

"I may say that for a long time, nothing has delighted me so much as this idea. To dance to the memory of the victims, the guillotined, with a black crape round the arm—truly, Madame Tallien, this is poetry."

"A wild poetry," said the count; "it is deeper and more justified than the one at the bottom of the present performance, which brings the advocate Robespierre before us in Grecian costume to translate the ninth Thermidor into the antique."

"I anticipate great pleasure at the ball to-night," said the third lady, the viscountess l'Espinasse, with whom we are already acquainted. "The cream of Parisian society will meet there."

"More numerous than ever," Tallien affirmed. "We intend to celebrate this first ball with the greatest splendour."

"Ah, my dear," hissed Madame Tallien to her friend, Recamier, extending her hand to her, "did we ever think of this when we were in our cell?"

"Rather a home thrust," she replied jestingly. "Oh we have acquired great experience, though we are still so young." "There is something the matter," said the count de Chavrenx, interrupting the conversation, and leaning over the box. "The curtain had just fallen, and the crowd had most enthusiastically applauded the performance which was abusing Robespierre in the most cruel manner. But the Jacobins in the pit felt offended, and hissed. A dreadful tumult arose. Each party tried to triumph and cry down the other."

"Out with them!" furiously shouted the young people who had prepared for Madame Tallien so spirited a reception, raising their sticks threateningly against the men in carmagnoles and red caps.

For a moment they became intimidated. But suddenly a powerful voice called from the top gallery:

"Are you frightened, Jacobins? Do you allow Robespierre to be defied?"

Again the protestations of the Jacobins in the pit, who were more numerous than they appeared, caused a fearful noise. The whole public rose, crying for or against the Jacobins, applauding or hissing.

The powerful voice from the gallery again drowned the clamour.

"The Marseillaise!" he thundered in a commanding tone to the orchestra.

"Yes, the Marseillaise!" was echoed by a hundred voices, and the noise died away at this call.

The orchestra, accustomed to this demand, struck up at once the stirring hymn: the pit joined in a roaring chorus, then all the spectators. The curtain rose again: the actors and actresses on the stage sang with energy, the revolutionary air which had become the national one for all parties. The whole house rang with the wonderfully touching strains:

Aux armes, citoyens!  
Formez vos bataillons!  
Marchons, marchons!  
Qu'un sang impur  
Abreuve nos sillons!

The public being now in a more cheerful mood, the second act commenced. But soon the Jacobins, who had taken the manner in which the disturbance ended as a victory for themselves, became bolder, and began the struggle anew by hissing at passages in the play which were offensive to them. The other party became more irritated, as these passages exalted them and praised their heroes as the preservers of the country. Towards the conclusion of the performance the mutual provocations had again assumed such a shape that a disturbance was feared. In consequence of which Madame Tallien and her companions left the theatre, and were soon followed by most of the ladies in the boxes.

The pit being now left alone to fight their battle, the parties stood in a threatening attitude opposite each other—here Robespierre, there Thermidor. The Jacobins had again asked for the Marseillaise, but the Thermidorians furiously protested against it, demanding the Reveil du Peuple, a reactionary air which was zealously used by the royalist party.

Notwithstanding the shouts of the Jacobins, the musicians ordered this air, at the same time rushing with their sticks upon their adversaries and driving them out of the theatre. The more obvious their victory became, the more general and triumphant their song:

Peuple français, peuple de frères,  
Peux tu voir, sans frémir d'horreur,  
Les crimes arborer les bannières  
Du carnage et de la terreur?  
Tu souffres qu'une horde atroce  
Et d'assassins et de brigands  
Souille par son souffle traître  
Le territoire des vivants!

