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JULY 18, 1912

THE FARMER'S ADVOCATE

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boded no good to her, who had dared to upset his most cherished plans, had hastily shouted the word of command,—

"Into it, my men, and let no one escape from that hut alive!"

The moon had once more emerged from between the clouds: the darkness on the cliffs had gone, giving place once more to brilliant, silvery light. Some of the soldiers had rushed to the rough, wooden door of the hut, whilst one of them kept guard over Marguerite.

The door was partially open; one of the soldiers pushed it further, but within all was darkness, the charcoal fire only lighting with a dim, red light the furthest corner of the hut. The soldiers paused automatically at the door, like machines waiting for further orders.

Chauvelin, who was prepared for a violent onslaught from within, and for a vigorous resistance from the four fugitives, under cover of the darkness, was for the moment paralyzed with astonishment when he saw the soldiers standing there at attention, like sentries on guard, whilst not a sound proceeded from the hut.

Filled with strange, anxious foreboding, he, too, went to the door of the hut, and peering into the gloom, he asked quickly,—

"What is the meaning of this?"

"I think, citizen, that there is no one there now," replied one of the soldiers imperturbably.

"You have not let those four men go?" thundered Chauvelin, menacingly. "I ordered you to let no man escape alive!—Quick, after them all of you! Quick, in every direction!"

The men, obedient as machines, rushed down the rocky incline towards the beach, some going off to right and left, as fast as their feet could carry them.

"You and your men will pay with your lives for this blunder, citizen sergeant," said Chauvelin, viciously, to the sergeant who had been in charge of the men; "and you, too, citizen," he added, turning with a snarl to Desgas, "for disobeying my orders."

"You ordered us to wait, citizen, until the tall Englishman arrived and joined the four men in the hut. No one came," said the sergeant, sullenly.

"But I ordered you just now, when the woman screamed, to rush in and let no one escape."

"But, citizen, the four men who were there before, had been gone some time, I think . . ."

"You think?—You? . . ." said Chauvelin, almost choking with fury, "and you let them go . . ."

"You ordered us to wait, citizen," protested the sergeant, "and to implicitly obey your commands on pain of death. We waited."

"I heard the men creep out of the hut, not many minutes after we took cover, and long before the woman screamed," he added, as Chauvelin seemed still quite speechless with rage.

"Hark!" said Desgas suddenly.

In the distance the sound of repeated firing was heard. Chauvelin tried to peer along the beach below, but as luck would have it, the fitful moon once more hid her light behind a bank of clouds, and he could see nothing.

"One of you go into the hut and strike a light," he stammered at last.

Stolidly the sergeant obeyed: he went up to the charcoal fire and lit the small lantern he carried in his belt; it was evident that the hut was quite empty.

"Which way did they go?" asked Chauvelin.

"I could not tell you, citizen," said the sergeant; "they went straight down the cliff first, then disappeared behind some boulders."

"Hush! what was that?"

All three men listened attentively. In the far, very far distance, could be heard faintly echoing and already dying away, the quick, sharp splash of half a dozen oars. Chauvelin took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

"The schooner's boat!" was all he gasped.

Evidently Armand St. Just and his three companions had managed to creep along the side of the cliffs, whilst the men, like true soldiers of the well-drilled Republican army, had, with blind obedience, and in fear of their lives, implicitly obeyed Chauvelin's orders—to wait for the tall Englishman, who was the important capture.

They had no doubt reached one of the

creeks which jut far out to sea on this coast at intervals; behind this the boat of the Day Dream must have been on the look-out for them, and they were by now safely on board the British schooner.

As if to confirm this last supposition, the dull boom of a gun was heard from out at sea.

"The schooner, citizen," said Desgas, quietly; "she's off."

It needed all Chauvelin's nerve and presence of mind not to give way to a useless and undignified access of rage. There was no doubt now that once again that accursed British head had completely outwitted him. How he had contrived to reach the hut, without being seen by one of the thirty soldiers who guarded the spot, was more than Chauvelin could conceive. That he had done so before the thirty men had arrived on the cliff was, of course, fairly clear, but how he had come over in Reuben Goldstein's cart, all the way from Calais, without being sighted by the various patrols on duty was impossible of explanation. It really seemed as if some potent Fate watched over that daring Scarlet Pimpernel, and his astute enemy almost felt a superstitious shudder pass through him, as he looked round at the towering cliffs and the loneliness of this outlying coast.

