

THE BEAUTIFUL PRISONER.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

St. Just commanded Cardourel, who usually called twice every day at his office, to accompany the commissioner of the police to Montreuil.

No one felt more happy than Cardourel. All the plans he had devised were going to be realized; he could now be revenged upon Thérèse Cabarrus and Tallien, and satisfy his ambition of playing an important game. He repaired to the police-commissioner, and informing him of the order he had received, contrived with him a formal stratagem for the arrest of the woman he so much hated. When the officer, who was an easy-going and not very intelligent man, heard from Cardourel the former history of Thérèse Cabarrus, and considered at the same time his own instructions, he had not the least doubt in Cardourel's assertion, that this affair was a matter of great consequence, requiring all precautionary measures; and as Cardourel gave further to understand, that he was required to act as a confidential man in this undertaking, the officer, not to spoil anything, resigned himself entirely to Cardourel's direction. He intended, with the assistance of two policemen, to effect the arrest, without making much noise, as he was recommended to do. Cardourel, however, prevailed on him to take with him a number of secret agents of the police, for the purpose of surrounding the castle on all sides.

In two close carriages the police-commissioner and his agents started before day-break the next morning for the castle of Montreuil. There, near the grated gate, Cardourel with his spies, whom he had selected from his associates, stepped out, and instructed the commissioner not to return with the prisoner to Paris before being apprized by him to do so. While Cardourel with his spies were entering the bush to guard the back of the castle, the commissioner pulled the bell at the gate, whereupon a servant coming down the road, enquired before opening the gate for their errand. The servant having noticed, not without mistrust and fear, the red scarf of the officer.

"Open the gate," said the officer; "I come in the name of the law."

"I dare not open the gate without the count's special order," answered the servant.

"In this case you will deliver this letter to the count; I am waiting for his answer."

The servant went back with the letter to the castle, where no one anticipated such a visit which should break the peace of the congregation.

Count Montreuil was in his study, talking to Benoit about Thérèse Cabarrus, who had given him, the evening before, an account how she had become acquainted with the former turnkey. The old count had taken the liveliest interest in this narrative, as not only the noble behaviour of Benoit gave him great satisfaction, but the beautiful woman exercised a powerful charm over him. The previous evening, when he had conducted her for the first time to his church, he had prophesied that she would become a convert, and would greatly participate in the establishing of the reign of peace.

The count had no sooner read the letter of Robespierre than he grew deadly pale, exclaiming in his first alarm:

"My God, is it possible! Madame de Fontenay is to be arrested!"

The servant trembled, and Benoit sent forth a cry of terror.

"She!" groaned he. "Poor unfortunate."

"I am asked to deliver her, who is confided to my care, to the mirmidons of the law," continued the count less excitedly, but his noble forehead became contracted. "Impossible! I cannot do it. And yet, how can I save her? What shall I do, not to violate hospitality and to avoid a resistance, which is as useless as it is pernicious."

"Sir," cried Benoit in great excitement, interrupting the count, "I will save her! I will effect her escape through the subterranean passage while you are negotiating with the police."

His animated eyes were fixed on the count, his breast heaved, his breath came short and quick.

"This is the only resource, Benoit," replied the count after a while gravely. "Act my son, hurry! In the mean time I will receive the officers."

Benoit was already off to Thérèse's room. He threw open the door, and in his enthusiasm of being able to save her, exclaimed:

"Hasten, Madame; the police are here to arrest you! Come with me, I will save you!"

Thérèse Cabarrus, in deshabille, which she was just in the act of exchanging for her evening dress, started back on the sudden entrance and words of Benoit, and gazed incredulously and anxiously on him.

"What do you say?" answered she. "I shall flee? Where to?"

"Oh, do not hesitate!" cried he vehemently, while she quickly threw a black silk robe around her. "Every minute is precious. The police are already in the park."

He drew her out of the room, along the corridor. Here the count came to meet them; he beckoned to them with both his hands to hurry.

"Go with him, Madame, to save yourself. I will pretend to know nothing of your flight."

Benoit arrived in the balcony-room with Thérèse who, trembling with anxiety, and speechless with amazement, was watching him while he pushed back the carpet and opened the trap-door.

"Follow me," he requested her in the greatest agitation. "Be not afraid. By this road escape is possible."

For a moment she hesitated descending the ladder to the dark cellar; she then proffered her hand to Benoit. He drew his arms around her, and carried her down the ladder.

"Oh, Madame," whispered he, "how grateful I am for the opportunity of doing you this service."

She pressed his hands and replied:

"You do not know how much I am indebted to you, my friend?"

He pressed impetuously her hand to his lips, drew a deep sigh, but suddenly recovering, exclaimed:

"We must hurry, or we are lost!"

