

La Vendée

La Vendée

by

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CHAPTER I. THE POITEVINS

The history of France in 1792 has been too fully written, and too generally read to leave the novelist any excuse for describing the state of Paris at the close of the summer of that year. It is known to every one that the palace of Louis XVI was sacked on the 10th of August. That he himself with his family took refuge in the National Assembly, and that he was taken thence to the prison of the Temple.

The doings on the fatal 10th of August, and the few following days had, however, various effects in Paris, all of which we do not clearly trace in history. We well know how the Mountain became powerful from that day; that from that day Marat ceased to shun the light, and Danton to curb the licence of his tongue that then, patriotism in France began to totter, and that, from that time, Paris ceased to be a fitting abode for aught that was virtuous, innocent, or high-minded; but the steady march of history cannot stop to let us see the various lights in which the inhabitants of Paris regarded the loss of a King, and the commencement of the first French Republic.

The Assembly, though it had not contemplated the dethronement of the King, acquiesced in it; and acted as it would have done, had the establishment of a republic been decreed by a majority of its members. The municipality had determined that the King should fall, and, of course, rejoiced in the success of its work; and history plainly marking the acquiescence of the Assembly, and the activity of the city powers, naturally passes over the various feelings excited in different circles in Paris, by the overthrow of the monarchy.

Up to that period there was still in Paris much that was high, noble, and delightful. The *haute noblesse* had generally left the country; but the *haute noblesse* did not comprise the better educated, or most social families in Paris. Never had there been more talent, more wit, or more beauty in Paris than at the commencement of 1792; never had literary acquirement been more fully appreciated in society, more absolutely necessary in those who were ambitious of social popularity.

There were many of this class in Paris who had hitherto watched the progress of the Revolution with a full reliance in the panacea it was to afford for human woes; many who had sympathized with the early demands of the Tiers Etat; who had rapturously applauded the Tennis Court oath; who had taken an enthusiastic part in the *fête* of the Champ de Mars; men who had taught themselves to believe that sin, and avarice, and selfishness were about to be banished from the world by the lights

of philosophy; but whom the rancour of the Jacobins, and the furious licence of the city authorities had now robbed of their golden hopes. The dethronement of the King, totally severed many such from the revolutionary party. They found that their high aspirations had been in vain; that their trust in reason had been misplaced, and that the experiment to which they had committed themselves had failed; disgusted, broken-spirited, and betrayed they left the city in crowds, and with few exceptions, the intellectual circles were broken up.

A few of the immediate friends of the King, a few ladies and gentlemen, warmly devoted to the family of Louis XVI, remained in Paris. At the time when the King was first subjected to actual personal restraint, a few young noblemen and gentlemen had formed themselves into a private club, and held their sittings in the Rue Vivienne. Their object was to assist the King in the difficulties with which he was surrounded, and their immediate aim was to withdraw him from the metropolis; Louis' own oft-repeated indecision alone prevented them from being successful. These royalists were chiefly from the province of Poitou, and as their meetings gradually became known and talked of in Paris, they were called the Poitevins.

They had among them one or two members of the Assembly, but the club chiefly consisted of young noblemen attached to the Court, or of officers in the body-guard of the King; their object, at first, had been to maintain, undiminished, the power of the throne; but they had long since forgotten their solicitude for the King's power, in their anxiety for his safety and personal freedom.

The storming of the Tuileries, and the imprisonment of Louis, completely destroyed their body as a club; but the energy of each separate member was raised to the highest pitch. The Poitevins no longer met in the Rue Vivienne, but they separated with a determination on the part of each individual royalist to use every effort to replace the King.

There were three young men in this club, who were destined to play a conspicuous part in the great effort about to be made, in a portion of France, for the restitution of the monarchy; their fathers had lived within a few miles of each other, and though of different ages, and very different dispositions, they had come to Paris together since the commencement of the revolution.

M. de Lescure was a married man, about twenty-seven years of age, of grave and studious habits, but nevertheless of an active temperament. He was humane, charitable, and benevolent: his strongest passion was the love of his fellow-creatures; his pure heart had glowed, at an early age, with unutterable longings for the benefits promised to the human race by the school of philosophy from which the revolution originated. Liberty and fraternity had been with him principles, to have realized which he would willingly have sacrificed his all; but at the

commencement of the revolution he had seen with horror the successive encroachments of the lower classes, and from conscience had attached himself to the Crown. Hitherto he had been without opportunity of showing the courage for which he was afterwards so conspicuous; he did not even himself know that he was a brave man; before, however, his career was ended, he had displayed the chivalry of a Bayard, and performed the feats of a Duguescin. A perfect man, we are told, would be a monster; and a certain dry obstinacy of manner, rather than of purpose, preserved de Lescure from the monstrosity of perfection. Circumstances decreed that the latter years of his life should be spent among scenes of bloodshed; that he should be concerned in all the horrors of civil war; that instruments of death should be familiar to his hands, and the groans of the dying continually in his ears. But though the horrors of war were awfully familiar to him, the harshness of war never became so; he spilt no blood that he could spare, he took no life that he could save. The cruelty of his enemies was unable to stifle the humanity of his heart; even a soldier and a servant of the republic became his friend as soon as he was vanquished.

Two young friends had followed M. de Lescure to Paris—Henri de Larochejaquelin and Adolphe Denot. The former was the son of the Marquis de Larochejaquelin, and the heir of an extensive property in Poitou; M. de Lescure and he were cousins, and the strictest friendship had long existed between the families. Young Larochejaquelin was of a temperament very different from that of his friend: he was eager, impetuous, warm-tempered, and fond of society; but he had formed his principles on those of M. de Lescure. The love of his fellow-creatures was not with him the leading passion of his heart, as it was with the other; but humanity had early been instilled into him as the virtue most necessary to cultivate, and he consequently fully appreciated and endeavoured to imitate the philanthropy of his friend.

At the time alluded to, Henri de Larochejaquelin was not quite twenty years of age. He was a lieutenant in the body-guard immediately attached to the King's person, and called the "Garde du Roi." At any other period, he would hardly yet have finished his education, but the revolution gave a precocious manhood to the rising generation. Henri's father, moreover, was very old; he had not married till late in life; and the young Marquis, when he was only seventeen, had to take on himself the guardianship of his sister Agatha, and the management of the paternal property. The old man was unable to leave his chair, and though he still retained his senses, was well pleased to give up to the son of his old age the rights and privileges which in the course of nature would descend to him.

