

teries. Three thousand peasants were masters of Pornic. They cried, "Long live the English!" A letter from Santerre to the Convention, which Barère was reading, ended with these words:

"Seven thousand peasants attacked Vannes. We repulsed them, and they have left in our hands four cannon"——

"And how many prisoners?" interrupted a voice.

Barère continued: "Postscript of the letter. 'We have no prisoners, because we no longer make any.'"

Marat, standing motionless, did not listen; he appeared absorbed by a stern preoccupation. He held in his hand a paper, which he crumpled between his fingers; had any one unfolded it, he might have read these lines in Momoro's writing—probably a response to some question he had been asked by Marat—"No opposition can be offered to the full powers of delegated commissioners, above all, those of the Committee of Public Safety. Genissieux said, in the sitting of May 6th, 'Each Commissioner is more than a king; it had no effect. Life and death are in their hands. Massade to Angers; Trullard to Saint Amand; Nyon near General Marcé; Parrien to the army of Sables; Millier to the army of Niort; they are all powerful. The Club of the Jacobins has gone so far as to name Parrien brigadier-general. The circumstances excuse everything. A delegate from the Committee of Public Safety holds in check a commander-in-chief."

Marat ceased crumpling the paper, put it in his pocket, and walked slowly toward Montaut and Chabot, who continued to converse, and had not seen him enter.

Chabot was saying: "Maribon, or Montaut, listen to this: I have just come from the Committee of Public Safety"

"And what is being done there?"

"They are setting a priest to watch a noble."

"Ah!"

"A noble like yourself"——

"I am not a noble," interrupted Montaut.

"To be watched by a priest"——

"Like you."

"I am not a priest," said Chabot.

They both began to laugh.

"Make your story explicit," resumed Montaut.

"Here it is, then. A priest named Cimourdain is delegated with full powers to a viscount named Gauvain; this viscount commands the exploring column of the army of the coast. The question will be to keep the nobleman from trickery and the priest from treason."

"It is very simple," replied Montaut. "It is only necessary to bring death into the matter."

"I come for that," said Marat.

They looked up.

"Good morning, Marat," said Chabot. "You rarely attend our meetings."

"My doctor has ordered me baths," answered Marat.

"One should beware of baths," returned Chabot. "Seneca died in one."

Marat smiled.

"Chabot, there is no Nero here."

"Yes, there is you," said a rude voice.

It was Danton who passed and ascended to his seat. Marat did not turn round. He thrust his head in between Montaut and Chabot.

"Listen; I come about a serious matter; one of us three must propose to-day the draft of a decree to the Convention."

"Not I," said Montaut; "I am never listened to. I am a marquis."

"And I," said Chabot, "I am not listened to. I am a Capuchin."

"And I," said Marat, "I am not listened to. I am Marat."

There was a silence among them.

It was not safe to interrogate Marat when he appeared preoccupied, still Montaut hazarded a question.

"Marat, what is the decree that you wish passed?"

"A decree to punish with death any military chief who allows a rebel prisoner to escape."

Chabot interrupted. "The decree exists; it was passed in April."

"Then it is just the same as if it did not exist," said Marat. "Everywhere, all through Vendée, anybody who chooses helps prisoners to escape and gives them an asylum with impunity."

"Marat, the fact is the decree has fallen into disuse."

"Chabot, it must be put into force anew."

"Without doubt."

"And to do that the Convention must be addressed."

"Marat, the Convention is not necessary; the Committee of Public Safety will suffice."

"The end will be gained," added Montaut, "if the Committee of Public Safety cause the decree to be placarded in all the communes of the Vendée, and make two or three good examples."

"Of men in high position," returned Chabot; "of generals."

Marat grumbled: "In fact, that will answer."

"Marat," resumed Chabot, "go yourself and say that to the Committee of Public Safety."

Marat stared straight into his eyes, which was not pleasant even for Chabot.

"The Committee of Public Safety," said he, "sits in Robespierre's house—I do not go there."

"I will go myself," said Montaut.

"Good," said Marat.

