttering veil and floating mantilla gliding under these old arches; quite mysterious, in fact. Look, for instance, at that lovely creature with the auburn tresses. *Tête-dieu!* how I long to wheel that girl round in a waltz. Ha! there is a *rouge-et-noir* table not far from this, and a thought strikes me; I shall make my fortune to-night. Will you lend me a couple of these dazzling duros you showed me a short time ago?"

"Undoubtedly, and with pleasure."

"*Vive la joie!* Come along, then. There is a gaming-house in the Calle de Ferdinando, kept by some officers of the Portuguese caçadores. Come with me, and I will show you how to break their bank, and carry off their glorious piles of duros and dobloons."

"I never gamble," replied Ronald; "and by the rules of our service 'tis strictly forbidden to do so, either in camp or quarters."

"Bah! *mon camarade*. If I had you within sound of the bells of Notre Dame, I would soon learn you to forget your northern prejudices."

Stuart's remonstrances and protestations were made in vain. The gay impetuosity of the Frenchman overcame them all; and while arguing about the matter they arrived at the door, where a board, painted red on one side and black on the other, announced that the *rouge-et-noir* table was kept there. A crowd of English, Portuguese, and German officers were pressing round the table, at the head of which sat the banker, a swarthy Portuguese officer of light infantry, with a long cigar in his mouth, and having heaped up before him several piles of dollars, doubloons, and British guineas,—all of which were rapidly changing hands, at every turn of the red and black cards.

Stuart remarked that there was not a single Scottish bonnet in the room, and his national abhorrence of gambling caused him absolutely to blush at being there. He was disgusted at the wild eagerness, the intense anxiety, the bitter disappointment, fierce anguish, or cruel triumph which he witnessed in the features of the players. The two dollars De Mesmai had borrowed were soon added to the goodly pile which lay before an officer of the 39th; and urged on by the former, Ronald betted on several cards, all of which turned up fatally, and he had the mortification to behold every one of his remaining dollars swept across the table in quick succession, and coolly pocketed by a fierce-looking Spanish officer of De Costa's brigade, who evidently thought it no sin to gamble, although he wore on his left breast the enamelled red cross of Calatrava, a religious order of knighthood.[*] Ronald rushed away from the hell, feeling absolutely furious at his own folly and at De Mesmai, who, however, continued at the table in hopes of borrowing from some one.

[*] Instituted by Don Santio of Toledo, in 1130.

The lesson was not lost on Stuart, who, from that day until this, has never touched a card. But that night's play left him literally penniless, and in a strange city. He was ashamed to apply to any of his brother-officers, or expose his folly to them; and as Gordon, the regimental paymaster, had not received the arrears of pay, there was nothing to be hoped for from him. It was now dusk, and he was wandering among the groves of olive and willow that flourish by the sedgy banks of the Guadiana and overhang its current. Here, while pursuing the narrow pathway by the river-side, he was surprised by seeing the figure of Dugald Mhor Cameron, the colonel's private servant, standing at a short distance from him; a sure sign that Cameron himself was not far off.

Dugald Mhor (or big Dugald) was an aged but hardy Highlander, from the country of the Cameron, or the land of the great Lochiel on the banks of Loch Linnhe, among the wild dark mountains of Lorn and Morven,—the Morven of Ossian. From these he came to follow the son of the laird through the continental wars, and he had been by the side of Cameron in every battle in which the corps had been engaged in Egypt, Denmark, Holland, Portugal, and Spain, and had been twice wounded,—once at Bergen-op-Zoom, and again at the battle of Alexandria in Egypt. Dugald was nearly seventy years of age, yet his well-knit frame was strong and muscular as that of a horse, and his hair was white as snow; while his face was as dark as his tartan, by constant exposure to the weather.

With the broad blue bonnet over his thin white haffets, the heavy-belted plaid cast over his gallant breast, the dirk, the pistol, and the claymore dangling at his belt, his strong bare limbs, and the brass-studded Highland target slung on his shoulder, Dugald Mhor was the *beau-ideal* of the loyal old Jacobite of the 'forty-five; that period when the star of the Stuarts, amid the last blaze of the true Scottish spirit, flashed-forth but to vanish for ever. It need scarcely be added that old Dugald was a stanch Jacobite. He had witnessed the battle of Culloden, whither, as a sort of page or attendant gilly, he had followed Cameron of Lochiel. Since the day Fassifern left his home to follow the drum, Dugald Mhor had been to him a kind of standing orderly, friend, sometimes a governor, but always a leal true northern henchman, that would cheerfully have laid down his life, if by doing so he should have pleased his master.

When Stuart beheld this kilted vassal of the colonel's standing on the narrow path before him, he was sure that the latter could be at no great distance; a flush suffused his cheek, and he became confused at the idea of encountering so proud and fiery a man while lying under his displeasure. A turn of the path brought him in view of Cameron, who was just bidding adieu to Sir Rowland Hill. To avoid a *rencontre* now seemed impossible. The general rode off in the opposite direction, while Cameron advanced straight towards Ronald by the narrow footway at the river-side.

"Well, Mr. Stuart," said he frankly; "this morning from my trusty Dugald Mhor I received and perused your long letter concerning your absence, for which I believe I must excuse you. It was a very unfortunate affair that of the Spanish lady's death; but every means must be taken to discover this rascal, Micer Cifuentes. How deeply you colour! I trust I have said nothing to offend? Ah! I comprehend the matter fully now, by your confusion. There was a great deal more in that letter than what met the eye, though it was very cunningly worded. But it will not do in these days, even in Spain, to ride to the rescue of every distressed damsel, and a knight-errant in a red coat is a strange anomaly. But I believe there was much more of love than chivalry in the affair; therefore, Stuart,

I pass it over, as I trust it will never occur again."

"To that, colonel, I may pledge you my word of honour; one such adventure is quite enough for a life-time."

"You are aware how far I might have carried this matter; for one who commands a Highland regiment, composed of such fiery spirits, and so different from the line generally, must be strict. Your absence has made a noise through the whole division, and I have just been making your peace with Sir Rowland Hill, who is very favourably disposed towards you, in consequence of the dashing manner in which you led the stormers on at Almaraz, and for this last affair,—the capture of d'Erlon's aide-de-camp. How very unluckily the count escaped! He would have been a noble prize to have sent to Britain. The adjutant will send you your sword; and remember not to be restive at the mess, as it is probable you will be severely quizzed, the officers having heard of this Spanish donna, and got a version of the story very different from the real one."

That night Ronald returned to his billet with a lighter heart than he had felt since the death of Catalina. His trusty squire of the body, Evan Iverach, on learning the low state of his exchequer, pressed upon him a purse of dollars, which he had carefully saved up from his pay with the intention of purchasing a silver-mounted set of pipes for his father Donald, the old piper at Lochisla. Ronald, with much reluctance, took the money as a loan, Evan vowing if he did not, he would throw it out of the window into the Guadiana, which ran below it. Any chagrin he had felt at being put under arrest, was entirely obliterated by the hearty congratulations and welcome he received from the officers assembled on parade next morning. But his indignation was soon called forth again by the manner in which Louis Lisle greeted him. On advancing towards him with his outstretched hand, Lisle bestowed upon him a cold and angry glance, turned on his heel, and withdrew to a distant part of the parade. Ronald's fiery blood boiled up within him; and, had not the memory of Alice arisen in his mind, subduing and softening him, he would there and then have called her brother to an account for his singular conduct. But smothering his indignation, he returned to the group of officers with a flushed brow and an angry eye, to have his temper sorely tried for some time about the Spanish lady, with regard to whom many stories had been circulated at the mess-table.

On the evening of that day the streets of Merida rang to the echo of muffled drums and the sad notes of the military dead march, as the funeral of D'Estouville passed on its way to the church of San Juan, attended with similar honours as would have been shown to a British officer of the same rank.

The sword and cap, bearing the badges of the brave old Guard, were laid on the lid of his coffin, the pall of which was borne by Fassifern, and five other field-officers. His countryman, De Mesmai, acted as chief mourner. Another

officer of the French medical staff, who was also a prisoner in Merida, attended likewise. A smile of pleasure kindled in the proud eye of the cuirassier as the mournful procession passed between the ranks of the first brigade, leaning on their arms reversed, and lining the streets on both sides. He was well pleased at the sentiments of generosity and chivalry which directed Sir Rowland Hill to evince the same respect to the remains of a foe that would have been paid to those of a friend; and De Mesmai was one who knew well how to appreciate them. The grenadiers of the Gordon Highlanders formed outside the church, under the command of Major Campbell, and fired three volleys in the air, while the grave closed over the remains of what was once a gay and a gallant heart. The officers of the first brigade of infantry would have erected a monument to the memory of D'Estouville, but it was known that it would be demolished by the Spaniards the moment the British left the city; therefore the idea was abandoned, and the tomb of the guardsman lies unmarked and unknown under the chancel of the great church at Merida, a few feet in front of the mutilated monument erected to the memory of Francisco Pizarro of Truxillo. At the wine casa and the *rouge-et-noir* table De Mesmai was loud that night in praises of British generosity and gallantry; but these he suddenly changed for something very like invectives, when he was informed that, by day-light next morning, he must be prepared to accompany a detachment of sick and prisoners, who were ordered to the rear.