Without being absolutely handsome, young Larochejaquelin was of a very prepossessing appearance. He was tall and robust, well made, and active. Though he had not attained that breadth of shoulder, and expansion of chest, which a few

years would probably have given him, he had the perfect use of his limbs, and was full of health and youthful energy; his eyes were bright, and of a clear blue colour; his hair was light, and his upper lip could already boast that ornament which the then age, and his own position made allowable. He was a favourite with all who knew him—more so even than his friend de Lescure; and it is saying much in his favour to declare that a year's residence amongst all that was beautiful and charming in Paris, had hitherto done but little to spoil him.

Adolphe Denot was an orphan, but also possessed of a fair property in the province of Poitou. He had, when very young, been left to the guardianship of the Marquis de La Rochejaquelin, and had at intervals, during his holidays, and after he had left school, spent much of his time at Durbellière, the family residence of the La Rochejaquelins. Henri had of course contracted a close friendship with him; but this arose more from the position in which they were placed together, than a similarity of disposition. They were, indeed, very unlike; Adolphe was somewhat older than the other, but he had neither his manliness of manner nor strength of character; he was more ambitious to be popular, without the same capacity of making himself so: he had as much romantic love of poetical generosity, without the same forgetfulness of self to enable him to emulate in practice the characters, which he admired in description; he had much veneration for poetic virtue, though but little strength to accomplish practical excellence. He had, on leaving school, proclaimed himself to be an ardent admirer of Rousseau; he had been a warm partisan of the revolution, and had displayed a most devoted enthusiasm to his country at the *fête* of the Champ de Mars. Latterly, however, the circles which he mostly frequented in Paris had voted strong revolutionary ardour to be *mauvais ton*; a kind of modulated royalism, or rather Louis Seizeism, had become fashionable; and Adolphe Denot was not the man to remain wilfully out of the fashion. On the 10th of August, he was a staunch supporter of the monarchy.

Adolphe Denot was a much handsomer man than his friend; his features were better formed, and more regular; he had beautifully white teeth, an almost feminine mouth, a straight Grecian nose, and delicately small hands and feet; but he was vain of his person, and ostentatious; fond of dress and of jewellery. He was, moreover, suspicious of neglect, and vindictive when neglected; querulous of others, and intolerant of reproof himself; *exigeant* among men, and more than politely flattering among women. He was not, however, without talent, and a kind of poetic fecundity of language, which occasionally made him brilliant in society; it was, however, generally speaking, those who knew him least who liked him best.

Larochejaquelin, however, was always true to him; he knew that he was an orphan, without brother, sister, or relatives, and with the devotion of a real friend, he overlooked all his faults, and greatly magnified his talents. For Henri's sake, M. de Lescure tolerated him, and the three were therefore much together; they came from

the same country; they belonged to the same club; they had the same political sympathies; and were looked upon as dear and stedfast friends.

On the 10th of August, the King left the Tuileries, and took refuge in the National Assembly; during the greater part of the night he remained there with his family. Early on the following morning, he was removed, under a guard, to the Feuillants; and on the 12th it was decided that he should be confined in the prison of the Temple.

It was on the morning of the 12th, that the last meeting of the little club of the Poitevins took place.

They met with throbbing hearts and blank faces; they all felt that evil days had come that the Revolution which had been so petted and caressed by the best and fairest in France, had become a beast of prey, and that war, anarchy, and misrule were at hand.

They sat waiting on the morning of the 12th, till they should learn the decision of the Assembly with regard to the King. De Lescure was there calm and grave, but with much melancholy in his countenance.

Larochejaquelin was there. Hot and eager, whispering plans for rescuing the King, to which the less resolute hardly dared to listen. Charette, the Prince de Talmont, d'Autachamps, Fleuriot, and others, all of whom now detested the Revolution, though they could not but feel the danger of proclaiming themselves royalists.

"Denot will be here directly," said La Rochejaquelin; "he is at the Assembly—they are not apt to be very tedious in their decisions."

"Danton has openly declared," said Fleuriot, "that the armed sections shall remain in revolt, unless the Assembly decree the abolition of the monarchy."

"Lafayette," said the Prince, "is the only man now who could save the country—if Lafayette will move, he might still save the throne."

"He could do nothing," said d'Autachamps, "but add himself to the ruins—the regiments, to a man, would side with the populace."

"I don't know," said Larochejaquelin, "I don't think so. See how our Swiss fought—could any men be more true to their officers or their colours? and do you think there are not thousands in the French army as true, as brave as they? If Lafayette would raise his hand, I for one would join him."

"Wait, Henri, wait," said de Lescure, "wait till you know whether Lafayette and the army will really be wanting to save the King. If Roland be still firm, and Vergniaud true to his principles, they may still quell the fury of the Jacobins—the moderate party has still a large majority in the Assembly."

"Roland and Vergniaud are both true," said Fleuriot, "but you will find, de Lescure, that they can do nothing but yield or go—they must vanish out of the Assembly and become nothing—or else they must go with the people."

"The people! How I hate that phrase, in the sense in which it is now used," said Larochejaquelin. "A mob of blood-thirsty ruffians wishes to overturn the throne—but what evidence have we that the people wish it?"

"The people, Henri, have been taught to wish it," said de Lescure.

"No, Charles, the people of France have not been taught to wish it—with all the teaching they have had, they do not wish it—have they shewn any favour to the new priests whom the Revolution has sent to them; do they love much the Commissioners, who from time to time, come among them with the orders of the Assembly. Do the people in the Bocage wish it?—do they wish it in the Marais, Charette?—do they wish it in Anjou and Brittany? Danton, Robespierre, and Tallien wish it—the mob of Paris wishes it—but the people of France does not wish to depose their King."

"But unfortunately," said d'Autachamps, "it is Danton, Robespierre, and the mob of Paris who have now the supreme power, and for a time will have their way—they who are wise will lie by till the storm has blown over."

"And are we to remain quiet while we are robbed of every thing which we esteem as holy?" said Larochejaquelin; "are we all to acquiesce in the brutality of such men as Danton, for fear the mob of Paris should be too strong for us?"

"I for one, will not!" said Charette.