The next morning an order from the Committee of Public Safety was sent in all directions among the towns and villages of Vendée, enjoining the publication and strict execution of the decree of death against any person conniving at the escape of brigands and captive insurgents. This decree proved only a first step; the Convention was to go further than that. A few months later, the 11th Brumaire, Year II. (November, 1793), when Laval opened its gates to the Vendean fugitives, the Convention decreed that any city giving asylum to the rebels should be demolished and destroyed. On their side, the princes of Europe, in the manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick, conceived by the emigrants and drawn up by the Marquis de Linnon, intendant of the Duke of Orleans, had declared that every Frenchman taken with arms in his hand should be shot, and that, if a hair of the king's head fell, Paris should be razed to the ground.

Cruelty against barbarity.

BOOK THE FOURTH

I.—THE FORESTS.

There were at that time seven ill-famed forests in Brittany. The Vendean war was a revolt of priests. This revolt had the forests as auxiliaries. These spirits of darkness aid one another.

The seven Black Forests of Brittany were—the forest of Fougères, which stopped the way between Dol and Avranches; the forest of Princé, which was eight leagues in circumference; the forest of Paimpol, full of ravines and brooks, almost inaccessible on the side toward Baignon, with an easy retreat upon Concornel, which was a royalist town; the forest of Rennes, from whence could be heard the tocsin of the Republican parishes—always numerous in the neighbourhood of the cities,—it was in this forest that Puyssage lost Focard; the forest of Machecoul, which had Charette for its wild beast; the forest of Garnache, which belonged to the Trémouilles, the Gauvains, and the Rohans; and the forest of Brocéliande, which belonged to the fairies.

One gentleman of Brittany bore the title of Lord of the Seven Forests; this was the Viscount de Fontenay, Breton prince. For the Breton prince existed distinct from the French prince. The Rohans were Breton princes. Garnier de Saintes, in his report to the Convention of the 15th Nivose, Year II., thus distinguishes the Princes de Talmont: "This Capet of the brigands, Sovereign of Maine and of Normandy." The record of the Breton forests, from 1792 to 1800, would form a history of itself, mingling like a legend with the vast undertaking of the Vendée.

History has its truth: Legend has hers. Legendary truth is wholly different from historic. Legendary truth is invention that has reality for a result. Still history and legend have the same aim, that of depicting the external type of humanity.

The Vendée can only be completely understood by adding legend to history; the latter is needed to describe its entirety, the former the details.

We may say, too, that the Vendée is worth the pains. The Vendée was a prodigy.

This war of the Ignorant, so stupid and so splendid, so abject yet magnificent, was at once the desolation and the pride of France. The Vendée is a wound which is at the same time a glory.

At certain crises human society has its enigmas; enigmas which resolve themselves into light for sages, but which the ignorant in their darkness translate into violence and barbarism. The philosopher is slow to accuse. He takes into consideration the agitation caused by these problems which cannot pass without casting about them shadows dark as those of the storm-cloud. If one wishes to comprehend the Vendée, one must picture to oneself this antagonism: on one side the French Revolution, on the other the Breton peasant. In face of these unparalleled events—an immense promise of all benefits at once—a fit of rage for civilization—an excess of maddened progress—an improvement that exceeded measure and comprehension—must be placed this grave, strange, savage man, with an eagle glance and flowing hair, living on milk and chestnuts, his ideas bounded by his thatched roof, his hedge, and his ditch, able to distinguish the sound of each village bell in the neighbourhood, using water only to drink, wearing a leather jacket covered with silken arabesques—uncultivated but clad embroidered—tattooing his garments as his ancestors the Celts had tattooed their faces, looking up to a master in his executioner, speaking a dead language, which was like forcing his thoughts to dwell in a tomb; driving his bullocks, sharpening his scythe, winnowing his black grain, kneading his buckwheat biscuit, venerating his plough first, his grandmother next, believing in the Blessed Virgin and the White Lady, devoted to the altar but also to the lofty mysterious stone standing in the midst of the moor; a labourer in the plain, a fisher on the coast, a poacher in the thicket, loving his kings, his lords, his priests, his very lice; pensive, often immovable for entire hours upon the great deserted seashore, a melancholy listener to the sea.

Then ask yourself if it would have been possible for this man to welcome that light.

II.—THE PEASANTS.

The peasant had two points on which he leant—the field which nourished him, the wood which concealed him.