"And where is our destination, monsieur, if I may inquire?" asked he of Claude A—, the adjutant of the Gordon Highlanders, who had made the communication to him in French. "Some gay place, I hope. Lisbon is it?"

"The castle of Albuquerque, I believe."

"*Tête Dieu!* a most detestable and gloomy hole! And I am to be mewed up there, am I, monsieur?"

"For the present, until an opportunity occurs for your transmission to some strong garrison-town, across the Portuguese frontier, or home to Britain."

"You are exceedingly kind, *Monsieur Officier*, by the name of the bomb! most superbly so. But I trust that dilatory little devil, General the Count d'Erlon, will save you all this trouble. And as for my transmission to England—*diable!* I should be sorry his Britannic majesty's government should take so much concern in my affairs." He smiled sourly, and twirled his black moustaches. "Ha! and what sort of being is the officer who commands on the way to Albuquerque? I hope he will halt at La Nava: I left a sweetheart there twelve months ago, with whom I must leave my card in passing. But the officer,—is he a jovial trump, that will drink and play deep,—stride, swagger, and swear like a Hector?"

"None of *ours* are much given to any of these habits," answered Claude drily. "The Honourable Louis Lisle commands."

"Lisle! An ensign is he not? A pretty boy with yellow curls, more like the

Duchess de Choiseul's page than a belted soldier? Ah! we shall get on famously. Such a chit will not cross me in my amusements with these don Spaniards. De Mesmai of Quinsay under the orders of a young Scots sub-lieutenant! Ho, ho! excellent. But, body o' the Pope! tell me, monsieur, am I really to be kept in the castle of Albuquerque?"

"Captain de Mesmai, I have already told you," replied the adjutant, turning to go.

"Then permit me to acquaint you, monsieur, that such treatment is tacitly saying you doubt that sacred word of honour which I pledged to Ensign Ronald Stuart, when, as an officer and gentleman, I surrendered myself to him on parole. This being the case, that parole is dissolved; and I consider myself at liberty to effect my escape where, when, and how I please, without dishonour."

"As you choose," answered Claude quickly. "But remember, you will probably be shot in the attempt; or if retaken, will be degraded to the rank of a private dragoon,—what in your service you call a *simple cavalier*. Remember, monsieur, to be on the alert at day-break; you will hear the sound of the warning pipes as they pass under the piazzas of your billet."

With Lisle's detachment De Mesmai departed next morning for Albuquerque, but by some means effected his escape on the route there. He afterwards fell into the hands of some of the guerillas of Don Salvador de Zagala's band, by whom he was treated with less kindness and courtesy than he had received at Merida, and with whom I must for the present leave him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HEIGHTS OF ALBUERA. THE CROSS OF SANTIAGO.

"Come away, come away,
Hark to the summons!
Come in your war array,
Gentles and commons.

"Come every hill-plaid, and
True heart that wears one;
Come every steel blade, and
Strong hand that bears one."

Pibroch of Donuildhu.

On the night of the 11th, or rather the morning of the 12th of June, Ronald was awakened from sleep by an officer, who occupied the same billet, entering his chamber half dressed.

"Rouse, Stuart," said he; "something strange has happened. There is a noise and bustle over the whole town."

"I have heard nothing yet, Kennedy," answered the other, springing out of bed, and with military instinct donning his regimentals hastily in the dark. "You have aroused me from the most pleasant nap I have enjoyed for these six months past."

"Hark! there go the pipes."

"'Tis not the turn-out. What can be the matter? 'tis still two hours from day-break. We shall be roughing it again with D'Erlon or Drouet, I suppose."

"The pipes have ceased," said Kennedy, throwing open the casement, where the voices of the musicians were heard engaged in a quarrel.

"Plaw *the warning*, Hector Macfarlane, you very great sumph!" exclaimed Macdonuill-dhu, the piper-major, in great wrath. "Was it *Hoggil nam Bo*,—the pibroch of your ain mushroom name, I desired you to plaw?"

"Oich, prut trut!" replied Macfarlane fiercely. "I do suppose tat ta lads o' Lochsluai are as good and as pretty men, and bear as auld a name, as ony Macdonald o' the Isles. Diaoul!"

"Hoch, Got tam! it's mutiny and repellion this! Did ye move yer hand to yer dirk, Macfarlane?" asked Macdonald furiously. "Did ye grip yer dirk to threaten me?"

"It's a far cry to Lochowe. Gin you and I strode there, ye would na cock your feather or crawl sae crouse," said the other coolly. "It's piper-matchor you are, and sorrow tak the hoor that Hector Macfarlane, the son of Rori-bheg, has to obey your orders!" The angry reply of the non-commissioned officer was lost in the sound of the war-pipe, the drones of which Macfarlane threw over his shoulder, and strode down the street swelling with Highland indignation, while he made Merida ring far and wide to the tune of *Johnnie Cope*, the warning for the march, while the drums, bugles, and trumpets of other regiments, horse and foot, were heard in various parts of the echoing city.

"Holloa! Serjeant Macdonald, what is all this noise and uproar about?" asked Stuart.

"I ken nae mair than an unporn pairn, sir," replied the leader of the pipers; "put it's a tammed cauld morning to rouse puir chields frae their plankets. There is a sougning meeserable *Hanoverian* wind plawing frae the east, sharp enough

to skin our pare hoghs, and be tammed tilt! And that trunken loon, Macfarlane, has sae mony queghsfu' under his belt, that he took the dorts, and in spite o' a' orders blew the pibroch o' Lochsloy. A ponnie thing for him—the son o' Roribheg, a riever, hanged at Crieff for *liftin'*, to speak in defiance at me!"

The voice of the adjutant bawling for his horse was now heard, as he issued from under the piazzas, attended by an orderly with a lighted lantern, to collect the reports and get the companies mustered. The men were already falling in at the alarm post, and the musquet-butts were heard clattering heavily on the pavement, as one by one they took their places in the ranks.

"Stuart, don your fighting jacket; pack up your best scarlets for a ball when we reach Madrid," cried Claude, as he passed the window. "We are about to show Mr. Soult the point of war,

'Gin he meets us in the morning,'

as the song says. A despatch has within this hour arrived from Wellington, and we are ordered off to the front forthwith, to prevent Estremadura being invaded. Turn out as soon as you can; the corps are nearly all mustered in our *Plaza de Armas*. Ho, there! orderly drummer; beat for the coverers! Fall in, covering Serjeants!"

The grey day-light was now beginning to make objects visible. The sky was clear, and of a cold and dark blue, and a chilling blast swept through the dull and gloomy streets, where all was martial bustle and preparation. While dressing himself with more haste than care, Stuart heard the voice of Cameron and the adjutant ordering and directing the serjeant-major; he in turn bawled to the Serjeants of companies, who were vociferously calling the rolls, in which an immense number of Jocks, and Tams, and Donalds followed each other in succession. All was commotion and 'hurry-scurry,' amid which De Costa's brigade of Spanish horse galloped past, brandishing their swords, and shouting, "*Arma! arma! Viva! Viva!*" with might and main. General Long's brigade of British followed, but in characteristic silence.

To prevent Marshal Soult from invading Estremadura from the neighbouring province, Sir Rowland Hill marched his brigades of horse and foot to Sancho Perez, collecting from Zafra and other places on his march all the Spanish and Portuguese troops he could bring together to meet the enemy, who advanced towards him in great strength, plundering and destroying the grain and vines on their route. At Zafra they attacked and defeated an advanced corps of Spanish dragoons, commanded by the Condé Penne Villamur. Animated by this success, Soult continued to press forward at the head of thirty-eight or forty thousand men; and Sir Rowland Hill prudently fell back upon the heights of Albuera with

his division, twenty-two thousand strong. There he took up a position, which every means were taken to strengthen by the erection of trenches, breastworks, and traverses, at the formation of which fatigue-parties wrought day and night. Fresh troops joined them here daily, and Ronald heard, with considerable pleasure, that Don Alvaro's troop of lances were expected to join the Spanish brigade. Alvaro's command was a sort of independent troop, unattached to any regiment, like *les compagnies franches*, the free troops or companies, in the old French service. The second division occupied this entrenched position twelve days, awaiting the appearance of Soult, who advanced no nearer than Santa Martha, a town about a long day's march distant. He showed no disposition to fight a second battle of Albuera, the ground being so strong and its occupiers so determined, that the heights could only have been captured with immense loss,—if indeed Soult could have carried them at all. On the first night after the position was taken up, a blunder of Evan's caused no ordinary commotion throughout the camp.