The play was over; the Jacobins had met with an ignominious defeat. But the haughty jeunesse dorée walked in close files from the theatre, singing as they went, ready to knock down any Jacobin who did not spring aside, or conceal his red cap. Thus the times had changed! Three months ago, while the Jacobins exercised their government of terror, no one would have ventured to complain of their misbehaviour or to ridicule a red cap—he would have been at once arrested as a bad patriot and as a suspected person, and without any ceremony taken in the afternoon of the next day to the headsman Sanson to be made a head shorter. At present, under the sun of Thermidor, all the frightened and suspicious persons of good breeding had come out of their hiding places, and the young men of education, students and secretaries, commercial clerks, and aristocratic descendants everywhere made war against the Jacobins, persecuting in them more the vulgarity of the mob than a defeated political party. Even a satirical ditty had found its way from the stage into the streets, and the men of Thermidor liked to sing when they met a group of red caps:

"Tyran, voleur, assassin,  
Dans un seul mot cela s'exprime,  
Et ce seul mot c'est jacobin."

The young people stopped at the next side street, irresolute whither to go.

"To the house of our good lady!" exclaimed the one who was the best known and most influential.

"Yes, yes! to the beautiful Cabarrus! To Madame de Thermidor!"

"Or of September!" quoth a young nobleman who had not forgotten that he, as Figaro said, had taken the trouble of being born.

"Wherefore September?" asked an elderly man. "Does she change her name with the months?"

"What an idea! Have you forgotten that Tallien, her husband, has played a part at the September assassinations? Why, therefore, should she not be called our good lady of September?"

"That does not suit at all."

"And how ungallant!"

"Well, to-night they will dance at Tallien's in honour of the victims. Is it not comical? The death of the king is decreed, and two years afterwards a quadrille is arranged to commemorate it."

"This is history."

"Ah bah, history! It is farce."

"No matter, what is the use of fighting about names?"

"We now cheer our good lady Tallien as three months ago Robespierre was cheered, eight months ago Danton, a year ago Marat, two years ago Vergniaud, and three years ago Mirabeau."

"And soon we will shout again, 'Long live the King!'"

"Hush!" they all cried warningly, reproving the young royalist who wished to call Madame Tallien the lady of September.

"That is forbidden! Such words should not be publicly pronounced."

"It must not be thought of, as it is unpatriotic. France is a republic, and desires no more a king."

"No more? This is nonsense."

"Then liberty would be done for! No one who wore a crown has yet espoused liberty."

They had arrived at the residence of Tallien. It was one of the old aristocratic hotels, the owner of which had emigrated, and whose property had been confiscated by the republic. Such estates at that time could be bought for a song. A great crowd had gathered on both sides of the porch to gaze at the guests arriving on foot and in carriages. Such a festival had not been heard of for a long time in Paris, and the crowd seemed to be delighted at seeing once more ladies in beautiful toilettes and gentlemen in costly costumes. The string of carriages was unbroken, and each carriage afforded new amusement to the spectators, on account of the variety of the toilettes.

A new era had begun, paying however the last tribute to the ancient régime. There came old aristocrats in the court-clothing of Louis XVI., ladies in the style of dress of Marie Antoinette; between them the youth in Grecian costume, in the dress of the beautiful Helena, adapted more for the summer-like climate of Nauplia than the autumn-like of the old Lætitia. The military dressed with republican simplicity, and officers in the uniform of the guard; and though the republican style of the army predominated, there were yet to be seen the powder and even the wigs of the time of royalty.

The "jeunesse dorée," from the theatre Feydeau, with the boldness of favourite cavaliers, had quickly formed a line, through which the guests had to pass. Each one that was recognized by them or one of them, did not escape the welcome of these daring young men, often neither too friendly nor too pleasant.

A very stout lady in the old French costume, with a thin old gentleman in powdered wig, stepped from their carriage.

"Look at Madame de Pompadour!" exclaimed one.

"Truly, she has been well fed during the revolution."

"Under the maximum?"

"Oh no, she has eaten her husband's rations, and is now going to the ball of the victims!"

"To dance the Carmagnole!"

Loud, malicious laughter followed her through the hall. Crimson with anger she mounted the steps.