"Nor I," said Larochejaquelin—"not while I have a sword to draw, and an arm to use it. You are silent, Charles—is a Republic so much to your mind, that you have not a word, or even a wish for your King?"

"You are too talkative, Henri," replied the other; "will it not be well to think a little first before we proclaim definitively what we mean to do? We do not even know as yet in what position Louis XVI. may find himself tomorrow—he may be more firmly seated on his throne than he has been at any time since the Three Estates first met at Versailles."

As he ceased speaking, the door opened, and Adolphe Denot entered, hot with walking fast, and with his whole dress disordered by pushing through the dense masses of the crowd.

"Speak, Adolphe," said Henri, "have they decreed—has it come to the vote?"

"Are they still sitting?" said Fleuriot; "Danton, I am sure, would not have yielded so soon as this:—if the chamber be closed, he must have been victorious."

"The King," said Denot, pausing for breath, "the King is to be taken to the Temple!"

There was a momentary silence among them all—their worst fears had been realized—the brute force of Paris had been triumphant. The firmness of Roland, the eloquence of Vergniaud, the patriotism of Guadet had been of no avail. The King of France—the heir of so long a line of royalty—the King, who had discarded the vices of his predecessors, and proved himself the friend of the people, was to be incarcerated in the worst prison in Paris by the vote of that very Assembly which he had himself called into existence.

"He is to be confined in the Temple," continued Denot, "with the Queen and the two children. The populace are mad; they would kill him, if they could lay their hands on him."

"Where are your hopes now, Charles?" said Larochejaquelin. "Is it yet time for us to proclaim what we are—is it yet time for us to move? or are we to set still, until Danton enrols us in his list of suspected persons?"

No one immediately answered the appeal of the hot young loyalist, and after a moment or two de Lescure spoke.

"Adolphe, did you hear the words of the decree?"

"Again and again," said Denot. "I was at the door of the Assembly, and the decree was known to the crowd the moment the votes had been taken."

"But did you hear the exact words?"

"That Louis and his family should be imprisoned in the Temple," answered Denot.

"Did they say the King, or did they call him by his name?" asked de Lescure again. "Did they decree that the King should be imprisoned, or Louis Capet?"

As he spoke, the door again opened, and another member, who had been among the crowd, entered the room.

"Gentlemen," said he, "allow me the honour to congratulate you. You do not know your own happiness. You are no longer the burdened slaves of an *effète* monarchy; you are now the vigorous children of a young Republic."

"*Vive le Roi, quand même*," said Larochejaquelin, standing up in the middle of the room. "I am glad they have so plainly declared themselves; we are driven now to do the same. Prince, now is the time to stand by our King. Charette, your hand; our dreams must now be accomplished. You will doubt no longer, Charles. Prudence herself would now feel that we have no longer aught to wait for."

"No—we must delay no longer," said Adolphe Denot. "A King is to be saved; every hour of delay is an hour of treason, while the King is in the hands of his enemies."

"A fine sentiment, Denot," said d'Autachamps; "but how will you avoid the treason?—how do you purpose to rescue his Majesty?"

"With my sword," said Adolphe, turning round shortly. "Do you doubt my will?"

"We only doubt your power, Adolphe," said de Lescure. "We only fear you may not be able to raise the standard of revolt against the armed sections of all Paris, backed by a decree of the Assembly."

"I can at any rate die in the attempt," replied Denot. "I cannot draw the breath of life from the atmosphere of a Republic! I will not live by the permission of Messieurs Danton and Robespierre."

"Whatever we do," said Fleuriot, "the club must be given up. We are known to be friendly to the King, and we are too weak to stand our ground; indeed, we should only incur useless danger by meeting here"

"And waste the time which we may well employ in the provinces," said Charette.

"You are right, Charette," said Rochejaquelin, whom the wildness of his friend Denot had a little sobered. "You are quite right—Paris is no longer a place for us. I will go back to the Bocage; there, at least, I may own among my neighbours that I am not a republican; there, perhaps, I may make some effort for my King—here I can make none. You will not stay in Paris, Charles, to hear unwashed revolutionists clatter of Louis Capet?"

"No, Henri, I also will return home. Charette is right. We should but waste our time in Paris, and be in danger. We shall probably be in safety in Poitou."

"Perhaps not in safety," said Henri. "We may, I trust, soon be in action."

"How in action?" said Fleuriot. "What do you intend to do?"

"To follow any one who will lead me to assist in restoring the King to his throne," replied Henri. "Let us, at any rate, retire to our provinces; and be assured that the National Assembly will soon hear of us."

The club was broken up; the young friends met no more in the Rue Vivienne. Within a week from the 10th of August, the denizens of the municipality had searched the rooms for any relics which might be discovered there indicative of a feeling inimical to the Republic; their residences also were searched, and there were orders at the barriers that they should not pass out; but the future Vendéan leaders had too quickly appreciated the signs of the time; they had gone before the

revolutionary tribunal had had time to form itself. They were gone, and their names for a season were forgotten in Paris; but Henri Rochejaquelin was right—before long, the National Assembly did hear of them; before twelve months had passed, they were more feared by the Republic, than the allied forces of England, Austria, and Prussia.

CHAPTER II. ST. FLORENT

Nothing occurred in the provinces, subsequently called La Vendée, during the autumn or winter of 1792 of sufficient notice to claim a place in history, but during that time the feelings which afterwards occasioned the revolt in that country, were every day becoming more ardent. The people obstinately refused to attend the churches to which the constitutional clergy had been appointed; indeed, these pastors had found it all but impossible to live in the parishes assigned to them; no one would take them as tenants; no servants would live with them; the bakers and grocers would not deal with them; the tailors would not make their clothes for them, nor the shoemakers shoes. During the week they were debarred from all worldly commerce, and on Sundays they performed their religious ceremonies between empty walls.

The banished priests, on the other hand, who were strictly forbidden to perform any of the sacerdotal duties, continued among the trees and rocks to collect their own congregations undiminished in number, and much more than ordinarily zealous, in their religious duties; and with the licence which such sylvan chapels were found to foster, denunciations against the Republic, and prayers for the speedy restoration of the monarchy, were mingled with the sacred observances.