At the base of the heights, where a stream called the Albuera runs, he was posted as an advanced sentinel in a most wild and dreary spot. A wide and desolate plain, stretching away towards Santa Martha, lay before him; black ridges like waves of ink rose behind; and all around were scattered the ghastly remnants of the battle fought on the ground twelve months previously. The night was gloomy and dark, the sky was starless, and not a sound broke the solemn stillness of the hour save the Albuera, brawling and gurgling along that deep and savage-looking ravine, by means of which the French had out-flanked the Spaniards. Excepting the murmur of the mountain-torrent, all was silent as the tomb; not a blade of grass was stirring, and those gloomy fantasies, so apt to fill the strong imagination of a Highlander, arose appallingly before Evan. Anxiously and intently he had fixed his eyes on some shrubbery or tall weeds, which appeared in the twilight afar off. These his heated imagination transformed into battalions of foot and squadrons of horse, advancing stealthily over the plain. He fired his musquet, and retired on the main body of his picquet, which lay within an *abbatis* composed of cork trees, felled and intertwined for a breast-work around them. The whole camp rose in arms, expecting instantly to be attacked, but the dawn revealed the cause of Evan's mistake. A few days after Soult had taken possession of Santa Martha, Ronald had the command of one of the picquets thrown out in that direction. All were on the alert, as the enemy were continually expected to advance from their cantonments. The picquet, which consisted of thirty Highlanders, occupied the summit of a rocky eminence; where, piling their arms, they lay down on the green sward to watch the sun, as it verged towards the western horizon, glittering on the polished arms of solitary sentinels and videttes posted at equal distances along the banks of the rocky river, and in front of that dark forest from the bosom of which its waters came.

A Spanish sunset is a glorious scene in June, but which of the Highlanders there would have exchanged the Scottish pine or purple heath, for the olive grove or clustering grapes of Spain? Ronald was seated in a grassy nook, employed in conning over the pages of the Madrid *Gaceta*, when he was roused by the trampling of hoofs and clang of harness. He sprang up in time to see the shining helmets of a hundred French cuirassiers flashing in the sun-beams, as they issued successively from a deep and narrow gorge on his left, into which they had contrived to penetrate and advance unseen,—evading thus the sentinels of the other picquets.

"Death and fury! we are lost men. Our retreat is cut off! Stand to your arms," cried he, drawing his sword. "Form circle round the face of the rock,—show your front to them! Be cool, and steadily take your aim. Keep up your fire till the cavalry picquets in front of the wood ride to our rescue. Ha! the gallant 9th are in their saddles already."

With coolness and precision his orders were obeyed. The brave little band, aware of the power of foot over horse, formed circle round the eminence, and opened a close and well-directed fire, before which the cuirassiers were compelled to waver, recoil, and stay for some minutes their headlong charge, being impeded and entangled with falling men and horses; and the former, if not dead when they fell, were soon trodden to death by the hoofs of the rear rank.

"Charge!" cried the officer, a dashing fellow, who led them on. "*Charges en queue la troupe!*" and firing their pistols, they came furiously forward sword in hand, making the turf shake as they thundered along. It was a critical moment for the little band! A sharp twinge in his left shoulder informed Ronald that a pistol-shot had taken effect there, depriving him of the use of his arm; and several of his men lay killed and wounded among the feet of their comrades, who could not help feeling a little dismayed at the overwhelming number of their opponents.

"Keep up your fire, brave Highlanders! stand fast, true Scotsmen!" cried Stuart, brandishing his claymore. "Aim deliberately and level low; strike below the corslet. Courage, my boys! 'tis all for our lives. They will kill, as they cannot capture. Hold your ground; keep shoulder to shoulder, and give them the bayonet at the face of the rocks. Hurrah! well done, my own brave comrades! We shall be rescued instantly."

The cuirassiers advanced in a semi-circle boldly enough; but the steady fire of their opponents caused them again to recoil.

"*Vive l'Empereur! Chateaufleur, Chateaufleur! retournez la charge. Charge!*" cried the officer again, and again the serried ranks came rushing on with renewed impetuosity; but they were once more driven back, leaving the ground strewn with writhing men and steeds. A few resolutely pressed forward in the rashness of their daring, and struck at the defenders of the rock across the ridge of deadly bayonets which protruded over it. But they were at once destroyed, shot

and bayoneted. One soldier, who was cut across the face, clubbed his musquet and dashed out the brains of his adversary. And one powerful French dragoon grasped the Serjeant of the picquet, and attempted to drag him down by main strength from the rock; but Ronald saved him, by plunging his sword through the corslet of the Frenchman, who tumbled from his saddle, and was dragged away down the ravine of the Albuera by his affrighted horse.

The rock was again free, but not entirely so, as the cuirassiers, who were reduced to half their original number, were preparing to renew the attack, which appeared to be general along the whole chain of outposts, as the sound of firing was heard in every direction. The picquets of the 39th and 66th regiments, on the right and left, were retiring rearward on the heights, firing as they fell back, on bodies of the enemy's cavalry which were advancing over the plain. Ronald beheld all the other out-picquets retiring in safety. His alone had been cut off, and by means of that accursed ravine! His little party were now reduced to sixteen effective men, and he gave them and himself up for lost. But aid was nigh; part of De Costa's cavalry, lying in front of the wood, were ordered forward by Sir Rowland Hill to his rescue. Onward they came with the speed of the wind, bearing death on the points of their spears. Ronald beheld with delight that it was the troop of Alvaro de Villa Franca, who had just joined De Costa, which was moving to his aid. As they came on, they raised the old battle cry of Spain. "*San Jago, y cierra España!*" was the shout, as they swept gallantly on in a compact mass,—horse to horse, helms and corslets glancing, plumes and pennons waving.

"*Senora Beatificada* strengthen our spears!" cried Alvaro, rushing forward with his uplifted sword. "Follow me, Montesa! Saint James and Close Spain! Stand, Frenchmen, if ye be true cavaliers! *Viva! San Jago, y cierra España! Cerrar con el enemigos!*"

The lances of the front rank sunk to the rest, while those of the rear protruded over the casques of the former, and onward still they pressed, shaking the very rock from which the rescued picquet viewed this new conflict. Not a whit dismayed at the number or character of their opponents, the undaunted cuirassiers met them half-way, and a most gallant hand-to-hand conflict ensued. The scene when the adversaries first met was a perfect combat in the style of the days of chivalry,—the realization of a scene of romance. The proud battle-cry of the Spaniards, answered by the '*Vive l'Empereur!*' of the French,—the crash of lances, splintering on casque and corslet,—the clash of blades,—the tramp of hoofs,—the dust,—the blood,—the groans and shrieks,—the curses, the spurring and prancing, as the parties intermingled,—the brown uniforms and the blue,—the steel helmets and the brass,—the red plumes and the black,—the tall spears and uplifted sabres flashing in the setting sun,—the gaudy standard of the Spaniards,—the eagled guidon of the French, fluttering and waving above the conflict—the

dead and the wounded trodden heedlessly below,—formed altogether a most exciting and soul-stirring scene.

Alvaro distinguished himself in no ordinary degree. The long horse-hair on his crest was seen dancing up and down amidst the thickest of the *mélée*, and whenever his sword descended, a saddle was emptied by the blow. But Ronald could not remain long to witness the valour of his friend, although he eagerly wished to do so. He drew off the remnant of his picquet, and crossing the Albuera, retired into the trenches of the camp, where of course the whole division were under arms.

The outposts were driven in on all sides; and satisfied with this display, Soult brought off his cavalry, who had suffered severely in the contest. Ronald's wound was found to be severe; but the shoulder-blade had escaped fracture, and as soon as it was dressed, he rejoined his company with his arm slung. On the disappearance of the French, the troops piled arms, and all was again the same as before, save the plain in front of Albuera, which was strewn with dead and wounded, and other relics of the skirmish.

As Stuart sat in his tent, writing an account of the day's fray for Lochisla, the door became darkened, and Don Alvaro, entering, grasped him by the hand. He was pale with fatigue, and Ronald knew, by the increased gravity and sorrow imprinted on his features, that he was aware of his sister's death, and that it lay heavy on his heart.

"*Amigo mio*," said he, "a minute later had seen your brave picquet cut to pieces. We drove back these gay cuirassiers in glorious style, fighting, like true soldados, at point of sword and spear every inch of the way."

"I have a thousand thanks to return you, Don Alvaro, for the dauntless manner in which you rode to the rescue. These cuirassiers were tough fellows, and fought with a bravery, equalled only by that of their opponents."

