

THE BEAUTIFUL PRISONER.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE THE STORM.

REVOLUTIONS exhibit an inner connection with the ideas of the nation; they do not arise through the whims of single men, but through the electric discharge of heaped-up and oppressing ideas, obtaining thereby their authority, generally also their triumph. On the eighth Thermidor, which was the name given to the 23rd of July by the new calendar of the republic, the physiognomy of Paris looked wholly different from that of the preceding day. The streets were crowded with people talking violently together, quarrelling, shaking their heads, and doubling their fists; every one seemed to feel that a political storm was on the point of breaking out, of which no one had been aware the previous day.

But the day passed on quietly; there was an oppressive, gloomy calmness, which, as the fore-runner of great events, like great storms, mysteriously surrounded everything. Everywhere they had their misgivings—in the convention, in the committees, in the commune and the Jacobin club. What course would the revolution take? Which of the circles would open and surround the others with its fiery ring? The centre of gravity for the coming events was looked for; whither would it fall? Into the convention, or into the commune and the Jacobin club? Thousands of people stood before the Tuileries, where the representatives were assembled, curious to hear the particulars of the proceedings. And the news that was carried by people from the overcrowded galleries, spread with the quickness of lightning through the multitude and over the whole city. Sometimes gendarmes passed on horseback, or a guard of pikemen marched across the courtyard of the former royal castle. Deputies pressed with difficulty through the crowd to the entrance of the castle; several were seen coming out shyly as if they were flying, answering only by abrupt words to the questions of the multitude.

"Foudre!" said a stout man in the midst of a large crowd, who looked like a butcher, as he stood in his shirt-sleeves covered with blood, as though he had just come from the slaughter-house; "it would be a pity if those intriguers and proud Jacobins should succeed in being elected to the committees! This is what they want?"

"Of course," exclaimed a barber, "they are jealous. But Robespierre knows how to treat them."

"Why has he not been at the convention for so long a time?" asked a thick-set hucksteress. "To-day he went thither for the first time again."

"Eh, why should he annoy himself?" cried the barber.

"And yet it was stupid of him, citizen," said another of the group. "It gave the conspirators an opportunity to organize themselves."

"Ah, bah, conspirators!" added a third. "You smell conspirators everywhere!"

"Well, if there are some, they will meet with their reward. Thunder and lightning!" cursed the butcher, "short work must be made of these counter-revolutions!"

"Who are the conspirators?" asked the woman.

"Who are they?" said the barber. "It can hardly be believed, they are old friends of Robespierre, are Jacobins, Montagnards, men like Tallien, Fréron, and Barras."

"What do you say?" exclaimed the hucksteress surprised. "Have they deserted Robespierre? Well, I must confess, no one now-a-days can trust to friendship and fidelity! I have, as you know, a daughter whose lover is a brave *Sans-culotte*—in fact, he is such an honest lad that I could never have thought ill of him."

"Well," asked the barber sneeringly, when the woman stopped, "what wrong has this honest fellow being doing? Has he jilted your daughter?"

"Yes, imagine, citizen, he has quarrelled with her, and told her that he would break with her. Who can believe in fidelity and friendship after this!"

A journeyman of the butcher now pressed forward, saying in a much excited manner to his master and those around him: "There is no chance of getting into the Assembly-room; the stairs are thronged with people. But I am told that Robespierre has now possession of the tribune. Not a whisper is heard in the hall, so attentively do they all listen."

"So I believe," replied the master. "Anxiety silences their tongue."

"That's so," remarked the woman. "Robespierre can speak like a book. I heard him once at the Jacobin club, and felt as though he spoke from my own heart."

"If we could only know what he is saying," added the barber. "I am told by a man who is well informed, that Robespierre has drawn up a long list with the names of all the suspected and indulgent deputies whom he will to-day eject from the convention."

"If he only would do so," cried the butcher. "The sooner these scoundrels are turned out, the better."

"But this guillotining and accusing must soon come to an end," harshly cried a voice in the crowd. "If Danton no longer suited, of what use could the rest be? Citizen Robespierre ought to stop this butchering. Yesterday eighty were beheaded at once."

Greatly surprised they turned round to the bold speaker.

"Good friend," said the butcher to him, "you should not display so publicly your bad patriotism. It might fare ill with you."

"So? You call this a bad patriotism?" replied the stranger. "If beheading is patriotism, it is a patriotism of butchers."

"Ho! ho, I will let you feel the butcher!" burst forth the butcher, lifting his arm to strike the bold speaker. But he was prevented by those around him, most of whom seemed to take the part of the threatened.

"The citizen is right," they shouted; "France is not a slaughter-house. Liberty can be adored without the headsman."

"If his children had been beheaded, he would think differently," cried an old woman in a rage.

"Stop! stop!" now rang through the crowd. "There is one coming from the Assembly. Let us make enquiries!"

The man who came forth was surrounded; he was a deputy and showed his willingness to speak.