The execution of Louis, in January, 1793, greatly increased the attachment which was now felt in this locality to his family. In Nantes and Angers, in Saumur, Thouars, and other towns in which the presence of Republican forces commanded the adhesion of the inhabitants this event was commemorated by illuminations, but this very show of joy at so cruel a murder, more than the murder itself, acerbated the feelings both of the gentry and the peasants. They were given to understand that those who wished well to their country were now expected to show some sign of gratitude for what the blessed revolution had done for them—that those who desired to stand well with the Republic should rejoice openly at their deliverance from thralldom. In fact, those who lived in large towns, and who would not illuminate, were to be marked men—marked as secret friends to the monarchy—as inveterate foes to the Republic—and they were told that they were to be treated accordingly. Men then began to congregate in numbers round the churches, and in the village squares, and to ask each other whether they had better not act as enemies, if they were to be considered as enemies; to complain of their increasing

poverty and diminished comfort; and to long for the coming time, when the King should enjoy his own again.

The feeling with the country gentry was very generally the same as with the peasantry, though hitherto they had openly expressed no opposition to the ruling Government. They had, however, been always elected to those situations which the leaders of the revolution had wished the people to fill exclusively with persons from their own ranks. They were chosen as mayors in the small towns, and were always requested to act as officers in the corps of the National Guards, which were formed in this, as in every other district of France. On this account the peculiar ill-will of the Republican Government was directed against them. In France, at that time, political inactivity was an impossibility. Revolt against the Republic, or active participation in its measures, was the only choice left to those who did not choose to fly their country, and many of the seigneurs of Anjou and Poitou would not adopt the latter alternative.

In March, the Commissaries of the Republic entered these provinces to collect from that district, its portion towards the levy of three hundred thousand men which had been ordered by the Convention. This was an intolerable grievance—it was not to be borne, that so many of their youths should be forcibly dragged away to fight the battles of the Republic—battles in which they would rather that the Republic should be worsted. Besides, every one would lose a relative, a friend, or a lover; the decree affected every individual in the district. The peasants declared that they would not obey the orders of the Convention—that they would not fight the battles of the Republic.

This was the commencement of the revolt. The troops of the Republic were, of course, put in motion to assist the officers who were entrusted with the carrying out of the conscription. There were garrisons in Nantes, in Anjou, and in Saumur; and detachments from these places were sent into the smaller towns and villages, into every mayoralty, to enforce the collection of the levy, and to take off with them the victims of the conscription. Among other places, an attempt was made to carry out the new law at St. Florent, and at this place was made the first successful resistance, by an armed force, to the troops of the Convention.

St. Florent is a small town on the south bank of the Loire, in the province of Anjou, and at the northern extremity of that district, now so well known by the name of La Vendée. It boasted of a weekly market, a few granaries for the storing of corn, and four yearly fairs for the sale of cattle. Its population and trade, at the commencement of the war, was hardly sufficient to entitle it to the name of a town; but it had early acquired some celebrity as a place in which the Republic was known to be very unpopular, and in which the attachment of the people to the throne was peculiarly warm.

Here the work of the conscription was commenced in silence. The lists were filled, and the names were drawn. No opposition was shown to the *employés* in this portion of their unpopular work. Indeed, it appears that no organized system of opposition had been planned; but the first attempt that was made to collect the unfortunate recruits upon whom the lots had fallen, was the signal for a general revolt. The first name on the list was that of Peter Berrier; and had Peter Berrier intended to prove himself a good citizen and a willing soldier, he should, without further call, have attended that day at the temporary barracks which had been established in St. Florent. But he had not done so, and there was nothing wonderful or unusual in this; for on all occasions of the kind many of the conscripts had to be sought out, and brought forth from the bosoms of their families, to which they retired, with a bashful diffidence as to their own peculiar fitness for martial glory. But in this instance not one of the chosen warriors obeyed the summons of the Convention, by attending at the barracks of St. Florent. Not one of the three hundred thousand men was there; and it was soon apparent to the colonel in command of the detachment, that he had before him the unpleasant duty of collecting one by one, from their different hiding-places, the whole contingent which the town of St. Florent was bound to supply.

Peter Berrier was the first on the list, and as it was well known that he was an ostler at a little *auberge* in the middle of the square, a corporal and a couple of soldiers was despatched to the house of entertainment to capture him; and the trio soon found that they would not have far to search, for Peter was standing at the gate of the inn yard, and with him three or four of his acquaintance—men equally well-known in St. Florent.

There was a sturdy farmer there of the better sort—a man who not only held a farm near the town, but had a small shop within it, for the sale of seeds and tools for planting—his name was Forêt—and it was said that no man in St. Florent was more anxious for the restoration of the King. There was the keeper of the *auberge* himself, who seemed but little inclined to find fault with his servant, for the contumacious manner in which he treated the commands of the Convention; and there was the well-known postilion of St. Florent, the crack of whose whip was so welcome from Angers to Nantes, the sound of whose cheery voice was so warmly greeted at every hostelry between those towns. The name of Cathelineau was not then so well known as it was some six months afterwards, but even then Cathelineau, the postilion, was the most popular man in St. Florent. He was the merriest among the mirthful, the friend of every child, the playmate of every lass in the town; but he was the comforter of those poorer than himself, and the solace of the aged and afflicted. He was the friend of the banished priest, and the trusted messenger of the royalist seigneur; all classes adored him, save those who sided with the Republic, and by them he had long been looked on as an open and

declared enemy. St. Florent was justly proud of its postilion; and now that evil days were come upon the little town, that their priests were banished, and these young men called for to swell the armies of the hated Convention, many flocked to Cathelineau to ask from whence he expected deliverance from all their troubles.

It was well known that Peter Berrier was the first whom the Colonel's myrmidons would be sent to seize, and many eyes were resting on the group collected at the gateway of the *auberge*, as the corporal and the two soldiers, without their muskets, but with pistols at their belts, marched across from the little barracks to the spot where they were standing. At any rate, Cathelineau had not advised a retreat, for there stood Peter Berrier—prominent in the front of the group—a little pale to be sure, and perhaps rather uneasy in his attitude; but still evidently prepared to bear the brunt of that day's proceeding. He was not going to run away, or he would long since have started. He was not going to obey the orders of the Convention, or he would not have stood there so openly and firmly, waiting the approach of the corporal and the two soldiers. It was very evident that there was to be a row in St. Florent that day, and that the postilion approved of it.