"Stay, *senor*; there is another subject on which I would rather converse with you, than of our hourly occupation of fighting," replied Villa Franca, as he cast aside his leather gauntlets, and unclasping his helmet, wiped the dust from his swarthy face and dark moustaches. "Catalina, my idolized sister,—I would ask you about her?"

Stuart's heart beat quicker. "You have then heard?" said he sorrowfully.

"Yes, *senor*; from Ignacio El Pastor, a priest of Estremadura, I learned the terrible intelligence. I fell in with him near Badajoz, when bearing your letter to my cousin and wife Donna Inesella. I took the liberty of opening it, and making myself master of its contents; and thus became aware of my sister's dishonour and deplorable murder. Don Ronald Stuart, there is something very singular in all that affair; and I must request that you will give me a detailed account of the whole occurrence, without the omission of a single circumstance, for the truth

of which I hold your honour, as a cavalier and soldier."

"How is this, Senor Alvaro?" replied Ronald, alike surprised and displeased at the tone and bearing of the Spaniard. "I consider it next to an impossibility that you should suspect me of any thing wrong, or of leaving any thing undone."

"*Amiga mio*, your pardon. I spoke somewhat hastily; but when I mention the tumult of this day's conflict, and the excitement which the recollection of my dear and beautiful sister arouses within me, I have a sufficient apology." He leant against the pole of the tent and covered his face with his hands, betraying an emotion in which Ronald could not but participate. "Pardon me, Senor Stuart," continued the cavalier, "you loved my poor sister too well to deserve that I should judge harshly of you; but say on, and tell all you know of her dreadful death."

The Spaniard stretched himself on the turf floor of the tent, and resting on his helmet, leant his head upon his hand, and fixing his keen dark eyes upon Ronald's, listened to the account given by the latter of her death. He began with his meeting her at Almarez, and without concealing a single sentiment which had animated them, or an observation which had passed, he continued the narrative down to the hour of her burial at the convent of Jarciejo. But both became greatly excited as the tale proceeded. Love, sorrow, and indignation caused Ronald's features to flush, and his brow to knit; but those of the hot-brained Spaniard became black with fury, and convulsed with the excess of those passions to which his tongue could not give utterance. He wept and groaned, and grasped the hilt of his poniard energetically. When Ronald ceased, he started from the ground, with his large dark eyes flashing like those of an incarnate demon.

"Moderate your transports, Don Alvaro; be calm, I beseech you!" said Stuart, grasping him by the arm.

"Cavalier, your story has driven me to frenzy," cried he, through his clenched teeth. "You cannot have loved Catalina as she deserved to be loved, otherwise you would not be so calm in such a terrible hour as this. Excuse me, senor; alas! I know not what I utter. You come of a northern people, less prompt to ire and vengeance than the fiery Spaniard. But much as you may have heard of Spanish vengeance," said he, becoming suddenly calm, "all the tales that have been told of it since the days of King Bamba or Roderick the Goth will fall immeasurably short of mine. I have left no means untried to capture Narvaez Cifuentes, but where the ban-dog lurks at present I know not. But the hour of retribution will yet come, and my fury will burst on his devoted brow like a thunderbolt." He sunk upon his knees, and ratified a solemn vow of vengeance by kissing the bare blade and cross-hilt of his stiletto. "Senor," said he, "is it the custom in your native land to swear across the dagger?"[*]

[*] All oaths in courts of law, and others in Spain, are sworn across a sword or dagger.

"In the days of my grandsire it was; and there are yet some among our Scottish hills who consider none now binding, unless sworn over the unsheathed dirk."

"'Tis well: it shows the military spirit of your people. Conform to the present customs of Spain, and to those of your northern ancestors. Swear with me, cavalier."

Promptly as Alvaro could have wished, Ronald unsheathed the long Highland dirk with which he had lately equipped himself. It was a handsome weapon set with jewels, and accoutred with knife and fork, like the regimental dirks now worn by every Highland officer: and across it he vowed to aid Alvaro in delivering Cifuentes up to vengeance.

"This is well. I will now be calm," said the cavalier in a tone of satisfaction. "You may have some scruples about slaying the dog with your own hand; but deliver him over to the first alcalde, and he will reserve him for the fury of Alvaro of Villa Franca."

"Such a reservation may do, should I meet him in camp or city; but woe to him should we forgather in any desert spot,—my sword and his heart will not be long asunder."

"Spoken like a true hidalgo, who needs no friend save his own right hand. Our Lady del Pilar! slay me this earthly fiend, and I will consider you as much my brother as if my sister, my sublime Catalina, had wedded you at the altar. Although in truth, to be frank with you, I would rather she had bestowed her hand on her cousin, the Condé of Truxillo, a brave cavalier, who has loved her long and dearly. What now, Pedro? Do you bring me the list of killed and wounded?" said he, as Serjeant Gomez stood erect at the triangular door of the tent, and brought his right hand up to the peak of his helmet, in a sweeping military salute.

"The Valencian rogue, senior cavalier; how are we to dispose of him?"

"Ha! I had forgotten. Right, my true soldado. A base goatherd, senior," said he, turning to Ronald, "a most contemptible traitor, who guided up the ravine those hundred cuirassiers who so nearly cut your picquet off. Pedro captured the rogue after the skirmish. He is a notorious spy and traitor. Where is he now, Pedro?"

"Tied hard and fast, like a Merino sheep, under the belly of my Andalusian," answered Pedro with a grin.

"You had better turn him over to the provost-marshal of the camp," said Ronald; "he will give him his deserts from the branch of the nearest tree. The rascal! by his treachery to his country my company has lost fourteen gallant hearts, and I have won this wound."

"As he is a prisoner of mine," said Alvaro, "I will dispose of him, and save senor the provost-marshal any trouble in the matter. Desire a file of troopers to dismount and load their carbines,—no! that were a waste of King Ferdinand's powder. Run your dagger into his throat, Pedro, and see that you strike deep; then fling his carcase over the rocks into the Albuera, and let it rot in that same ravine that he knows so well."

Pedro disappeared, and almost instantly a prolonged shriek, which startled the whole camp, announced that the unscrupulous *sargento* had obeyed his orders to the very letter. Ronald was about to express some abhorrence of this summary mode of execution, when he was interrupted.

"Villa Franca," said a handsome Spanish cavalry officer, about twenty years of age, appearing at the door of the tent; "the Condé Penne Villamur wishes to see you. Our brigade and De Costa's have been ordered to the front, as an advanced post. Such are the orders of Sir Rowland Hill. The condé would speak with you without delay, and our trumpets will sound 'to horse' in an hour."

"'Tis well, Lorenzo. I am in a true fighting mood to-day, and our troop of lancers are in glorious order. The Marquess de Montesa of Valencia," said Alvaro, introducing the stranger to Ronald, "the senior lieutenant of my lances."

"A sharp skirmish that was, in which we were engaged a short time ago, senor," said Montesa with a laugh. He was one of those gay fellows who laugh at every thing. "We appear to have shared alike in the misfortunes of war," he added, pointing to his left arm, which was bound up in his red Spanish scarf.

"Ha, marquess! your presence reminds me of what other thoughts had nearly driven from my memory. Look you, Senor Don Ronald," said Alvaro, displaying a golden cross suspended by a red-and-yellow riband. "We have been commissioned by my relative, Alfonso de Conquesta, Grand-master of the military order of Saint James of Spain, to invest you with this badge, and create you a knight-companion of our most honourable order, as a reward for your bravery at Almaraz, accounts of which have been fully blazoned forth by the *Gacetas* of Madrid and other places."

Stuart, who had longed with all the ardour of a young soldier for some of those military decorations with which the bosoms of foreign troops are covered, received the cross with a pleasure which he could not conceal. At that time neither medal nor star was to be seen in our service, save among the officers of the 15th Light Dragoons, who received from the Emperor of Germany an 'order of Merit' for their singular bravery at Villiers-en-Couche, in 1794.

"A most beautiful cross indeed, Don Alvaro," said Stuart; "but our mess are droll fellows, and I shall be sadly quizzed about it."

"A badge such as this should raise other sentiments than those of ridicule in the minds of honourable cavaliers," observed Montesa. "You will find it a star

for the ladies' eyes to follow. Our Spanish damsels know well, that the tried and proved soldier alone wins the cross and riband of St. James."

"The marquess has your diploma of knighthood in his sabre-tache: he will explain to you the rules of the order. Meanwhile, I shall attend the noble condé," said Alvaro, and departed. The diploma, a parchment containing the oath, the rules of the order, and bearing its seal appended, was written in Spanish and Latin, and Ronald was a little startled at the tenour of the vow.