But surely this was reality! and the year of grace 1792: there were no fairies and hobgoblins about. Chauvelin and his thirty men had all heard with their own ears that accursed voice singing "God save the King," fully twenty minutes after they had all taken cover around the hut; by that time the four fugitives must have reached the creek and got into the boat, and the nearest creek was more than a mile from the hut.

Where had that daring singer got to. Unless Satan himself had lent him wings, he could not have covered that mile on a rocky cliff in the space of two minutes; and only two minutes had elapsed between his song and the sound of the boat's oars away at sea. He must have remained behind, and was even now hiding somewhere about the cliffs; the patrols were still about, he would still be sighted, no doubt. Chauvelin felt hopeful once again.

One or two of the men, who had run after the fugitives, were now slowly working their way up the cliff: one of them reached Chauvelin's side, at the very moment that this hope arose in the astute diplomatist's heart.

"We were too late, citizen," the soldier said, "we reached the beach just before the moon was hidden by that bank of clouds. The boat had undoubtedly been on the look-out behind that first creek, a mile off, but she had shoved off some time ago, when we got to the beach, and was already some way out to sea. We fired after her, but of course it was no good. She was making straight and quickly for the schooner. We saw her very clearly in the moonlight."

"Yes," said Chauvelin, with eager impatience, "she had shoved off some time ago, you said, and the nearest creek is a mile further on."

"Yes, citizen! I ran all the way, straight to the beach, though I guessed the boat would have waited somewhere near the creek, as the tide would reach there earliest. The boat must have shoved off some minutes before the woman began to scream."

Some minutes before the woman began to scream! Then Chauvelin's hopes had not deceived him. The Scarlet Pimpernel may have contrived to send the fugitives on ahead by the boat, but he himself had not had time to reach it; he was still on shore, and all the roads were well patrolled. At anyrate, all was not yet lost, and would not be, whilst that impudent Britisher was still on French soil.

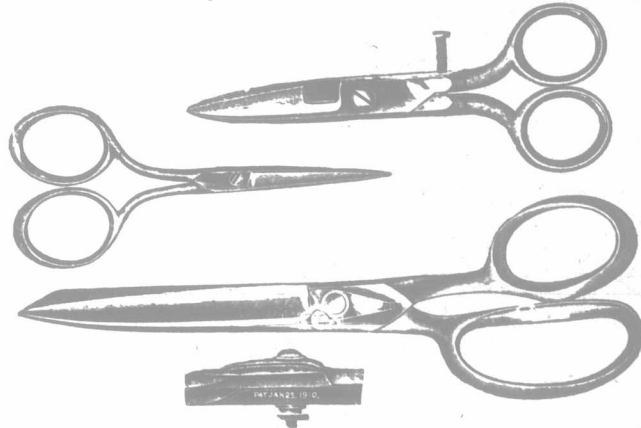
"Bring the light in here!" he commanded eagerly, as he once more entered the hut.

The sergeant brought his lantern, and together the two men explored the little place: with a rapid glance Chauvelin noted its contents: the cauldron placed close under an aperture in the wall, and containing the last few dying embers of burned charcoal, a couple of stools, overturned as if in the haste of sudden departure, then the fisherman's tools and his nets lying in one corner, and beside them, something small and white.

"Pick that up," said Chauvelin to the sergeant, pointing to this white scrap, "and bring it to me."

It was a crumpled piece of paper, evi-

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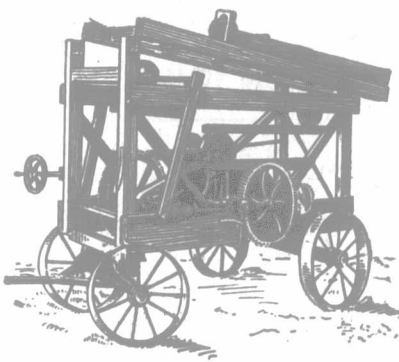
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