As the military party drew near to the gate of the inn yard, the corporal opened a small roll of paper, which he held in his hand, and standing still about six paces distant from the spot where Peter was maintaining his ground, read or pretended to read, the following words from the piece of paper which he held in his hands:

"In the name of the French Republic, and by command of the Convention, you, Peter Berrier, having been duly, legally, and specially drawn, chosen, and selected by lot, to serve in the armies of the Republic for one year, from the date of your first bearing arms, or for so long as your services may be necessary to the security of the Republic, are hereby required and desired to join the detachment of the Republican army at present serving in St. Florent, without let, delay, or hindrance, and thereby show yourself a friend to your country, and a good citizen of the Republic."

The corporal pronounced this form of invitation in that tone of voice, which proved that it was very familiar to him, and that he was much in the habit of requesting good citizens to join the armies of the Republic for such time as their services might be necessary; and, having finished it, he rolled up the piece of paper, stuck it into his belt, as he might soon require the use of his hands, and, walking quite close up to the group, said—

"Come, Peter Berrier, you are not such a fool, I hope, as to intend giving us any trouble. Come along."

Peter looked first into the farmer's face; then to his master's; and, lastly, to the postilion's; and, seeing that they were all evidently firm in their resolve, he plucked

up spirit, and replied.—"Why, Mr Corporal, I have no inclination just at present to go to fight for the Republic. You see I have no quarrel yet with my master here, M. Débédin, and he cannot well spare me. I am afraid, Mr Corporal, I must decline."

"That's nonsense, you know," growled the corporal; "you must come, you know; and as well first as last. I don't want to be uncivil to a comrade, and I'd be sorry to have to lay a hand on you."

"Then you'd better keep your hands off," said Cathelineau, "we quiet people in St. Florent don't bear handling well."

The corporal looked up at the postilion, but he soon saw that he wasn't joking.

"Take my word for it, my friend," continued Cathelineau, "Peter Berrier does not wish to be a soldier, and, if you force him to become one, it is not on the side of the Republic that he will be found fighting."

"We'll take chances for that," replied the corporal, not exactly understanding what the other meant; "at any rate, back without him we won't go; and if you're determined for a riot, Messieurs, why I'm sorry; but I can't help it," and, appealing to Peter as a last hope, he said, "Come, Berrier, will you come with us quietly, or must we three drag you across the square to the barracks?"

"At any rate, Mr Corporal," said Peter, "I will not go with you quietly; as to the being dragged, I can say nothing about that yet."

The corporal looked round towards the barracks, as he felt that it was possible that he might want more assistance, and he saw that a body of men under arms was standing immediately in front of the building, and that a couple of the officers were with them. The corporal saw at a glance that they were ready for immediate action, if their services should be requisite. In fact, the colonel of the detachment well knew the feeling in the place with reference to the levies of the conscription. He was sure, from the fact of not a single man having attended at the barracks, as directed, that there existed some general determination to resist the demands of the Convention, and he had consequently closely watched the proceedings of the corporal.

"Take your answer, Mr Corporal," said Cathelineau: "had Peter Berrier intended to have joined you, he would not have troubled you to come across the square to fetch him. In one word, he will not go with you; if as you say, you intend to drag him across the market-place, you will find that you have enough to do. Peter Berrier has many friends in St. Florent."

The corporal again looked round, and he saw that the men under arms now stretched from the front of the barracks, nearly into the square; but he also saw that the inhabitants of the town were standing clustering at all the doors, and that men

were crowding towards the square from the different inlets. Four or five of the more respectable inhabitants had also joined the group in the gateway, from the hands of one of whom the postilion quietly took a stout ash stick. The corporal, however, was not a coward, and he saw that, if he intended to return with Peter Berrier, he should not delay his work with any further parley, so he took his pistol from his belt and cocked it, and, stepping quite close to Berrier, said,

"Come men—forward, and bring him off; one man to each shoulder," and he himself seized hold of the breast of Peter's coat with his left hand and pulled him forward a step or two.

Peter was a little afraid of the pistol, but still he resisted manfully: from the corporal's position, Cathelineau was unable to reach with his stick the arm which had laid hold of Berrier, but it descended heavily on the first soldier, who came to the corporal's assistance. The blow fell directly across the man's wrist, and his arm dropt powerless to his side. The corporal immediately released his hold of Peter's coat, and turning on Cathelineau raised his pistol and fired; the shot missed the postilion, but it struck M. Débédin, the keeper of the *auberge*, and wounded him severely in the jaw. He was taken at once into the house, and the report was instantaneously spread through the town, that M. Débédin had been shot dead by the soldiery.

The ash stick of the postilion was again raised, and this time the corporal's head was the sufferer; the man's shako protected his skull, which, if uncovered, would have probably been fractured; but he was half-stunned, at any rate stupified by the blow, and was pulled about and pushed from one to another by the crowd who had now collected in the archway, without making any further attempt to carry off his prisoner.

The other soldier, when he saw his two comrades struck, fired his pistol also, and wounded some other person in the crowd. He then attempted to make his escape back towards the barracks, but he was tripped up violently as he attempted to run, and fell on his face on the pavement. The unfortunate trio were finally made prisoners of; they were disarmed, their hands bound together, and then left under a strong guard in the cow-house attached to the *auberge*.

This skirmish, in which Berrier was so successfully rescued, occurred with greater rapidity than it has been recounted; for, as soon as the colonel heard the first shot fired, he ordered his men to advance in a trot across the square. It took some little time for him to give his orders to the lieutenants, and for the lieutenants to put the men into motion; but within five minutes from the time that the first shot was fired, about forty men had been commanded to halt in front of the hotel; they all had their muskets in their hands and their bayonets fixed, and as soon as they halted a portion of them were wheeled round, so that the whole body formed a square. By

this time, however, the corporal and the two soldiers were out of sight, and so was also Peter Berrier, for Cathelineau considered that now as the man had withstood the first shock, and had resolutely and manfully refused to comply with the order of the Convention, it was better that he should be out of the way, and that the brunt of the battle should be borne by his friends. Peter was consequently placed in the cow-house with the captives, and had the gratification of acting as guard over the three first prisoners taken in the Vendéan war.

Cathelineau and Forêt, however, stood out prominently before the men who were collected before the *auberge*, and had already taken on themselves the dangerous honour of leading the revolt.