"'Tis no small honour the noble and venerable Grand-master confers upon you, senor," said Montesa, after reading over the document. "The order of Saint James is one of the most ancient and chivalric in Spain. It was instituted, in the year 1170, by Ferdinand II. king of Leon and Galicia. It is conferred solely on hidalgos of the highest rank, very seldom on foreigners, and never yet on a heretic."

"I am afraid, marquess, your Spanish prejudices will incline you to class me with the latter."

"I trust that, although as true a Catholic as ever kissed cross, I have more liberality, and the Grand-master is too anxious to enrol you as a gallant soldier in the order, to inquire much about your tenets, which in truth are doubtful," said Montesa laughing, "if I may believe the reports of my fair cousin, the abbess of Santa Cruz. Religious inquiries may be dispensed with, but for form's sake the vows are indispensable; and when Alvaro returns, we will examine and sign the diploma sent hither by Don Alfonso."

"The vows; I should be glad to know them. By your cross, I perceive that you are a knight of the order."

"Every Spanish officer of distinction is," replied Montesa, with a proud smile. "We are supposed to observe the rules of San Austin, and vow obedience, conjugal fidelity to our wives—*demonio!* and service to all ladies. Things easily sworn to," added he, laughing heartily, "but hard to keep in Spain. By San Jago! I have broken them a score of times. Senor, you know that vows and restrictions which suited the steel-clad knights of Ferdinand of Leon, will scarcely suit the cigar-smoking and dashing officers of Murillo or Don Carlos D'Espagna's divisions. Our Lady! we would as soon swear to the vows of the bare-footed Franciscan. But you will have to make it appear that your ancestors have been, at least, hidalgos or gentlemen for four generations."

"For sixteen, if you choose, marquess; but I should need the assistance of some northern bard to unravel the matter. However, my colonel will resolve that point for you."

"And that in your veins there runs not the base blood of Jew, Morisco, or heretic; and that you have never been called in question by the late Inquisition,—the devil confound it!"

"To these I may freely swear No! on blade and bible."

"You see by the diploma," continued Montesa, with a droll smile, "that knights in their noviciate are obliged to tug an oar in the king's galleys for six months, to harden them to labour; and then live for six months more in a Carthusian monastery, fasting and praying, being the while scantily supplied with black bread, and liberally with water to wash away their sins and enormities."

"The deuce, marquess! These disagreeable preliminaries will scarcely suit me; and I fear I must forego the high honour intended me by the venerable Grand-master."

"Not at all, senor," replied Montesa. "Were these parts of the military noviciate to be rigorously exacted, how very few of our Spanish caballeros of Madrid would display their crosses on the gay Prados. By Santiago! I would see De Conquesta and his order at the bottom of the Mediterranean, before I would submit to such degradation. Besides, senor, if twelve months campaigning here will not harden us, nothing on earth will."

"How then, marquess?"

"A few doubloons paid to the grand-treasurer, at Cadiz, where at present Don Alfonso resides, will procure you a dispensation from these, and all will then be right. Ha! here comes Villa Franca. You have made dispatch with the condé."

"Montesa," said Alvaro, entering, "our trumpets will blow 'boot and saddle' instantly. The Spanish horse will relieve General Long's brigade of the out-picquet duty on the Santa Martha road. We move the moment the sun dips behind the heights of Albuera."

"You will probably see some fighting before dawn."

"True, Senor Stuart; and perhaps a few saddles will be emptied before the bugles sound the *réveille*," replied Montesa, whose own was doomed to be one of them. "Ho! there go our trumpeters already. Alvaro, we had better invest our friend with his cross; dispensing, of course, with the mummery of monks and godfathers. *Diavolo!* we ought to have had a fair lady to clasp on his belt and affix the star. Would we were near the convent of Jarciejo!"

"The lady must be dispensed with likewise. Hark! the condé already blows 'to horse!' He is somewhat impatient, truly. Lend me your sword, marquess; I cannot bestow the knighthood with mine, as the cross-guard was broken off in our late fandango with the enemy. Let us seek the tent of Don Juan Cameron; and when we have been satisfied on some points of lineage, amigo mio, amidst the officers of your own brave regiment you shall become our sworn knight-companion."

"A most unceremonious instalment," said Montesa, "but war and necessity must be pleaded for our excuse; and the knight that is created in a tent, is more likely to prove a true cavalier, than he who receives his spurs in the carpeted

palace or decorated chapel."

In Fassifern's tent Stuart was duly dubbed knight of Saint James, having as such the privilege of wearing his bonnet in presence of the king of Spain. As soon as the hasty ceremony was over, the Spaniards sprung to their saddles and departed, leaving Ronald with the cross on his breast amid a circle of his brother-officers, who, with their congratulations, threw in sundry dry jokes.

For many months afterwards he was known among them as "the knight of Santiago," seldom receiving any other name except when on duty. Jokes must be furnished for mess and parade, and Ronald's cross was a standing one. He became, however, a greater favourite with the colonel and regiment. He was esteemed by the officers and beloved by the soldiers, who would, as they emphatically said, "storm hell's yetts to serve him." Than British soldiers, none know better how to appreciate the good qualities of an officer who treats them well, and their love, esteem, and confidence, which cannot fail being of service to the officer himself, are easily gained by kindness and affability. Nor was Saint James's cross the only piece of good fortune that Ronald obtained. He had returned to his tent, where he sat finishing his letter for Lochisla, and regretting bitterly that he was unable to send another for Inchavon, when Alister came in with a newspaper in each hand.

"I congratulate you, Sir knight of Santiago de Compostella; the saints are propitious to you certainly, or the Horse Guards at least. Lisle has sent me these papers up from the castle of Belem, from which place he was just about to set out on his return with a detachment of convalescents. Look you here."

"What! any more orders of knighthood?"

"Something more substantial. 'War-office, 24th—no, 28th foot, Lieut. Dalbiac to be captain, *vice* Paget, killed in action. Ensign Stuart, from the 92nd Highlanders, to be lieutenant, *vice* Dalbiac."

"Ha! is it really possible?" exclaimed Ronald, springing up.

"Quite, and a most lucky dog you are. You may thank Almarez and Sir Rowland Hill for this. He recommended you for promotion, you know."

"The 28th is an English regiment—"

"The gallant slashers."

"I should be sorry to leave the Highlanders,—one of our most dashing national regiments."

"Your taste appears to be consulted admirably. Look at this *Gazette* in the next paper. '92nd Highlanders.—Brevet-major Colin Campbell to be major, *vice* Macdonald, appointed to the 8th Garrison Battalion; Lieut. Macdonald to be captain, *vice* Campbell; Lieut. Ronald Stuart, from the 28th foot, to be lieutenant, *vice* the Honourable Sholto Douglas, who exchanges."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Stuart, as they shook hands. "I shall be with you

still: Cameron has planned this matter, surely. But this Honourable Sholto,—I have never had the pleasure of seeing him.”

”Oh! he has been on the staff in Ireland for these three years past. A drawing-room soldier, that has no idea of bivouacks and tough ration beef,—fording rivers up to the neck, and having forced marches of forty miles. Sholto has kept himself clear of these matters, and is consequently no favourite with the chief—Cameron, I mean; the warning he gave me about that title at San Pedro must not be forgotten. I wish you joy heartily, Ronald, notwithstanding you are promoted over my head. However, I am near the top of the ensigns, and the next engagement may provide for some of the seniors. We must wet the new commission to-night in glorious style; and, hark! firing, by Jove! The out-picquets are engaged! Soult is at it again.” Drawing back the door of the tent, they saw the flashes of musquetry and gleam of steel appear on the Santa Martha road, and wreaths of white smoke curling up among the rocks and broken ground between showing that a running skirmish had commenced. The noise of the firing became more rapid and loud, and then died away; and the Spanish cavalry were seen sword in hand, pursuing the French at full gallop. The Condé Penne Villamur had repelled the attack of the French cuirassiers, and having defeated them, rashly left his ground in pursuit along the road to Santa Martha; where, falling into an ambush of several squadrons of horse, his Spaniards were almost all cut to pieces. Don Alvaro, at the head of his lancers, charged madly through and through them, and brought off the condé, after a most desperate and bloody conflict fought hand to hand with sword and spear, amid which the gay and brave young Marquess of Montesa was slain, being ”cloven to the teeth, through steel and bone,” by Louis Chateaufleur, a major of cuirassiers, mentioned by De Mesmai in preceding chapters. Alvaro was so severely wounded by a sword-thrust between the joints of his breast and back-plate, that he was rendered unserviceable for some time; and procuring leave, departed for Idanha-a-Velha, where Donna Inesella still resided.

CHAPTER XI. THE MARCH TO TOLEDO.

”O, leeze me on the philabeg,
The hairy knee and gartered leg!
But aye the thing that glads my e’e,

Is the *white cockade* aboon the bree.”

