

## THE RECRUIT

BY HENDRICK CONSCIENCE

(Concluded)

Trien soon perceived that the two strangers were accustomed to tend the sick, and had no doubt that the old gentleman was a physician. This thought consoled her, and raised her spirits. A mingled feeling of gratitude and anxious anticipation found expression on her countenance in a peculiar smile which glimmered through her tears. Her surprise increased when she heard the following words:

"Major," said the attendant, "this is just as it was at Sabijana de Alba in Spain. It makes me quite melancholy to think of it."

"Our poor friend Captain Steens, you mean?" replied the gentleman with a sigh. "The faint is deep! Give me the bottle."

"Yes, I seem to see it still: the Captain lay just so, at the foot of a citron-tree; but he left his body at Vittoria, poor fellow! That was a slashing, and stabbing, and shooting, and mangling! Many a one we picked up, and many a wound we dressed that day. I was all blood from top to toe, and you too, Major."

"The heart begins to beat again: he will come to himself immediately," said the physician.

The attendant raised the young man's eyelids with his finger, and said:

"He is blind—the soldier's old disease; we know the pestilence well. But look at the left eye, Mayor, it seems to me not quite gone."

A cry of joy burst from the maiden's heart. She had watched for the return of life to her friend's pale face, and had perceived with beating heart a gentle colour suffusing itself over his cheeks. Now he moved. The moment he came to himself, the blind man touched the clothes of the two strangers who had been assisting him, and said anxiously:

"Where am I? What has happened to me?" And stretching his hand farther round him, exclaimed in a tone of alarm: "Trien! Trien! where are you?"

The girl seized his hands, and said exultingly:

"Oh, John, thank God that you are here! It is a great good fortune, good men are beside you. They say, too, that your left eye is not quite dead."

"Whoever you are, may our Lord God bless you for your goodness!" said the lad.

"Comrade," interrupted the attendant, "we shall try whether we can stand now. Only have courage, and you will manage it easily."

He seized the soldier under the left arm, while the old gentleman supported him on the other side, and thus they raised the blind man to his feet. Under the belief that the attention of the two strangers would end here, Trien smiled sweetly, and said, with a bright and cheerful look:

"Gentlemen, I am a poor peasant girl, and our John, too, is not rich; but he assured we shall our whole life long think of you in our prayers, and bless you for your kindness. Give yourselves no more trouble, pray: let him sit on the grass to rest himself, and I shall wrap cloths round his wounded feet. We must then go to the village, where we shall spend the night. May God send you health and happiness on earth and afterwards eternal bliss in heaven!"

"No, no, no, no," replied the old man; "follow me. You are stout-hearted both of you, but I do not wish you to fatigue yourselves on your journey home. The young soldier shall not go farther till he has regained his strength. We shall see whether I can do anything to reward your noble self-sacrifice, my child."

"We have still some bottles of old Spanish wine left," added the attendant, "which might restore a dead man to life and health. That is all the medicine he needs. Only wait a little, my daughter; in an hour you will scarcely know him again."

"Ah, sirs," stammered the girl, "do as your Christian hearts tell you. I can scarcely speak, I feel your kindness so deeply. A thousand, thousand thanks, good, dear men!"

Supported on both sides, by master and servant, John tottered on with slow steps. When they came into the garden, Trien went by the servant's side, and whispered:

"Tell me, friend, is your master a doctor?"

"Doctor?" replied the servant; "he was Chirurgien Major under Napoleon. We have cut off more legs and arms than could lie here on this path, and that is not few."

"Can he cure diseased eyes also, friend?"

"Yes, yes; and a great deal better, I can tell you, than the surgeons of the present day. There are very few, alas! now alive of the brave comrades of the Peninsula, else many would be going about who had to thank him for their eyesight."

"Ah, good man! you must beg him, very humbly, to look at our John's eyes; perhaps he may cure them! God knows."

"Keep your mind at ease, my daughter; he will do that with pleasure. He loves soldiers. John will not go from this very soon."

"And if you can do anything in the matter, or put in a good word, I shall be very thankful to you."

"You need not ask me to do that; I shall not fail to do so. Where a soldier, there a comrade," says the proverb. Do you see, he is somewhat better already; I am giving him scarcely any support."

They stopped over the threshold, and entered a beautifully furnished room. The old gentleman led the blind youth to a broad arm-chair, and made him sit down with his back to the light. He then gave a key to the servant, which he received with manifest pleasure, and quickly left the room, returning almost immediately with a bottle and some glasses. As he passed, he whispered in the maiden's ear:

"It is the wine which would raise the dead. You shall see the miracle immediately."

Trien did not rightly catch what he said, and with intense curiosity she looked at the old gentleman, who was now putting a glass of a clear red liquid to the young man's lips.

"Drink this—and take a hearty draught," he said; "it will refresh you."

"Heavens! what is that?" cried the blind man with astonishment, some moments after he had taken the drink; "how it warms me within! Thanks, thanks. I am hungry now."

"Gently, comrade; not so fast," said the old man; "we shall now dress your feet, and then examine your eyes. Come, daughter—I had almost forgotten you, my dear child—sit down on this chair, and, Charles, give the girl a glass of wine."

While the servant was engaged with Trien, and was praising to her the wonder-working qualities of the Spanish wine, the old man had bound up the youth's feet. He now washed his eyes with a liquid, and anointed them with a white salve. When he had done this, he went to the window and let the curtains down, to soften the light; and then approaching the soldier again, he said:

"Friend, open your eyes, and try whether you can distinguish anything."