"Men of St. Florent," said the colonel addressing the crowd, "I am most reluctant to order the soldiers to fire upon the inhabitants of the town; but unless you at once restore the three men who were sent over here on duty, and give up the man, Peter Berrier, who has been drawn as a conscript, I will do so at once."

"Peter Berrier is a free man," said Forêt, "and declines going with you; and as for your three soldiers, they have fired at and killed or wounded two inhabitants of the town—they at any rate shall be brought before the mayor, before they are given up."

"Sergeant," said the colonel, "take out six men and make prisoner that man; if a rescue be attempted, the soldiers shall at once fire on the people, and on your own heads be your own blood."

The sergeant and the six men instantly stepped out, but Forêt was surrounded by a dense crowd of friends, and the soldiers found it utterly impossible to lay hold of him.

"Your pistols, sergeant; use your pistols," roared the colonel, as he himself drew one of his own from his holsters, and at the same time gave orders to the men in the ranks to present their pieces.

The sergeant followed by his six men, made a desperate dash into the crowd with the object of getting hold of Forêt; but in spite of the butt-end of their pistols, with which the soldiers laid about them, they found themselves overpowered, and were barely able to make good their retreat to the main body of the detachment; at the same time, a volley of stones, brickbats and rough missiles of all kinds, descended on the soldiers from every side, for they were now nearly surrounded; a stone struck the Colonel's horse and made him rear: immediately afterwards, another stone struck himself on the side of the face, and nearly dismounted him.

"Fire," roared the Colonel, and the whole detachment fired at the same moment; the soldiers fronting the *auberge* could not fire into the mob directly before them,

or they would have run the risk of killing their own comrades, who were still struggling there with the townspeople; and in this way, Cathelineau and Forêt were saved, but the carnage all around them was horrid; the soldiers had fired point blank into the dense crowd, and not a bullet had fallen idle to the ground. A terrible scream followed the discharge of musketry; the dying and the wounded literally covered the space round the soldiers, but they were quickly dragged into the back ground, and their places filled by men who were evidently determined that they would not easily be conquered.

Another volley of stones was soon showered on the soldiers, and this was kept up with wonderful activity—the women and children supplied the men with the materials—the stones in the streets were at once picked up—old walls were pulled down—every article that would answer for a missile was brought into use; an iron pot, which had been flung with immense violence by the handle, struck the second officer in command in the face, and dashed his brains out. Immediately that either part of the square battalion was in any confusion, the people dashed in, and attempted to force the muskets from the hands of the soldiers; in some cases they were successful, and before the body had commenced a retreat, Forêt and Cathelineau were both armed with a musket and bayonet.

The colonel now saw that he could not maintain his position where he was; he had not brought out with him the whole force of the garrison, though in all he had not above seventy or eighty men; but he had behind the barrack a gun of very large calibre, properly mounted, with all the necessary equipments and ready for service. Such a piece of artillery accompanied every detachment, and was kept in preparation for immediate use at every military station; it had already been ascertained that this afforded the readiest means of putting down revolt. He resolved, therefore, on retreating while he had the power for doing so, and gave the necessary orders to the men.

With great difficulty, but slowly and steadily, his men executed them: amidst showers of stones, and the now determined attack of the people the soldiers returned to the barracks, leaving one of their officers, and one other man dead in the crowd; many of them were severely wounded; few, if any, had escaped some bruise or cut. The people now conceived that they were going to take refuge in the barrack, and determined to drive them utterly out of the town; but, as soon as the soldiers had filed into the barrack yard, another murderous fire was discharged by those who had been left at the station. Then Cathelineau, who was still in front of the crowd, and who was now armed with the bayonet, which he had taken from the point of the musket, remembered the cannon, and he became for a moment pale as he thought of the dreadful slaughter which would take place, if the colonel were able to effect his purpose of playing it upon the town.

"The cannon!" whispered he to Forêt, who was still at his side; "they will fall like leaves in autumn, if we don't prevent it."

"Have they it ready?" said Forêt.

"Always," said the other, "they have nothing to do but wheel it into the street; and they are at it, you hear the noise of the wheels this moment. We must bear one discharge from it, and the next, if there be a second, shall fall upon the soldiers."

Others, beside Cathelineau, recognized the sound of the moving wheels—and, "the cannon, the cannon, they will fire the cannon on us," was heard from side to side among the crowd; but none attempted to run, not one of the whole mass attempted to fly, and when the barrack gates flew open, and the deadly mouth of the huge instrument was close upon them, they rushed upon it, determined at any rate, to preserve their houses, their wives, and their children from the awful destruction of a prolonged firing.

"They must have one shot at us," said a man in a trembling whisper to his neighbour. "God send it were over!" replied the other, as the gates of the barrack-yard were thrown back.

The greater number of the soldiers and the two officers who had returned with them, made good their retreat into the barracks, under the fire of their comrades, who had been left there. Some three or four had been pulled and hustled into the crowd, and their arms were quickly taken from them and they were sent back to the *auberge* as prisoners. The colonel, as soon as he found himself in his own quarters, gave immediate orders that the gun should be wheeled round to the barrack-yard gate, which had hitherto been kept closed, and that the moment the gates could be got open it should be fired on the crowd. These gates faced directly into the square, and the destruction caused by one shot would have been tremendous. The colonel, moreover, calculated that in the confusion he would have been able to reload. The gun, in its original position, was pointed on the town, but it was immediately seen, that without moving it, it could not be brought to bear upon the crowd congregated round the barracks.

The first attack of the crowd had been at the barrack door, through which the soldiers had retreated; but this was soon changed to the yard gates. The people, however, were unable to knock them down before the wheels of the cannon were heard, as they had been considerably checked by the fire of the reserved party. Both soldiers and towns-people were now anxious to face each other, and the gates soon fell inwards towards the military. Had the men at the gun had their wits about them they would have fired through the gates; but they did not, they waited till they fell inwards across the cannon's mouth, and in his confusion the artillery-sergeant even then hesitated before he put the light to the touch-hole.