Jacobite Song.

Sir Rowland Hill, finding that the French marshal lacked determination to attack his strong position at Albuera, resolved to assail his legions in their quarters at Santa Martha, for which place the whole division marched on the morning of the 1st July. The enemy retired as usual before him, their rear-guard skirmishing with the cavalry advance of the British, who suffered some loss at forcing the passage of the Guadacia, upon the ford of which the French brought their flying-artillery to bear; and against Berlenza some fighting ensued, and Ronald Stuart narrowly escaped being cut in two by an eighteen-pound shot from the enemy's guns. Many weeks were consumed in tedious marching and skirmishing, in which there was neither glory nor gain to be acquired; and right glad were the second division when the route for the gay city of Aranjuez, the Windsor of Spain, reached them while stationed at the dull and uninteresting town of Don Benito.

At Llerena, a town romantically situated at the base of the huge Sierra San Bernardo, they received intelligence of the glorious victory won by Lord Wellington's army over that of Marshal Marmont on the field of Salamanca; and learned that Joseph, the *ci-devant* king of Spain, had been driven from his usurped throne, and compelled to establish his head-quarters in the city of Valencia.

A Spanish peasant, who had witnessed the battle, brought the tidings to Llerena, which was illuminated in consequence; and a huge bonfire, lighted by the 36th regiment, blazed from the summit of San Bernardo.

When news of the victory obtained at Salamanca reached Marshal Soult, he raised the siege of Cadiz and retreated towards Cordova, leaving his cannon and ammunition in the hands of the British. He drew off all his troops from Estremadura, in consequence of which the presence of the second division was no longer requisite in that province: hence the unexpected route for Aranjuez. Gladly they bade farewell to Don Benito, turning their faces towards Castile—the famous and romantic Castile,—of old the land of the warrior and troubadour, of love and chivalry, “of battle and of song.”

At Truxillo Ronald had the pleasure of again seeing his friend the Capitan Conquesta, who presented him to his newly-wedded bride, Donna Maria, with whose history the reader is already acquainted. Ronald spent a very pleasant evening with the cavalier, who, for his edification, fought over again the campaigns of Buenos Ayres, enriched with many episodes, in which he himself, and “that stout and honourable cavalier the General Liniers,” acted prominent parts.

At Truxillo Stuart was appointed one of the lieutenants of the light company, an alteration which he considered no small compliment, as the smartest

fellows alone are selected for the flank companies. On marching past the convent walls of Jarciejo, they were greeted by many a *viva* from the nuns, who waved their white kerchiefs from the grated loop-holes to the troops, who replied to them by loud cheers, each corps making the old walls shake as they came up in succession. Ronald's heart was, perhaps, the saddest there among thirty thousand men. It was impossible to be otherwise than sorrowful, when so near the tomb of the high-souled and noble Catalina. The same evening they crossed the Tagus at Almarez, by a pontoon bridge. It was with mingled feelings of pride and veneration that the three regiments of the first brigade passed the spot, where so many brave comrades had found a soldier's last resting-place. The ruined forts were now overhung with wild weeds and grass; the wall-flower, the honeysuckle, and ivy clung to the embrasures of fort Napoleon, and nodded on the remnant of the old tower of Ragusa. In some places a fleshless bone projecting from the sod bore witness of the hasty interment received by the dead. On descending from the pass of Miravete they came in sight of Almarez, its rocks, and woods, and winding river, just as the broad setting sun went down in all its glory. A loud and exulting cheer burst from the bonneted Highlanders, and was carried along the column to the rear, reverberated a thousand times among the splintered peaks and frowning crags of the Lina. The bands of the 50th, the 71st, and 92nd regiments struck up the "British Grenadiers;" and thus they passed in their glitter and pride, with drums beating and colours flying, above the sod that covered the breast of many a gallant comrade. It was a proud time for the first brigade; and while their hearts throbbed quicker to the "spirit-stirring" roll of the drum, or swell of the merry bugle, they forgot not that they trod near the tomb of those who heard their notes no more.

Two days afterwards the troops occupied the town of Calzada de Orepeza, in the midst of which stood an old baronial fortalice, or square embattled tower, which was garrisoned by a party of Don Salvador de Zagala's guerilla corps. Soon after seeing his light company dismissed to their several billets, Ronald, on passing this keep, was surprised to hear his name eagerly and distinctly called by some one within it; and on looking up at its huge gloomy front, beheld a hand beckoning to him through a narrow loop-hole, which was cut at the top and bottom for the ejection of arrows in the olden time. Who could be thus imprisoned here, and acquainted with his name, he was utterly at a loss to conjecture; but he turned to the guard of guerillas, who lay reposing on the earth in a cool shady place, under the masses of wild vines which straggled over the barbican wall, smoking cigars and burnishing their arms, which, as well as their dress, were of so motley a kind as to remind Ronald of his old acquaintances in the wood of La Nava. All wore the red military cockade of Spain fastened to the front of their broad hats or slouching caps.

On inquiring who was imprisoned in the tower, they replied a *ladrone* or thief, and brought to him a *guerilla*, whom they dignified with the title of *Senor el Castellano*, i.e. the constable or governor of the castle, a huge-headed, broad-shouldered, brawny, and muscular fellow, who had evidently been a muleteer, but had resigned the whip and bells for the musket and poniard. He wore a pair of French epaulets on his mule-driver's jacket; a sash encircled his waist, bearing a powder-horn, and several pistols and daggers; the large plume of some staff-officer decorated his *sombrero*, and his followers were most of them arrayed likewise in the trappings of the slain. The *castellano* received Ronald with much respect, and led him through the windings and intricacies of the ancient tower, which, with its round wheel-stairs, arched passages, and narrow loopholes, reminded him of the old pile at Lochisla. From the number of doors which were unlocked by huge clanking keys in their progress, Stuart was led to expect something extraordinary, but on reaching a solitary turret chamber, when the door was thrown open what was his surprise to behold Captain de Mesmai, whom he supposed to be in the castle of Albuquerque. He was miserably altered, and Ronald, while he beheld him, became filled with pity and indignation—pity for his situation, and indignation at the ungenerous Spaniards. His blue uniform had been stripped of its lace, epaulets, stars, and medals, and hung about him in tatters, showing his skin in many places. A *guerilla* on sentry at the door had appropriated the helmet and corslet of the 10th to himself. De Mesmai had been plundered of his boots, and his feet were in a miserable state in consequence of the long marches the *guerillas* had compelled him to make. He was thin and gaunt, and a beard of a week's growth bristled upon his chin; but there was the same merry devil-may-care twinkle in his eye, which showed that his bold and buoyant heart was yet unchanged.

"*Vive la bagatelle—Hoa! Vive la joie!*" cried he, springing forward and clasping Ronald in his arms with true French energy, "My dear friend, you may judge how glad I am to see you. I shall now be rescued from the brutality of these base and accursed Spanish dogs." As this was said in Spanish, lightning gleamed in the eyes of Castellano, who stood by. He grasped the hilt of his poniard, but relinquished it as Ronald's fiery and threatening glance fell on him. Yet he scowled malignantly at De Mesmai as he withdrew his hand.

"Ah, Stuart, *mon ami!* of what I have suffered at the hands of these *guerillas* you can form no idea. I have been plundered as you see: I have been beaten, kicked, even spat upon. *Mon Dieu!* such treatment for a gentleman and soldier of France! I have been locked up in this desolate stone chamber for four nights and days, during which not one morsel of food has passed my lips."

"Rascal! do you dare to treat an honourable prisoner of war, thus?" exclaimed Ronald, turning to the Spaniard, who bestowed a sullen look upon him,

but made no reply.

"I fully expected that before this," continued De Mesmai, "D'Erlon would have made some effort to effect my exchange. The devil confound him! I will revenge myself on him for his forgetfulness, by being doubly sweet to madame, his dear little countess, whose fortunate *cher ami* I have the honour to be. *Diable!* what would the 10th cuirassiers,—the pets of the Parisian ladies,—the dandies and glory of the Bouvelards, say, could they see me in this plight? Faith, I believe a dozen girls in the Rue des Trois Maries would run crazy, could they know of it. *Diablement!* shirtless and shoeless,—and with a coat as holy as that of Monseigneur St. Denis, which hangs in the aisle of the old church of Besançon. Look at me, Monsieur Stuart; your allies, the guerillas, have done all this. But I will revenge myself on D'Erlon, and garnish his empty old head with certain ornaments which shall be nameless,—I will, by the name of the bomb!"

"I am glad to find that your high spirits have not deserted you, and that you are as merry a fellow as ever. Can it be, that those wretches have really starved you thus?"