"Ah, here General Barras is coming!" was now shouted, and a respectful silence greeted the commandant of Paris.

"Count Barras *enchanté*!" mocked one, while Barras in company with a young officer was entering the house.

"Who is this officer?" was asked. "No one knew."

"He has a face like an olive, and eyes like an eagle."

"He is a remarkably young general, who must have distinguished himself."

New personages arrived.

"Ah, the beautiful Grecians!" they exclaimed on seeing a group of young girls. "Ah, the bare feet!"

"Ah, the bare arms!" mocked another. "Ah, the bare bosom!"

"The d——, where sit the dresses?"

"Hush! This is the Thermidorian costume! These are the graces of our good lady Tallien!"

A graceful young lady stepped from a cab.

"Attention!" called one; "this is the widow of the guillotined General Beauharnais, another victim of the reign of terror."

"*A la bonne heure!* Long live Madame!" they shouted.

Then came again young ladies in the Grecian costume, accompanied by some officers.

"Leonidas!" they said.

"Why not Epaminondas?"

"Say rather Miltiades!"

Deputies arrived and were cheered. A venerable old man with two young ladies on his arms appeared.

"Do you know him?" was asked, when they had passed.

"Oh yes, it is Count Montreuil, an excellent man!"

"Aha, the new prophet!"

"An object! He deserves respect, I tell you. He has borne the revolution like a true nobleman."

"Have we not done the same? Oh, who talks here of nobility? Nobility is abolished, except the one of the heart."

"He is a strange fanatic!"

Only at long intervals carriages were now arriving, most of the guests had come; the hour appointed for the commencement of the festival had long since passed. The crowd being unable any longer to satisfy their curiosity disappeared. The Muscadins also were about to leave, and repair to their coffee-house, where they intended to play and drink.

"Let us first apprise our good lady of our presence. Her guard does not march to their quarters without having wished her a good night."

"A serenade! a serenade!" they shouted.

"Yes, a serenade," replied their leader; "this is soon said, but who will sing an air?"

"Stop!" cried a student. "I know one which I am willing to sing. I have composed it myself."

"Let us hear it!"

"You others," said the student preparing to commence, "shall join in the chorus. Let us go to the court-yard, where we shall be better heard."

The young men crossed the hall, and were not prevented by the porter, as they performed such scenes here every evening.

In the court-yard they observed the splendidly lit-up windows of the salons, in which the festival took place. The gay dancing music greeted their ears; as soon as it stopped the student in a beautiful tenor began to sing his elegy.

The song was heard in the salons, and beautiful girls were listening at the half-open windows to the touching melody. Thérèse with a gracious smile was gazing down on them, waving her lace-handkerchief.

"Long live Madame Tallien! Our good lady of Thermidor!" Thus shouting, the young men marched away.

We will now mount the staircase covered with rich carpets and decorated with exotic plants, to see the queen of the festival in her realm.

The old luxury that had been scared away by the reign of terror had revived. Servants in rich liveries were crossing the salons, offering refreshments on silver salvers. Tallien was doing the honours of the house to the ladies, while his wife beaming with joy answered to the flatteries and gallantries of the gentlemen. All the political, military and social celebrities of Paris had assembled here to-night—men of all factions, with the exception of the Jacobin. In the large salon they were dancing with a cheerfulness and cordiality as if they wished to express in their rhythmic movements the bliss of being allowed, after the rough days of the reign of terror, to pay homage to the muses. The ladies in their rare and splendid toilettes wore a black bow on their left shoulder, the gentlemen a black crape round their right arm. It seemed more like a Greek festival of the Olympiades than a Parisian reunion. Even the music, though arranged for dances, had a grave character. Elegies were interwoven with coquettish, insinuating airs. The dancers showed none the less the striking contrast which the recollection of the victims formed with the pleasure of the moment. They turned about in easy, unerring vibrations, with serious faces and in perfect quiet, being absorbed either in the recollection of dear friends, or in the enjoyment of the dance. The spectators, intermixed with the dancers, formed an element of their own, surrounding the different quadrilles, without in the least hindering or disturbing them.