He moved quickly down the passage, while Madame de Fontenay stopped near the ladder and eagerly watched his proceedings. With a kick he threw open the wicket by which the passage to the water was gained. A stream of light penetrated through the rather large opening, and showed the surface of the rivulet, which was scarcely twice as broad as the length of the small boat. Benoit now pushed the boat over the rollers down into the water, and timidly gazing round, stepped into the boat and helped Thérèse, who had meanwhile approached into it, and with one stroke of the oar arrived at the opposite bank.

The fugitives alighted, and without uttering a word, hastened through the leafless forest, not knowing the direction in which

your neck by it. Ask the beautiful woman if I have not longer had the honour of her acquaintance than you, her newest lover!"

"Wretch," indignantly burst out Benoit. "What madness do you utter? Say what your intentions are; why are you insulting this woman, who is under my protection?"

"Under your protection? ho, ho! Is the red-haired Tallien no longer her protector? Away with you, simpleton! Well," added he with a malicious grin, addressing Thérèse, "you must allow me this time to take you under my protection."

Gilbert seized in mock gallantry the arm of the unfortunate woman, who only required this touch to regain her full self-possession. Her black eyes flashed, her cheeks became crimson, and the quiver of her lips betrayed the violence of her emotion. With the force of revolted pride and unutterable abhorrence she pushed the offender from her.

"Villain that you are," she exclaimed, "if I were a man I would remind you of the slap on the ear which you have received in Bordeaux! Are you not ashamed," continued she turning to the agents, "of making common cause with such a wretch? Are you not Frenchmen who are accustomed to protect women from insult?"

The agents looked at each other bewildered.

"Ah, citizen," remarked one of them, "our commands are to arrest you."

"Yes," said Gilbert, pressing forward and now rudely seizing her arm; "I arrest you, aristocrat."

She shrieked, more with anger than fear. Benoit sprang forward, attempting to free her from this wretch.

"Begone, I tell you," cried Cardourel, "or you will repent it!"

"Yes, Benoit," said she entreatingly. "Go back to the castle—go, you cannot help me. I have fallen into the hands of this man, and shall feel only too happy if the prison protects me from him. You will apprise citizen Tallien of this attack; perhaps you can use other means in my behalf. Go, my friend, I thank you!"

She then followed Gilbert, while Benoit with tears in his eyes and in mute despair at his helplessness, looked after till she had disappeared round the corner of the castle.

Silently, with proud disdain, Thérèse Cabarrus suffered the rude familiarity of Cardourel and his insulting words. He was now pouring out all the hatred and malice which had agitated him since their first meeting, and rejoiced in humbling and annoying her by his remarks, in which enjoyment the agents did not disturb him. He had previously arranged with them to allow him this gratification of his vengeance.

They arrived at the rivulet which had to be crossed to reach the carriage-road to the castle. The agents had previously thrown the trunk of a tree across to form a bridge and to gain the forest from the back of the building. This slippery narrow bridge was evidently a very dangerous passage for a lady.

"I shall carry her over," declared Cardourel, and his eyes sparkled maliciously as he prepared to execute this threat.

"You shall not do so," replied she, and with a powerful jerk freed herself from him. Gilbert lost his balance and slid from the slippery bank, upon which he stood, into the water.

Without deigning him a look, she easily crossed the bridge. Two of the agents followed her, while the others laughingly helped to extricate Cardourel from his involuntary bath. Highly enraged he ran after her, and it seemed as if he was going to revenge himself actively upon her for the mishap that had befallen him, and which was the more unfortunate for him, as it prevented him, on account of his wet clothes, from taking a seat beside her in the carriage, and compelled him to walk back to Paris.

When he reached Thérèse Cabarrus, she was already under the care of three officers, of the police, who were conducting her to a carriage. They were surprised by seeing her a prisoner, as they had been informed by the count that she had already left his castle, and that he did not know whither she had gone. After having superficially searched the castle, they had just left it when the agents appeared with their prisoner, to whom the commissioner now presented his warrant sanctioning the arrest.

"Do then your duty!" answered Thérèse resignedly, "and do not tarry, but bring me to the place of my destination."

The carriage with her and three officers then quickly drove off to Paris, to the prison of the Luxembourg.

The next morning Robespierre received the report of the police-commissioner respecting the particulars of the arrest of Thérèse, with which he had been entrusted, and took back the warrant, without which the accusation could not be made. He locked it up in a drawer which contained his most important papers. He then repaired to the convention, which held its session in the castle of the Tuileries.

As he was going to take his seat, he had to pass that of Tallien. He saw the young deputy in a gloomy mood, indulging in a deep sorrow, which convinced him that Tallien was already informed of what had taken place.

He slightly tapped his shoulder, and most graciously smiling, whispered to him:

"You know it already, my friend?"