"For four days, my friend," said De Mesmai; "four days and four nights, on my sacred honour! my most earnest entreaties for bread were disregarded. When I used humbly to request, *Pan, gracias Senor Castellano,—pan en el nombre de Dios?* This scowling coward used to point to the village ruined by Massena's troops, and reply,—*Carajo! Perro é ladrone! El Español no hay nada. A quien Dios de mala ventura!* 'Dog and thief! the Spaniard has none. Ill luck to you!' This was my hourly answer. *Tête-Dieu!* how my blood has boiled up within me, and I have longed to thrust my hand into his ungenerous heart. *Sacre!* with two of my gallant 10th at my back, and were I again astride of my fleet Norman, I could soon make these rascals fly like hares before the hound. But may this right hand and arm be withered and shrunk unto the shoulder, if ever again it spares the life of a Spaniard when my sword has once laid the dog at my mercy. I will revenge in red blood the countless—the never-to-be-forgotten indignities I have received from these infernal guerillas. They have been taunting me for these few days past with a defeat which, they say, Marmont has met with at Salamanca. Bah! Lord Wellington could never beat Marmont, and I know the rogues have lied."

Ronald smiled, but made no effort to undeceive him. "Take my arm, De Mesmai, and permit me to lead you from this place," said he, apprehensive that blows would soon be exchanged between the Gaul and Spaniard, who glared at each other with unspeakable hatred and ferocity.

"*Vive la joie!* how I rejoiced when I beheld the scarlet columns of the British descending by the Navil Moral road on Calzada de Orepeza! I knew that my hour of deliverance was at hand."

"Come, then; march, monsieur. Let us leave this dismal tower! Stand aside,

worthy Senor Castellano."

"*Satanos, Senor Oficial!* it cannot be that you mean to release our prisoner?" asked the guerilla, grasping his poniard again.

"Unhand your dagger, you rascally guerilla! or I will seize you by the throat, and hurl you to the bottom of your tower," cried Ronald, laying his hand on his sword.

"*Il a la mine guerrier,*" said De Mesmai sneeringly, in his native language, and laughing at the guerilla, who still hesitated; while others came crowding into the apartment, and began to handle the locks of their musquets. "Would to St. Belzebub I had a weapon to strike in with you! We would cut our way through these base plebeians, as through so many children."

"Look you, senores," said Ronald; "'tis madness of you to obstruct me. Our soldiers are thronging all about the village, and by a single blast on this, I will summon a hundred men in a moment." As he spoke, he disengaged from his belt the silver whistle which, as a light infantry officer, was now part of his appointments. By this movement the folds of his plaid were raised, and the golden cross of St. James glittered before the eyes of the Spaniards, whose favour was instantly won by the sight of the well-known Spanish badge of military achievement. They fell back right and left, and the passage was free. De Mesmai, vowing vengeance against them, departed with his deliverer, who soon got him attired in other clothing, which, though somewhat motley, was preferable to the rags he had lately worn.

Adjourning to a *taberna*, kept by an old Jewess, they partook of an *olla podrida*,—a mess composed of fragments of fowl, flesh, and various ingredients stewed together; an excellent dish, when well spiced and seasoned, and one that is considered very substantial and nourishing by the Spaniards. For this, and a stoup of very sour wine, the conscientious *patrona* charged Ronald two duros.

After this they parted. Ronald had to take command of the escort of the regimental baggage, and De Mesmai was sent to the rear-guard, with whom some other prisoners of war marched. The unfortunate cuirassier, with true French volubility, gave Stuart a profusion of thanks for his kindness, and departed, swearing by the bomb that he would make his escape on the first opportunity which offered. This threat he executed two days afterwards, near Talavera de la Reina, when the division was on its march; and, aided by some Spaniards in the French interest, he gained Andalusia in safety, and rejoined Marshal Soult's army at Cordova.

After passing through a variety of towns and villages, the troops of Sir Rowland Hill, on the 29th of September, beheld before them the famous and venerable city of Toledo—of old the populous and wealthy capital of Spain, once so celebrated for its magnificence and glory, of which, alas! so little now remains.

The appearance of the dark city, illumined by the glow of the setting sun, which bathed in purple every thing that its rays fell upon, formed a new and agreeable object to the brigades, as they emerged in succession from the rich groves and cool vine-trellises that, bending under purple grapes, had for miles and miles overshadowed their line of march, and echoed to the music of the thirty regimental bands. A cheer arose from the advanced-guard when they came in sight of Toledo. Situated amidst the most delightful and romantic scenery, it crowns the summit of a rocky eminence, around which runs its girdle of walls and battlemented towers, circled on three sides by the Tagus, which, reflecting the hue of the sky, was now wandering like a river of blood among gloomy trees, sylvan ravines, and rocky places, adding greatly to the singular beauty of the surrounding country. The roofs of the houses, which are generally about five or six stories high, were seen shining in the sun above the serrated lines of the ramparts; and rearing high above all rose the enormous gothic tower and spire of the ancient cathedral, the red sky appearing between pinnacle and buttress, flying arch and traceried window, giving a peculiar appearance of lightness and richness to the huge dark mass. The opinion formed by the soldiers on first viewing Toledo was changed on entering it, and seeing the close, crooked, desolate, and filthy alleys which branch off in every direction.

A very handsome street, where the cathedral stands, and which leads to the great square, is, or was, the principal one in the city, and was kept tolerably well paved and clean. But every thing which meets the eye announces decay, and attests that trade, commerce, wealth, and glory have departed from Toledo. The population, which once exceeded two hundred thousand souls, has now sunk to about one eighth of that number.

At the city gate the troops were met by a number of the Spanish nobility and their attendants on horseback, followed by crowds of the citizens, who received them with loud acclamations. The *alcaldes*, headed by the governor, El Medico, a fierce guerilla chief, appeared at the archway, attired in their robes of scarlet, and attended by halberdiers and *alguazils* dressed in short black cloaks and doublets, and wearing broad hats, from beneath which their long hair hung down on their jagged lace collars. Numerous bands of ecclesiastics, chanting as they came, and bearing banner, cross, and smoking chalice, were likewise in attendance. Above their dark masses were borne aloft the dressed-up images of the Virgin, Santa Casilda, and San Ildefonso, of whom so many legends are told in Toledo. These affairs, fluttering with rich drapery and blazing with jewels, displayed all that singular mixture of mummery, religion, and *effect*, which is so much studied in the rites of the church of Rome.

In the name of King Ferdinand of Spain as his representative, and of the *alcaldes* and citizens of Toledo as their governor, El Medico welcomed Sir Rowland

Hill and the soldiers of the *fighting division* to the ancient capital of Spain, in a speech of wonderful length and pomposity.

As the brigades marched through the city, the joyous acclamations of the people, the tolling of bells, the chant of the priests, the din and uproar, the reiterated cheers and shouts of "Long live Ferdinand the Seventh! Long live the brave British nation! *Viva, Don Rowland Hill, viva!*" resounding on all sides, almost drowned the music of the bands and tramp of the marching feet. Even Ranald-Dhu, the piper-major of the Gordon Highlanders, with his six colleagues, had to blow their bags up with might and main before they could make themselves heard. The martial, yet wild-looking garb of the 92nd attracted great attention, and a dense crowd of staring Spaniards squeezed along on the flanks of the regiment, accompanying it through all the streets. The Highland garb was a new sight to the citizens of Toledo, who, although they had heard of the bare-kneed Scottish regiments, with whose valour all Spain was ringing, they now beheld one of them within the walls of the city for the first time. The remarkable appearance of Dugald Mhor, with his snowy tresses and blue bonnet, marching close to the colonel's side, elicited many a shout of wonder; but the old Gael was too much accustomed to be distinguished thus, and cared nothing about it as he strode on with his long claymore swinging at his thigh, and his brass target slung on his back. What the latter with its brass studs and steel pike could be, it was impossible for the Spaniards to conjecture; but they imagined it to be some unmeaning badge of office, like the gold stick of the Guards, and concluded that Dugald was some very important personage among the strangers. The windows and terraced tops of the houses were crowded with people, and the balconies overlooking the streets were filled with ladies, who kissed their white hands, waved their veils, and tossed bouquets of flowers, and even their little gloves to the officers, crying ever and anon,—"*Long live Sir Rowland Hill! Sus valiente caballeros y soldados, viva!*"

The balconies were decorated with garlands of flowers, quilts, carpets, and pieces of ancient tapestry; the banners of noble families, of corporations, and of Spain, waved from the windows amid gaudy pennons and streamers of every kind. Hurrah! it was indeed a magnificent scene of joy, noise, and uproar. Every man wearing the red coat was the friend of the Spaniard; and even the wearied little drum-boy, lugging along his drum, was a hero and a deliverer of Spain. That night solemn prayers for the success of the British arms were offered up in the great cathedral. The outside of its dome and spire were blazing with myriads of variegated lamps, and the town was illuminated with great splendour. The lighted-up spire presented a most singular appearance for leagues around. Rising from the glittering city, it stood like a vast column of fire against the dusky sky, causing the windings of the Tagus to gleam afar off, from the savage defiles

and deep gorges through which it wanders. The soldiers were billeted on the inhabitants of the city, within the walls; and the general with his staff was received into the mansion of the governor, El Medico.