Madame Tallien, our good lady of Thermidor, was the heroine of the day, of this Thermidorian time, this epoch of beautiful ladies crowned by the revolution. Radiant with the youthful beauty of twenty summers, she now saw realized what she had once dreamt in Bordeaux, when she pointed out to her preserver Tallien the proud aim of his life. He was the most illustrious among those who ruled France at this time of transition; she was worshipped and honoured like a queen, all her rivals coding willingly to her the sceptre of fashion, and doing homage to her in her own house. There were the gentle, amiable Madame Recamier and Josephine de Beauharnais, her companions in prison, and now the adored of the salons. There was Madame Fréron trying to surpass her in the magnificence of her soirées, and yet recognizing her as more fortunate and important. She was surrounded by every one, and the ladies in their Grecian costume seemed to have come from Olympus to hold court on the cavalry of Paris. All eyes followed her, observing her graceful carriage, her gentle smile; the charm of the witty language of the salons prevailed again, after having been so long superseded by political discourses and phrases.

Commandant Barras, with the young general whom he had introduced, and who had a face like an olive and eyes like an eagle, now approached the circle of beautiful ladies who surrounded the most beautiful of all, the Spaniard Cabarrus, Madame Tallien.

"Noble citizen," said he, addressing her in the more gallant republican style; for he who was almost dictator would neither abrogate the republican, nor even the former Jacobin. "Allow me to introduce to you a valiant officer who desires the happiness of being admitted into your salons. It is the conqueror of Toulon, Brigadier-General Bonaparte from Ajaccio."

Madame Tallien bowed to him in her most gracious manner.

"Such a recommendation makes you doubly welcome to me, citizen general," said she. "Oh, I remember your heroic deed. You drove the English from French territory. I was in Bordeaux at the time."

"I scarcely ventured to hope," replied he, "that so small a deed would make a lasting impression on a lady."

"You are mistaken, general. The ladies are the warmest adorners of heroes. But allow me to introduce you to my two friends; Madame Recamier and Madame de Beauharnais, widow of the unfortunate general."

Bonaparte bowed timidly to the ladies, and when he raised again his head, his eyes were fixed on the gentle face of Josephine, and he blushed when she said to him:

"How is it, general, that you are in Paris? Such an officer should not be distant from the army!"

"Oh, citizen ———," stammered he.

"The general has leave of absence," replied General Barras in his stead.

"Yes, ladies," resumed he in an energetic voice. "I have been thrown aside since you have obtained the sway."

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame Tallien in surprise. "How can I understand this?"

"You, general, are perhaps a Jacobin?" asked little Recamier shyly.

"I am a Frenchman, Madame, and a republican," replied Bonaparte proudly. "Above all I am a soldier and know as such how to do my duty. But I was always looked upon as the friend of the younger Robespierre, as a Jacobin, and not as a soldier who has deserved no reproach. I have been suspended—yes, if the deputies of my native land had been questioned, I would have lost my head."

"Yes," remarked Barras, "such things must exasperate a brave officer. But an opportunity will soon be found to repair this injustice."

"For this reason, general," said Madame Tallien to Barras, "you have taken your brother officer under your protection?"

"Under my special protection," replied he. "I am sorry that no commandership is vacant just now, so as to use my influence in his behalf." He extended his hand to Bonaparte, adding cordially: "Rely upon me, friend. Enjoy in the meantime the pleasures of Paris." He then withdrew.

Bonaparte, who was a little out of humour on account of this explanation of his position, was also going to leave the ladies, but Madame de Beauharnais stopped him with the words:

"Do you not dance, general?"

"Dance?" asked he, embarrassed either by this question, or by the kindly tone of the speaker. "I dance very badly, Madame. I have never learned it."

To be continued.