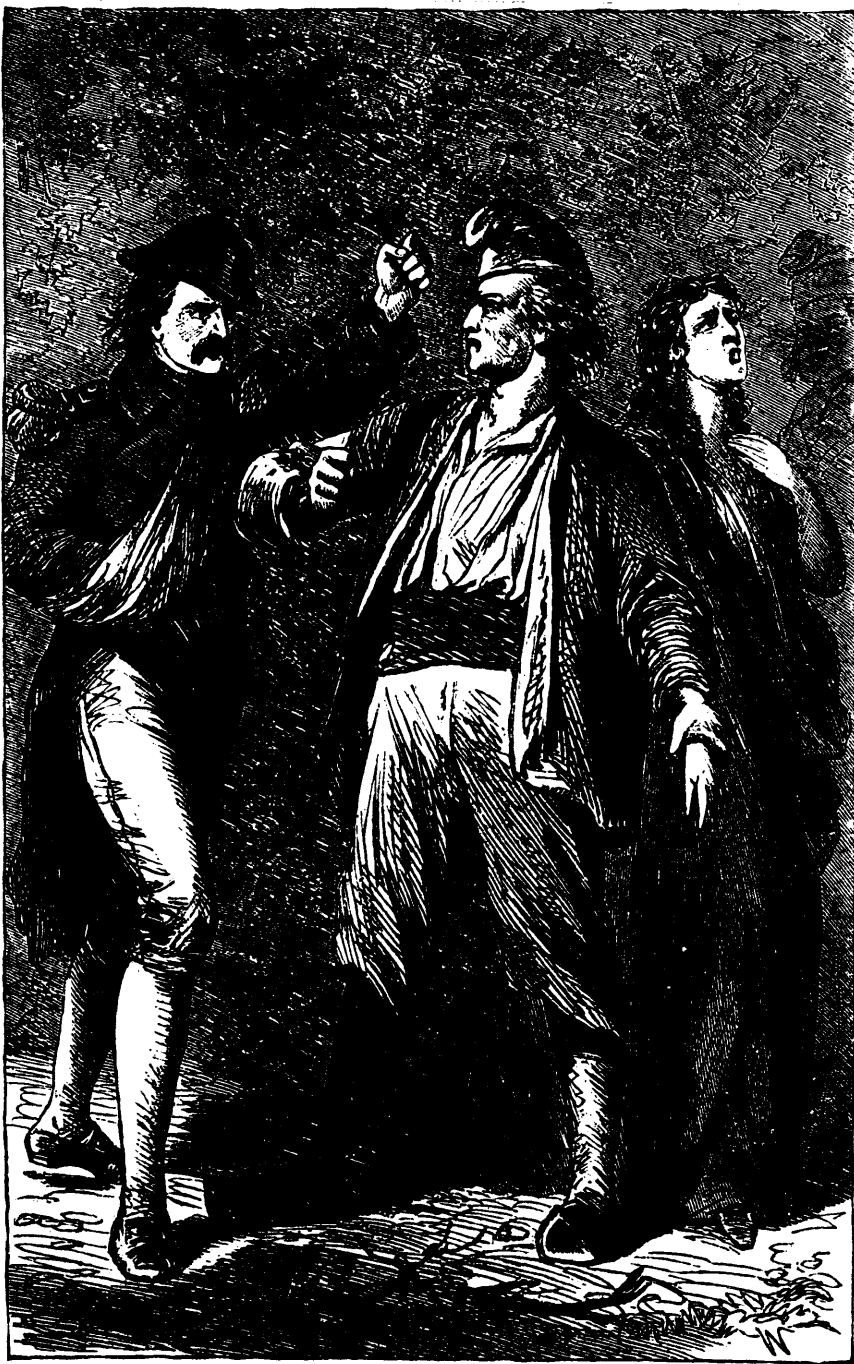
Tallien could hardly refrain from flying into a passion, but checked himself and answered in a tone of friendly reproach.

"I did not expect this from you."

"Because you are an egotist. I have meant it well with you."

"I know it."

"Well, and nevertheless you have tried to deceive me. The suspected are never brought to Montreuil."



The arrest of Thérèse Cabarrus.

they were going. But they had taken scarcely a hundred steps when they stopped with fear on hearing the threatening voices of their pursuers.

"Benoit!" cried she in great alarm, while clinging to his maimed arm. "We are lost."

He stood paralyzed, and saw no hope. Pale with fright, he gazed on the approaching pursuers.

"For God's sake!" suddenly shrieked Thérèse. "There comes that miserable Cardourel."

Benoit also recognized the man whom he recollected from the wine-house of "The Red Cap." He knew that his name was Cardourel, and that he was president of the revolutionary committee in Bordeaux.

"How has he come hither?" muttered he.

"He will cause my death! My friend, do not follow me to destruction! Save yourself!"

"Eh," said Cardourel sneeringly, as he saw the fugitives surrounded by his associates. "Thus we meet again, Madame de Fontenay? Who would have thought that I should meet you fleeing with a servant quite alone in the forest?"

Thérèse cast on him a glance of the deepest contempt. Benoit, however, trembling with rage, approached him and said:

"Who are you and these men? Why do you, like highwaymen, attack us?"

Cardourel and the agents burst out laughing.

"Look at Madame's brave cavalier! Eh, good friend, do not meddle too much with this business, or you will endanger