The Highlanders and the left wing of an English regiment (the 66th, I believe) were quartered in the mouldering palace of the ancient kings of Castile,—the Alcanzar, a building which has since degenerated into a house of refuge for the poor. In the evening the theatre was thronged with officers of the division, the ladies and all fashionable people in the town, to witness the representation of a new piece. It was entitled *The Plains of Salamanca*, and composed by a young student of Toledo in honour of the late victory obtained by the British arms. Between the acts or *jornados*, the bands of the 34th regiment and of the Highlanders occupied the orchestra, and played a number of Spanish airs in compliment to the audience.

A comic opera, called the *tonadilla*, closed the amusements of the evening. It was performed by a single person, a young and pretty actress, who sang, in a remarkably sweet voice, a long story or ballad full of drollery, love-adventures, and gallantry, drawing loud applause and astounding *vivas* from the audience, with whom she appeared to be a decided favourite, the stage being strewn with the chaplets and bouquets of flowers tossed to her by cavaliers from the boxes and pit.

Certainly the whole performance did not impress the British portion of the audience with a very high opinion of the state of the Spanish theatre. The house was small, ill-constructed, ill-fitted up, and ill-lighted with a few oil lamps, the nauseous fumes of which, mixed with those of oranges, cigars, and garlic, rendered the atmosphere very far from pure. The scenes were daubs, the attire of the actors rags, and the play destitute of talent; but the beauty of the bright-eyed ladies in the boxes, the pretty actress with her *tonadilla*, and the martial music in the orchestra, were sufficient to counterbalance other drawbacks and defects.

Sir Rowland's division lay two days in Toledo. On the evening before they marched, Ronald made a tour of the city to view all worth seeing. After visiting the famous sword manufactory, which yet flourishes as of old, he bent his steps towards the cathedral, the doors of which (like those of all continental churches) stood open day and night. It was almost dark when he entered it, and the appearance of that vast temple, when involved in gloom and mystery, is fully calculated to impress the mind with holy sadness, with pure veneration, and with awe. The pale light of the moon and stars, twinkling through eighty-six tinted and traceried windows, glimmered alternately on the scores of massive and magnificent columns that upheld the lofty roof, and showing them where the perspective of "the long-drawn aisles" vanished away in darkness and obscurity.

Six tall candles twinkled before the dark painting on the altar, and many holy tapers gleamed fitfully in far recesses before the shrines and images of Eugenius, Casilda, Ildefonso, Leocadia, and other favourite saints of Toledo, before which many a solitary devotee knelt on the cold pavement in earnest prayer.

The dark figures of monks and cavaliers,—the latter in broad hats and long cloaks, were gliding noiselessly about, adding greatly to the general effect of the scene. They moved like shadows: scarcely a foot-fall was heard as they trod lightly on the carved stones, beneath which sleep many a king and queen of fair Castile,—many a proud grandee and redoubtable warrior.

After endeavouring to decipher by the dim light of a neighbouring shrine the pompous inscriptions on the marble tombs of the great Don Alvar de Luna, Cardinal Mendoza, and others, Ronald turned to leave the place, his mind filled with admiration and enthusiasm at its vastness, grandeur, solemnity, and magnificence. As he passed down one of the side-aisles, indulging in a train of these fine sentiments, they were cut short, somewhat abruptly, by a person coming violently against him in the dark.

"Sir, you are very unceremonious," cried Ronald angrily, feeling for his sword. "What do you mean by coming against me thus rudely?"

"I believe I may, without injustice, ask the same question of you," answered a familiar voice; and as they advanced from between the columns into the light of a shrine, Ronald beheld with surprise the face of Louis Lisle.

"I did not expect you so very suddenly, and especially here at Toledo," said he, dubious in what manner to greet his old friend, whose features became at once clouded by the cold and stern expression which they had generally worn of late, especially since the hour in which he beheld the interview between Stuart and Catalina in the cottage at Almarez. "You have made expedition in your march from Lisbon."

"I arrived here about two hours ago, with a detachment of convalescents from Belem. You are aware that the division marches at sun-rise to-morrow; so I wish to see the cathedral before leaving Toledo," and turning coldly, he was about to move off.

"Louis Lisle," exclaimed Ronald, suddenly and fiercely, as he strode before and intercepted him, while all his long pent up indignation broke forth uncontrollably; "halt, sir! You shall not stir one pace from the spot until I have spoken with you. We must come to an explanation; my own honour demands it. Whence is it, that you treat me in this studied, cold, and insolent manner, and have ever done so since that hour in which we met on the plain at La Nava?"

"Recall to mind your conduct on that occasion, and I presume you are sufficiently answered," was the cold reply.

"Lisle—Lisle!" exclaimed Ronald bitterly, "when children, when youths at

home in our own country among the woods of Inchavon and Lochisla, we were constant companions and friends,—brothers in all but blood. Oh! why should it be otherwise now?"

"Ask that question of yourself, sir,—ask of your own false heart!" replied Louis, proudly and indignantly.

"Fury! Were you not the brother—"

"Stay, Mr. Stuart; I am not accustomed to be addressed in these thundering tones."

"Diaoul, Mr. Lisle! I am at a loss to understand what you mean," exclaimed Ronald, his wrath increasing. "Did you not, during the retreat into Portugal, and the advance again from Castello Branca into Spanish Estremadura, treat me with singular hauteur and coldness? so much so, that it has been remarked by the whole regiment,—ay, even the brigade?"

"I acknowledge that *I have*, Mr. Stuart," said Lisle, drawing himself up to his full height, and setting his bonnet haughtily on one side.

"Death and fury, Louis!" exclaimed Stuart, regardless of awakening a thousand echoes; "and for what has this been the cause?"

"I repeat to you again—search your own heart; the cause lies there."

"Blasted be my heart if I ask it of any but yourself!" replied Ronald, his hot Highland blood fully roused. "As I hope to live, but *one* consideration—*one* remembrance alone stays my hand from seeking the usual satisfaction ay, even in this cathedral. Ha! surely this marked change of conduct and manner towards an old companion and brother-soldier, cannot be in consequence of Sir Allan Lisle's obtaining the peerage, so long dormant?"

"Ronald Stuart," exclaimed the other, with a scornful smile, "you might know me better than to imagine I could be swayed by ideas so very childish and extremely silly. I have been forbearing towards you as mortal man could be; but permit me now to tell you, that you, Ronald Stuart, have behaved most cruelly, faithlessly, and basely to one, whose name my lips shall never utter in your presence and hearing."

"Basely! Louis—Louis—"

"Well do you know whom I mean!" interrupted the other with increasing vehemence; "she is inseparably connected with the memory of your native place. Her you have falsely forgotten, and why, Heaven only knows,—forming attachments here among Spaniards and strangers, while her heart has never wandered from you."

"Lisle! what is this you tell me now?"

"Truth, and the feelings of an enraged yet sorrowing heart! for I have long mourned in secret your fickleness and inconstancy—as God is my hearer, Ronald, I have! I deemed that your hearts were entwined together in such wise

that nought but death could sever them; but I have been mistaken. I believe the predictions of old Cavers, our nurse, when she warned the poor girl to beware of you, are now fulfilled. Your mother was one of the Monteiths of Cairntowis, and the perfidy of the race appears to be renewed in yourself,—even at this late period.”

”You speak strangely, Lisle, and in riddles. You cannot mean to insult me openly, by this allusion to my mother’s honourable and ancient family? I can forget and forgive—”

”Pshaw! I supposed so.”

”How, Mr. Lisle!” exclaimed Ronald, with renewed fury. ”You cannot suppose for an instant that I am—heavens! must I name it—a coward?”

”No, Stuart; a coward never came of your race, as my ancestors have often known to their cost. The cross which at this moment glitters on your breast reminds me that you would not shrink from any earthly danger; therefore do not suppose that my indignation will lead me to be unjust.”

”Your sister—Alice; of her I would speak.”

”Never let her name pass your lips!” exclaimed the other, as if the very sound of it roused him to frenzy. ”You have destroyed her, and almost broken her too sensitive too gentle and too confiding heart; but I will revenge her, Stuart, by the powers of Heaven I will! and you shall hear from me by day-break. For this night, I defy and spit upon you!”

He rushed from the cathedral, leaving Ronald transfixed with rage and amazement.

END OF VOL. II.

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