

YOUNG AND OLD.

When young I slighted art, yet sighed for fame;
Dashed into careless rhyme, and toyed with thought.
When art and thoughts with age and wisdom came,
I laid aside the verse that youth had wrought.
These fruits, I said, were green, that from my bough,
When windy fancies swept, so lightly fell.
A mellow autumn sun is shining now,
That shames the cruder crop youth loved so well.
Yet when it chanced some tender hearts had found
A sweeter flavour in the juiceless things
That lay in heaps neglected on the ground,
Than in the fruits the ripening season brings,
I thought, Must then the freed bird seek its cage,
And youth sing songs for youth, and age for age?

C. P. CRANCH.

NINETY-THREE.

BY VICTOR HUGO.

PART THE FIRST.

AT SEA.

BOOK THE FIRST.

THE WOOD OF LA SAUDRAIE.

During the last days of May, 1793, one of the Parisian regiments thrown into Brittany by Santerre reconnoitred the dreaded wood of La Saudraie, in Astillé. There were not more than three hundred men, for the battalion had been well nigh swept off by this fierce war. It was the period when, after Argonne, Jemmappes, and Valmy, of the first regiment of Paris, which had numbered six hundred volunteers, there remained twenty-seven men; of the second, thirty-three; and of the third, fifty-seven. It was a time of epic conflict.

The regiment despatched from Paris into Vendée counted nine hundred and twelve men. Each regiment took with it three pieces of cannon. They had been quickly put on foot. On the 29th of April, Gohier being Minister of Justice and Bouchotte Minister of War, the section of the Bon Conseil proposed sending battalions of volunteers into Vendée. Lubin, member of the Commune, made the report. On the first of May, Santerre was ready to marshal twelve thousand soldiers, thirty field-pieces, and a troop of gunners. These battalions, formed so quickly, were formed so well that they serve as models to-day; regiments of the line are constructed after their model; they changed the old proportion between the number of soldiers and non-commissioned officers.

On the 28th of April the Commune of Paris gave this password to the volunteers of Santerre: *No mercy; no quarter.* At the end of May of the twelve thousand who left Paris eight thousand were dead.

The regiment engaged in the wood of La Saudraie held itself on the watch. There was no appearance of haste. Each man looked at once to the right and to the left, before and behind. Kleber has said, "*A soldier has an eye in his back.*" They had been on foot for a long while. What time could it be? What period of the day was it? It would have been difficult to say, for there is always a sort of dusk in such savage thickets, and it was never light in that wood.

The forest of La Saudraie was tragic. It was in its copses that, from the month of November, 1792, civil war commenced its crimes. Mousqueton, the ferocious cripple, came out of its fatal shades. The list of the murders that had been committed there was enough to make one's hair stand on end. There was no place more to be dreaded. The soldiers moved cautiously forward. The depths were full of flowers; on each side was a trembling wall of branches and dew-wet leaves. Here and there rays of sunlight pierced the green shadows. The gladiola, the flame of the marshes, the meadow narcissus, the little wood daisy, harbinger of spring, and the vernal crocus,* embroidered the thick carpet of vegetation, crowded with every form of moss, from that resembling velvet (*chenille*) to that which looks like a star. The soldiers advanced in silence, step by step, pushing the brushwood softly aside. The birds twittered above the bayonets.

In former peaceable times La Saudraie was a favourite place for the *Houiche-ba*, the hunting of birds by night; now they hunted men there.

The thicket was one of birch trees, beeches, and oaks, the ground flat, the thick moss and grass deadened the sound of the men's steps; there were no paths, or only blind ones which quickly disappeared among the holly, wild sloes, ferns, hedges of rest-harrow, and high brambles. It would have been impossible to distinguish a man ten steps off.

Now and then a heron or a moor-hen flew through the branches, indicating the neighbourhood of marshes.

They pushed forward. They went at random, with uneasiness, fearing to find that which they sought.

From time to time they came upon traces of encampments—burned spots, trampled grass, sticks arranged crosswise, branches stained with blood. Here soup had been made—there, mass had been said—yonder, they had dressed wounds. But all human beings had disappeared. Where were they? Very far off, perhaps—perhaps quite near, hidden, blunderbuss in hand. The wood seemed deserted. The regiment redoubled its prudence. Solitude—hence distrust. They saw no one—so much the more reason for fearing some one. They had to do with a forest with a bad name; an ambush was probable.

Thirty grenadiers, detached as scouts and commanded by a sergeant, marched at a considerable distance in front of the main body; the vivandière of the battalion accompanied them. The vivandières willingly join the vanguard: they run risks, but they have the chance of seeing whatever happens. Curiosity is one of the forms of feminine bravery.

Suddenly the soldiers of this little advance party started like hunters who have heard the hiding-place of their prey. They had heard something like a breathing from the centre of a thicket, and seemed to perceive a movement among the branches. The soldiers made signals.