John opened his eyes, and remained for a time silent; although

the old gentleman asked him frequently whether he perceived anything. He seemed to be seeking an object with his dead eyes.

Suddenly he uttered a loud cry, and, rising from his chair, went with outstretched arms towards Trien, who had sprung from her seat, and, trembling with feverish hope, watched him as he approached. She would have rushed into his arms, but the servant held her back.

The blind man advanced, and held out his hand to her with an uncertain motion, saying at the same time, with a low and trembling voice:

"Trien, Trien, I am not blind! It is true this time; I shall once more see mother, grandfather and Pawken. Yes, I see that you have your red neckerchief on."

The maiden embraced him, uttering unintelligible words, which sounded more like lamentations than expressions of joy. The old gentleman, however, took the young man from her, and made her sit down again calmly on the chair. He then immediately tied the shade before the soldier's eyes, saying:

"You said that you saw that your friend had a red neckerchief on. It seems to me impossible that you could distinguish the colour; you are surely deceiving yourself."

"I see nothing but a gray shadow," replied the soldier; "but when growing blind, I observed that red seemed much blacker in the dark than other colours; and in this way I know that her neckerchief is red."

"So I thought," the old gentleman remarked. "We shall now go prudently and carefully to work. Charles, take our comrade into the kitchen, and let him have a little bread and meat—half rations only, no more at present—then lead him into the back room, that he may go to bed and rest. Tell the maid-servant to bring some food for the girl at the same time."

So soon as the servant had left the room with the soldier, Trien fell at the old man's feet with loud sobs, and embraced his knees speechlessly, moistening them with her tears. He endeavoured to raise her up, but she resisted him, and, turning her bright blue eyes upon his face, she exclaimed:

"Oh, sir, sir, God will reward you for having shown such kindness to poor peasant people. I cannot say all I feel; but I would willingly die ten years before my time, if it would procure for you a longer life. And because you mean to cure our John's eyes, angel of God that you are! we shall pray every day for you, and make a pilgrimage besides, dear sir!"

The old gentleman raised the girl from the ground, and addressing to her kind and comforting words, he led her to the table, where the maid-servant had already placed a refreshment.

Either from over-fatigue or emotion, Trien could eat very little; she paused in a few moments, and then gazed at her benefactor with an earnest, calm, and grateful look. He was seated near her, and was trying to induce her to eat; but when he perceived that she would take no more, he took her hand and said:

"Now, tell me from what place you come, and how it happens that you are travelling alone with a blind soldier, and whether you have parents, and where they dwell?"

With a natural and simple eloquence, the young girl began to tell him about the mud-huts, the lot-drawing, the old mother, the grandfather, Pawken, and the separation. When she came to tell him, however, all that she had suffered in her efforts to find her blind friend in Venloo; how she had nearly fainted for joy when the officer gave her permission to

take the unhappy man home with her; how she dreamt of our dear Lady, in the little room of the farm-house, and all that they had said to one another by the way; then the old man was overpowered by deep emotion, and now and then wiped a tear of sympathy from his eye. The sweet tones of the maiden's voice had an irresistible effect upon him, and he wondered at her rare self-sacrifice and love. She concealed nothing from him, but told him, honestly and openly, all her plans—her marriage with the blind man, and all which she had promised to him and expected to be able to fulfil, with a view to sweeten his bitter lot; she even told him what John had promised to do for her, if through God's goodness he regained his sight.

The affecting tale had lasted for a considerable time, and the old man had listened attentively without interrupting her. When the girl had concluded, with an expression of deep gratitude to him and seemed waiting for some remark, he said nothing for some time, but sat with downcast eyes, sunk in deep reflection. In a few minutes he raised his head:

"You have done rightly, my daughter," he said. "You are a virtuous, noble-minded girl! So, your dream of future life was, that by working day and night you would get on happily together. Your ambition was to mitigate the misery of blindness to your friend—his to reward you for your great love; and the desire of both of you to make the last days of your aged parents peaceful and happy? It is well; God has heard your prayers. He it is who has led you hither, and has commissioned me to do a good work. I will devote all my experience to the cure of your friend's left eye, and I have good grounds to believe that I shall be successful. As to other things, keep your mind at ease. Your noble dream shall be realized. To-night you sleep here. To-morrow we shall see what is to be done. Meanwhile you may take repose, or walk in the garden, and if you wish anything, you have only to ask it from the maid-servant or my attendant; they are good people who will be eager to serve you. I shall now leave you till the evening."

Trien gazed after the old man as he left the room, unable to utter a word in reply. After a time she went out, and wandered about the garden with a cheerful mind, thinking on the occurrences of the day, and on what the old gentleman had said to her.

Next forenoon a carriage left the garden-gate of the country house. On the foremost seat sat the servant with the great scar on his face, whistling a merry air, and cracking a large whip. On the back-seat sat the young man, with the green shade over his eyes, and beside him the now light-hearted Trien. She quietly pressed his hand, and whispered in his ear:

"Oh, John, we are happy—very happy, are we not? My beautiful dream is now come true. Oh, how joyful will your mother be now! And you, too, will soon be quite well again, for the old gentleman has assured us of it. How will they all wonder too, when they see us drive up in a beautiful carriage, like barons!"

"We shall go by Gierle and Wechel-ter-Zande," said the servant, "and so to Zoersel. Then you must show me the way; and now off we go."

He gave the horse the rein, calling out:

"Hopla, Marengo, forward! march!"

The dust of the highway rose like a cloud, and the carriage soon disappeared among the houses of the village.

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