"Robespierre," he reported, "has made a wonderful speech. I am quite excited by it, citizens, and you may judge that the Assembly was not less so, after the printing of this speech was decided upon."

"They are right!" sounded the voice of the first stranger. "The convention is sovereign, represents the people, is every thing. It cannot submit to the tyranny of this Robespierre, who is usurping monarchy."

"Long live King Robespierre!" maliciously shouted a *gamin* who had been listening.

"Down with him!" answered some of the crowd, while most of them looked anxiously around.

"Perhaps the same cry is now raised in the convention," remarked one who had just come from the castle. "It looked just like it."

"What were they doing?"

"Well, Robespierre made his speech—it was like the screeching of an owl—at the same time holding and rolling a manuscript in his hand like a weapon, with which he wished to crush his enemies."

"But it was said that they all were quietly listening to his speech?"

"That is true; they let Robespierre speak, complain of the malignity of his enemies, of the conspirators. And that he alone had remained incorruptible, and was ready to die."

"It is so," exclaimed the butcher. "Maximilian is an honest Jacobin."

"He is a hypocrite," fearlessly replied the stranger.

"Always the old song," continued the last comer. "But he had no success to-day. His complaints and virtues were not acknowledged. The Assembly was at first very quiet, unenviously quiet; then some began to grumble, laugh, and contradict. Yes, they are no longer afraid of this ambitious man."

"No longer afraid?" asked the hucksteress. "Citizen, you are mistaken!"

"We shall see if he is right," angrily burst forth the butcher. However, he kept on attentively listening to the speaker, who avoided all questions addressed to him by continuing his report.

"It was first moved to have Robespierre's discourse printed and sent to the departments. But this was opposed. They reproached Robespierre, who was much alarmed; they spoke

against the printing, at least demanded a delay—at all events, there was such a violent opposition as this advocate of Arras had never met before."

"Aha," muttered the stranger. "There is a change at last."

The reporter continued:

"Cambon came forward, pointing out Robespierre as the one who maintained the actions of the national convention."

"Nonsense! it is a slander!" interrupted the butcher and several others.

"No, no, it is so. Robespierre is a tyrant," shouted others.

"Fréron," continued the stranger,

"went yet further, and raised the question what had become of the freedom of opinions in the

convention. A great tumult arose, and at last it was resolved that Robespierre's discourse should not be printed."

"Ah!" said the barber cunningly, "this is extraordinary."

"Is it so?" muttered the butcher. "We shall not even read the speech of this brave patriot, and how he declaimed against his enemies and their conspiracy. Ha, is this not oppression?"

"The carts! The carts!" rang suddenly through the air. The crowd started up, thronging into the street, stretching their necks, howling, whistling, and screeching, and like an echo, the cry was repeated: "The carts! The carts!"

They brought the victims of that day. About fifty condemned, just coming from the judge, were taken to the guillotine.

It was arranged by Robespierre that accusation, sentence, and death should follow in quick succession. To save time, he had enforced a law interdicting the speeches in defence of the accused. Quickly, and in masses, they should be dragged to the guillotine, in order that death should dispatch all those who might become elements of resistance against the plans of this ambitious man.

On the carts following each other, there were men and women, old and young. Death made them all equals. Most of the men, on account of the great heat, had taken off their coats; the women were sitting on the benches. The hands of all were tied at their backs. Gendarmes escorted the vehicles. General Henriot himself, the commandant of the Parisian troops, was with a detachment of gendarmes on horseback leading this procession. With a loud noise the multitude rushed forward, stopping the passage in the street.

"No more! no more!" was the excited cry of the numerous crowd. "It shall not be! No more executions! No more blood!"

The crowd surrounded the carts, extending their hands to



Tallien and Collot d'Herbois at the Jacobin Club.

"What were its contents? what did he say?"

"That the guillotine must dispatch without mercy those who are disloyal, should the liberty of France be maintained."

"Very good! very good!" they shouted.

"Fie! shame!" many voices answered.

The deputy then retired.

"No one must have ventured to come forth," remarked the barber. "I thought there would be much noise and opposition. But he has them all in his power."

"Of course," added the butcher. "The conspirators have made a wrong calculation."

"The meeting has not yet closed," put in the stranger.

"Citizen Robespierre has been heard, and will be replied to."

Some one who had caught the last words turned round, saying:

"You are quite right, citizen. I have just come from the hall, where I could no longer suffer the heat of the galleries. Robespierre will remember this day; he has been cruelly disappointed, and it will be a wholesome lesson to him and his men of terror."

General amazement and solemn quiet followed, as if no one dared to express his belief in this communication.

"What?" asked the barber at last. "You talk as if the convention had declared against Robespierre."

"It has done so," replied the newly arrived. "Reason will at last get the upper hand."

"Citizen, let us hear!" asked the hucksteress earnestly. "Eh, it can hardly be believed that Robespierre has no longer the convention on his side?"

"No, no; I tell you that time is passed. The convention has regained its courage."

"Thunder and lightning," cried the butcher; "they have become rebellious!"