In the species of watch and search confided to scouts the officers have small need to interfere—the right thing seems done by instinct.

In less than a minute the spot where the movement had

been noticed was surrounded; a line of pointed muskets encircled it; the obscure centre of the thicket was covered on all sides at the same instant; the soldiers, finger on trigger, eye on the suspected spot, only waited for the sergeant's order. Notwithstanding this the vivandière ventured to peer through the underbrush, and at the moment when the sergeant was about to cry "Fire!" this woman cried "Halt!"

Turning towards the soldiers, she added—"Do not fire, comrades!"

She plunged into the thicket; the men followed.

There was in truth some one there.

In the thickest of the brake, on the edge of one of those little round clearings left by the fires of the charcoal burners, in a sort of recess among the branches—a kind of chamber of foliage—half open like an alcove—a woman was seated on the moss, holding to her breast a sucking babe, while the fair heads of two sleeping children rested on her knees.

This was the ambush.

"What are you doing here, you?" cried the vivandière.

The woman lifted her head.

The vivandière added furiously, "Are you mad, that you are there? A little more and you would have been blown to pieces!" Then she addressed herself to the soldiers—"It is a woman."

"Well, that is plain to be seen," said a grenadier.

The vivandière continued—"To come into the wood to get yourself massacred! The idea of such stupidity!"

The woman, stunned, petrified with fear, looked about like one in a dream, at these guns, these sabres, these bayonets, these savage faces.

The two children woke, and cried.

"I am hungry," said the first.

"I am afraid," said the other.

The baby was still suckling; the vivandière addressed it.

"You are in the right of it," said she.

The mother was dumb with terror. The sergeant cried out to her—"Do not be afraid; we are the battalion of the *Bonnet Rouge*."

The woman trembled from head to foot. She stared at the sergeant, of whose rough visage there was nothing visible but the moustaches, the brows, and two burning coals for eyes.

"Formerly the battalion of the Red Cross," added the vivandière.

The sergeant continued—"Who are you, madame?"

The woman scanned him, terrified. She was slender, young, pale, and in rags; she wore the large hood and woollen cloak of the Breton peasant, fastened about her neck by a string. She left her bosom exposed with the indifference of an animal. Her feet, shoeless and stockingless, were bleeding.

"It is a beggar," said the sergeant.

The vivandière began anew, in a voice at once soldierly and feminine, but sweet: "What is your name?"

The woman stammered so that she was scarcely intelligible—"Michelle Fléhard."

The vivandière stroked the little head of the sleeping baby with her large hand. "What is the age of this mite?" demanded she.

The mother did not understand. The vivandière persisted:

"I ask you how old is it?"

"Ah!" said the mother; "eighteen months."

"It is old," said the vivandière; "it ought not to suckle any longer. You must wean it; we will give it soup."

The mother began to feel a certain confidence; the two children, who had awakened, were rather curious than scared—they admired the plumes of the soldiers.

"Ah!" said the mother, "they are very hungry." Then she added—"I have no more milk."

"We will give them something to eat," cried the sergeant? "and you too. But that's not all. What are your political opinions?"

The woman looked at him, but did not reply.

"Did you hear my question?"

She stammered—"I was put into a convent very young—but I am married—I am not a nun. The sisters taught me to speak French. The village was set on fire. We ran away so quickly that I had not time to put on my shoes."

"I asked you what are your political opinions?"

"I don't know what that means."

The sergeant continued—"There are such things as female spies. We shoot spies. Come, speak. You are not a gipsy? Which is your side?"

She still looked at him as if she did not understand.

The sergeant repeated—"Which is your side?"

"I don't know," she said.

"How—you do not know your own country?"

"Ah, my country! Oh yes, I know that."

"Well, where is it?"

The woman replied, "The farm of Siscoignard, in the parish of Azé."

It was the sergeant's turn to be stupified. He remained thoughtful for a moment, then resumed: "You say—"

"Siscoignard."

"That is not a country."

"It is my country," said the woman; and added, after an instant's reflection, "I understand sir—you are from France, I am from Brittany."

"Well?"

"It is not the same neighbourhood."

"But it is the same country," cried the sergeant.

The woman only repeated, "I am from Siscoignard."

"Siscoignard be it," returned the sergeant. "Your family belong there?"

"Yes."

"What is their occupation?"

"They are all dead; I have nobody left."

The sergeant, who thought himself a fine talker, continued his interrogatories: "What? the devil! One has relations, or one has had. Who are you? Speak!"

The woman listened, astounded by this—"Or one has had!" which was more like the growl of an animal than any human sound.

The vivandière felt the necessity of interfering. She began again to caress the babe, and to pat the cheeks of the two other children.

"How do you call the baby?" she asked "It is a little girl—this one."

The mother replied, "Georgette."

"And the eldest fellow? For he is a man, the small rascal."

"René Jean."

"And the younger? He is a man too, and chubby-faced into the bargain."

"Gros-Alain," said the mother.