He had never time to do more than hesitate. Cathelineau had been close up to the wooden gates, against which he was so closely pressed that he was hardly able to change his bayonet from his right to his left-hand, and to cock the pistol which he had taken from the corporal, who had commenced the day's work. However, he contrived to do so, and when the wood-work fell, he sprang forward, and though he stumbled over the fragments of the timber, he fired as he did so, and the artillery sergeant fell dead beside the cannon; the unextinguished light was immediately seized by his comrade, but he had not time to use it; it was knocked from his hand before it was well raised from the ground, and the harmless piece of cannon was soon entirely surrounded by crowds of the townspeople. They were not content with spiking it in such a way as to make it utterly impossible that it should be discharged; but they succeeded in turning it entirely round, so that the back of the carriage faced towards the town.

The soldiers still continued the fight within the barrack-yard, and from the barrack windows; but they were so completely mixed with the townspeople, that the officers were afraid to order the men to fire from the windows, lest they should kill their own comrades. At last the colonel himself was taken prisoner; he was literally dragged out of one of the windows by the people, and soon afterwards the remainder of the troops gave up. One of the three officers and six men were killed; the rest were nearly all more or less wounded, and were all, without exception, made prisoners of war.

Cathelineau and Forêt had been in front of the battle all through; but neither of them were wounded. It was to Forêt that the colonel had given up his sword, after he had been dragged headforemost through a window, had had his head cut open with a brick-bat, and his sheath and sword-belt literally torn from his side. He had certainly not capitulated before he was obliged to do, and the people did not like him the worse for it.

And now the unarmed soldiery, maimed and lame, with broken heads and bloody faces, were led down in triumph into the square; and after them was brought the great trophy of the day, the cannon, with its awful mouth still turned away from the town. Cathelineau and Forêt led the procession, the former still carrying his bayonet, for he had given up both the musket and pistols to some one else, and Forêt armed with the Colonel's sword: they were fully recognized as the victorious leaders of the day.

At the bottom of the square they met a whole concourse of women, the wives and sisters of the champions—among whom the sister and sweetheart of Peter Berrier were conspicuous; they had come out to thank the townspeople for what they had done for them. With the women were two of the old cures of that and a neighbouring parish—pastors whom the decree of the Convention had banished

from their own churches, but whom all the powers of the Convention had been unable to silence. To them this day's battle was a most acceptable sign of better days coming; they foresaw a succession of future victories on behalf of the people, which would surely end in the restoration of the Bourbons to the throne, and of the clergy to their churches. The cures shook hands warmly with those in the front ranks of the people, gave their blessing to Cathelineau and Forêt, and then invited the people, with one accord, to give thanks to God for the great success which He had given them.

In one moment the whole crowd were on their knees in the market-place, while the two priests stood among them with their arms raised, uttering thanksgiving to the Lord for his mercy, and praying for the eternal welfare of those who had fallen in the affray. The soldiers of the republic found themselves standing alone as prisoners in the midst of the kneeling crowd; they looked awkward and confused enough, but they could not help themselves; they could not have escaped, even if they had been unanimous in attempting to do so; for they were unarmed, and the people knelt so closely round them, that they could hardly move. It was out of the question that they should also kneel, and join in the thanksgiving for having been so utterly beaten; so there they stood, their wounds stiffening and their blood running, till the priests had finished, and the people had risen.

And then another ceremony was performed; the priests were besought to come and bless the cannon, the first great trophy of the Royalist insurrection; and they did so. The cannon was a lucky cannon, a kind cannon, and a good cannon—a *bon enfant*, and worthy to be blessed; it had refused to pour forth its murderous fire against the inhabitants of a town that was so friendly to the King. It was decidedly a royalist cannon; it had very plainly declared the side it meant to take; nothing but miraculous interference on its own part could have prevented its having been discharged on the people, when it stood ready pointed on the town, with the torch absolutely glimmering at the touch-hole. It had been brought to St. Florent by republican soldiers, dragged by republican horses, and loaded with republican gunpowder; but it should never be used except in the service of the King, and against the enemies of the throne.

And so the priests blessed the cannon, and the people baptized it, and called it Marie-Jeanne, and the women brought out their little children, and sat them straddle-legged across it, whole rows of them at the same time, till the cannon looked like a huge bunch of grapes on which the fruit clustered thickly. By this time it was dark, and the people lighted huge bonfires through the town, and the children remained up, and as many as could cling on it still sat upon the cannon, and ropes were got and fastened to it, and all the girls of St. Florent dragged Marie-Jeanne round the town, and at last she was dragged into the yard of the *auberge*, in

front of which the fight had commenced, and there she was left for the night, under a strong guard.

While these rejoicings were going on out of doors, Cathelineau and Forte, the two priests, and a few others—the wise men of the town—were collected together within the *auberge*, and were consulting as to their future proceedings.

"We have done much," said Cathelineau, "and I rejoice at it. Too much, a great deal, for us now to remain idle. We cannot go back. We are now the enemies of the Republic, and we must attack our enemies elsewhere, or they will attack and overwhelm us in our little town."

They then determined that Cathelineau, on the next morning, should address the people from the window of the market-place, and that afterwards he and Forte should go through the neighbouring country and implore the assistance of the people, of the gentry, the priests, the farmers, and the peasants, in opposing the hated levy of the Republican forces; but first they would go to the gentry, and the names of many were mentioned whom it was thought would be sure to join them. The first was that of Henri de Larochejaquelin, and the next that of his friend M. de Lescure. Who loved the people so well as they, and whom did the people love so truly? Yes, they would call on young Larochejaquelin and his friend to be their leaders.

Early on the morrow, the postilion addressed the people from the market-place. He did not seek to himself the honour of doing so, nor, when he was asked to come forward as the leader of the people, did he refuse to do so. He was not covetous of the honour, but he would not refuse the danger. During the whole of the combat every one had looked to him as to the leader. He had not constituted himself the people's general, he had not for a moment thought of assuming the position; but he as little thought of refusing the danger or the responsibility, when the duties of a general seemed, by the will of all, to fall to his lot.

"Friends," said he, addressing them from the market-house, "we have saved ourselves for a while from the grasp of the Republic. But for the battle of yesterday, every one here would have a brother, a son, or a cousin, now enrolled as a conscript in the army of the Convention. Many of yourselves would have been conscripts, and would have this morning waked to the loss of your liberty. We did much yesterday when we bound the hands of the soldiers; but we have much more to do than we have yet done. Already in Nantes and in Angers are they talking of what we yesterday performed. We shall doubtless have many friends in Nantes and Angers, but the Republic also has many friends in those towns, and the soldiers of the Republic are strong there. It will not be long before they hurry to St. Florent to avenge the disgrace of their comrades; and bitter will be their revenge if they take

you unprepared. You have declared war against the Republic, and you must be prepared to fight it out to the end."

"We will, we will," shouted the people. "Down with the Republic—down with the Convention. Long live the King—our own King once again."

"Very well, my friends," continued Cathelineau, "so be it. We will fight it out then. We will combat with the Republic, sooner than be carried away from our wives, our children, and our sweethearts. We will fight for our own cures and our own churches; but our battle will be no holiday-work, it will be a different affair from that of yesterday. We must learn to carry arms, and to stand under them. You showed yesterday that you had courage—you must now show that you can join patience and perseverance to your courage."

"We will, Cathelineau, we will," shouted they "Tell us what we must do, Cathelineau, and we will do it.

"We must see," continued he, "who will be our friends and our allies. St. Florent cannot fight single-handed against the Republic. There are others in Anjou, and Poitou also, besides ourselves, who do not wish to leave their homes and their fields. There are noblemen and gentlemen, our friends and masters, who will lead you better than I can."

"No, no, Cathelineau is our general; we will follow no one but Cathelineau."

"You will, my friends, you will; but we need not quarrel about that. Forte and I, with Peter Berrier, will visit those who we think will join us; but you must at once prepare yourselves. You must arm yourselves. We will distribute the muskets of the soldiers as far as they will go. You must prepare yourselves. If we do not at once attack the Republicans elsewhere, they will soon overwhelm us in St. Florent. We will go to Cholet—the men of Cholet will surely second us—they are as fond of their sons and their brethren as we are. Cholet will join us, and Beaupreau, and Coron, and Torfou. We will go and ask them whether they prefer the Republic to their homes—whether the leaders of the Convention are dearer to them than their own lords—whether their new priests love them, as the old ones did? And I know what will be their answer."

He ceased speaking, and his audience crowded around him to shake hands with him, and to bless him; and before the sun was in the middle of the sky he had left St. Florent on his mission, in company with Forte and Peter Berrier.

CHAPTER III. DURBELLIÈRE

The château of Durbellière, the family seat of the Larochejacquelines, was situated in the very centre of the Bocage, between the small towns of Chatillon and Vihiers—in the province of Poitou, and about twelve leagues from St. Florent.

It was a large mansion, surrounded by extensive gardens, and a considerable domain. There were few residences of more importance as betokening greater wealth in the province of Poitou; but it was neither magnificent nor picturesque. The landlords of the country were not men of extensive property or expensive habits—they built no costly castles, and gave no sumptuous banquets; but they lived at home, on their incomes, and had always something to spare for the poorer of their neighbours. Farming was their business—the chase their amusement—loyalty their strongest passion, and the prosperity of their tenantry their chief ambition.

The château of Durbellière was a large square building, three stories high, with seven front windows to each of the upper stories, and three on each side of the large door on the ground floor. Eight stone steps of great width led up to the front door; but between the top step and the door there was a square flagged area of considerable space; and on the right hand, and on the left, two large whitewashed lions reclined on brick and mortar pedestals. An enormous range of kitchens, offices and cellars, ran under the whole house; the windows opened into a low area, or rather trench, which ran along the front and back of the house, and to which there were no rails or palings of any kind. The servants' door was at the side of the house, and the servants and people coming to them, to save themselves the trouble of walking round to this door, were in the habit of jumping into the area and entering the kitchen by the window. Doubtless some lady of the house, when the mansion was first built, had protested strongly against this unsightly practice; but habit had now accustomed the family to this mode of ingress and egress, and the servants of Durbellière consequently never used any other.

The back of the château was just the same as the front, the same windows, the same broad steps, the same pedestals and the same whitewashed lions, only the steps, instead of leading on to a large gravelled square, led into a trim garden. There were no windows, whatsoever, on one side of the house, and on the other only those necessary to light the huge staircase of the mansion.

The rooms were square, very large, and extremely lofty; the salon alone was carpeted, and none of them were papered, the drawing-room, the dining-room and the grand salon were ornamented with painted panels, which displayed light-coloured shepherds and shepherdesses in almost every possible attitude. In these rooms, also, there were highly ornamented stoves, which stood out about four feet from the wall, topped with marble slabs, on which were sculptured all the gods and demi-gods of the heathen mythology—that in the drawing-room exhibited Vulcan catching Mars and Venus in his marble net; and the unhappy position of the god of war was certainly calculated to read a useful lesson to any Parisian rover, who might attempt to disturb the domestic felicity of any family in the Bocage.

The house was not above a hundred yards from the high road, from which there were two entrances about two hundred yards apart. There were large wooden gates at each, which were usually left open, but each of which was guarded by two white-washed lions—not quite so much at ease as those on the pedestals, for they were fixed a-top of pillars hardly broad enough to support them. But this doubtless only increased their watchfulness.

But the glory of the château was the large garden behind the house. It was completely enclosed by a very high wall, and, like the house, was nearly square in its proportions. It contained miles of walks, and each walk so like the others, that a stranger might wander there for a week without knowing that he had retraversed the same ground, were it not that he could not fail to recognize the quaint groups of figures which met him at every turn. A few of these were of stone, rudely sculptured, but by far the greater number were of painted wood, and, like the shepherds and shepherdesses in the drawing-room, displayed every action of rural life. You would suddenly come upon a rosy-coloured gentleman, with a gun to his shoulder, in the act of shooting game—then a girl with a basket of huge cabbages—an old man in a fit of the choleric; the same rosy gentleman violently kissing a violet-coloured young lady; and, at the next turn, you would find the violet-coloured young lady fast asleep upon a bank. You would meet a fat cure a dozen times in half-an-hour, and always well employed. He would be saying his prayers—drinking beer—blessing a young maiden, and cudgelling a mule that wouldn't stir a step for him, till the large yellow drops of sweat were falling from his face. It was inconceivable how so many painted figures, in such a variety of attitudes, could have been designed and executed; but there they were, the great glory of the old gardener, and the endless amusement of the peasants of the neighbourhood, who were allowed to walk there on the summer Sunday evenings.

The gardens of Durbellière were also wonderful in another respect. It was supposed to be impossible to consume, or even to gather, all the cherries which they produced in the early summer. The trees between the walks were all cherry-trees—old standard trees of a variety of sorts; but they all bore fruit of some