"They are pretty little fellows," said the vivandière; "they already look as if they were somebody."

Still the sergeant persisted. "Now speak, madame. Have you a house?"

"I had one."

"Where was it?"

"At Azé."

"Why are you not in your house?"

"Because they burnt it."

"Who?"

"I do not know—a battle."

"Where did you come from?"

"From there."

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know."

"Get to the facts—who are you?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know who you are?"

"We are people who are running away."

"What party do you belong to?"

"I don't know."

"Are you blues—are you whites—who are you with?"

"I am with my children."

There was a pause. The vivandière said, "As for me, I have no children. I have not had time."

The sergeant began again. "But your parents? See here, madame, give us the facts about your parents. My name is Radoub; I am a sergeant, from the street of Cherche Midi; my father and mother belonged there. I can talk about my parents—tell us about yours. Who were they?"

"Their name was Fléhard—that is all."

"Yes, the Fléchards are the Fléchards, just as the Redoubts are the Redoubts. But people have a calling. What was your parents' calling? What was their business, these Fléchards of yours?"

"They were labourers. My father was sickly, and could not work on account of a beating that the lord—his lord—our lord—had given to him. It was a kindness, for my father had poached a rabbit—a thing for which one was condemned to death—but the lord showed him mercy, and said, 'You need only give him a hundred blows with a stick;' and my father was left crippled."

"And then?"

"My grandfather was a Huguenot. The curé had him sent to the galleys. I was very little then."

"Any then?"

"My husband's father smuggled salt. The king had him hung."

"And your husband—what did he do?"

"Lately he fought."

"For whom?"

"For the king."

"And afterwards?"

"Well, for his lordship."

"And next?"

"Well, then for the curé."

"A thousand names of brutes!" exclaimed a grenadier.

The woman gave a start of terror.

"You see, madame, we are Parisians," said the vivandière, graciously.

The woman clasped her hands, and exclaimed, "O my God and blessed Lord!"

"No superstitious ejaculations," growled the sergeant.

The vivandière seated herself by the woman, and drew the eldest child between her knees. He submitted quietly. Children show confidence as they do distrust, without any apparent reason—some internal monitor warns them.

"My poor good woman of this neighbourhood," said the vivandière, "your brats are very pretty—babies are always that. I can guess their ages. The big one is four years old; his brother is three. Upon my word, the little sucking poppet is a greedy one! Oh, the monster! Will you stop eating up your mother? See here, madame, do not be afraid. You ought to join the battalion—do like me. I call myself Houzarde. It is a nickname; but I like Houzarde better than being called Mamzelle Bicornéau, like my mother. I am the canteen-woman; that is the same as saying, she who offers drink when they are firing and stabbing. Our feet are about the same size. I will give you a pair of my shoes. I was in Paris the 10th of August. I gave Westermann drink too. How things went! I saw Louis XVI. guillotined—Louis Capet, as they call him. It was against his will. Only just listen, now! To think that the 13th of January he roasted chestnuts and laughed with his family. When they forced him down on the see-saw, as they say, he had neither coat nor shoes, nothing but his shirt, a quilted waistcoat, grey cloth breeches, and grey silk stockings. I saw that, I did! The hackney-coach they brought him in was painted green. See here; come with us; the battalion are good fellows; you shall be canteen number two; I will teach you the business. Oh, it is very simple! You have your can and your hand-bell; away you go into the hubbub, with the platoons firing, the cannon thundering—into the thickest of the row—and you cry, 'Who'll have a drop to drink, my children?' It's no more trouble than that. I give everybody and anybody a sup—yes, indeed—Whites the same as Blues, though I am a blue myself, and a good blue, too; but I serve them all alike. Wounded men are all thirsty. They die without any difference of opinions. Dying fellows ought to shake hands. How silly it is to go fighting! Do you come with us. If I am killed, you will step into my place. You see I am only so-so to look at; but I am a good woman, and a brave chap. Don't you be afraid."

When the vivandière ceased speaking, the woman murmured, "Our neighbour was called Marie Jeanne, and our servant was named Marie Claude."

In the meantime the sergeant reprimanded the grenadier: "Hold your tongue! You frighten madame. One does not swear before ladies."

"All the same; it is a downright butchery for an honest man to hear about," replied the grenadier; "and to see Chinese Iroquois, that have had their fathers-in-law crippled by a lord, their grandfathers sent to the galleys by the priest, and their fathers hung by the king, and who fight—name of the little Black Man!—and mix themselves up with revolts, and get smashed for his lordship, the priest, and the king!"

"Silence in the ranks!" cried the sergeant.

"A man may hold his tongue, sergeant," returned the grenadier, "but that doesn't hinder the fact that it's a pity to see a

* The gladiola is with us an autumnal, the crocus a spring flower.—*Trans.*

* How did they flesh themselves these flesh-hards? The sergeant makes a pun. Fléhard, our Fletcher, is an arrow-maker.—*Trans.*