It is difficult to picture to oneself what those Breton forests really were—they were towns. Nothing could be more secret, more silent, and more savage than those inextricable entanglements of thorns and branches; those vast thickets were the home of immobility and silence; no solitude could present an appearance more death-like and sepulchral; yet if it had been possible to fell those trees at one blow, as by a flash of lightning, a swarm of men would have stood revealed in those shades. There were wells, round and narrow, masked by coverings of stones and branches, the interior at first vertical, then horizontal, spreading out underground like funnels, and ending in dark chambers; Cambyes found such in Egypt, and Westermann found the same in Brittany. There they were found in the desert, here in the forest; the caves of Egypt held dead men, the caves of Brittany were filled with the living. One of the wildest glades of the wood of Misdon, perforated by galleries and cells amid which came and went a mysterious society, was called "The Great City." Another glade, not less deserted above-ground and not less inhabited beneath, was styled "The Place Royal." This subterranean life had existed in Brittany from time immemorial. From the earliest days man had there hidden flying from man. Hence those hiding-places, like the dens of reptiles, hollowed out below the trees. They dated from the era of the Druids, and certain of those crypts were as ancient as the cromlechs. The larvae of legend and the monsters of history all passed across that shadowy land. Teutatès, Cæsar, Hoël, Nornenes, Geoffrey of England, Alain of the iron glove, Pierre Manclerc, the French house of Blois, the English house of Montfort, kings and dukes, the nine barons of Brittany, the judges of the Great Days, the Comte de Nantes contesting with the Counts of Rennes, highwaymen, banditti, Free Lances, René II., Viscount de Rohan, the governors for the king, "the good Duke of Chaulnes," aiming at the peasants under the windows of Madame de Sévigné; in the fifteenth century the butcheries

by the nobles; in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the wars of religion; in the eighteenth century the thirty thousand dogs trained to hunt men; beneath these pitiless trappings the inhabitants made up their minds to disappear. Each in turn—the Troglodytes to escape the Celts, the Celts to escape the Romans, the Bretons to escape the Normans, the Huguenots to escape the Roman Catholics, the smugglers to escape the excise-officers—took refuge first in the forests and then underground. The resource of hunted animals. It is this to which tyranny reduces nations. During two thousand years despotism under all its forms, conquest, fudality, fanaticism, taxes, beset this wretched, distracted Brittany; a sort of inexorable battue, which only ceased under one shape to recommence under another. Men hid underground. When the French Republic burst forth, Terror, which is a species of rage, was already latent in human souls, and when the Republic burst forth the dens were ready in the woods. Brittany revolted, finding itself oppressed by this forced deliverance—a mistake natural to slaves.

III.—CONNIVANCE OF MEN AND FORESTS.

The gloomy Breton forests took up anew their ancient rôle, and were the servants and accomplices of this rebellion, as they had been of all others. The sub-soil of every forest was a sort of madrepore, pierced and traversed in all directions by a secret highway of mines, cells, and galleries. Each one of these blind cells could shelter five or six men. There are in existence certain strange lists which enable one to understand the powerful organization of that vast peasant rebellion. In Ille-et-Vilaine, in the forest of Pertre, the refuge of the Prince de Talmont, not a breath was to be heard, not a human trace to be found, yet there were collected six thousand men under Focard. In the forest of Meulac, in Morbihan, not a soul was to be seen, yet it held eight thousand men. Still, these two forests, Pertre and Meulac, do not count among the great Breton forests. If one trod there, the explosion was terrible. Those hypocritical corpses, filled with fighters waiting in a sort of underground labyrinth, were like enormous black sponges, whence, under the pressure of the gigantic foot of Revolution, civil war spouted out.

Invisible battalions lay there in wait. These untrackable armies wound along beneath the Republican troops; burst suddenly forth from the earth and sank into it again, sprang up in numberless force and vanished at will, gifted with a strange ubiquity and power of disappearance; an avalanche at one instant, gone like a cloud of dust at the next; colossal, yet able to become pigmies at will; giants in battle, dwarfs in ability to conceal themselves—jaguars with the habits of moles.

There were not only the forests, there were the woods. Just as below cities there are villages, below these forests there were woods and underwoods.

The forests were united by the labyrinths (everywhere scattered) of the woods. The ancient castles, which were fortresses, the hamlets, which were camps, the farms, which were inclosures for ambushes and snarls, traversed by ditches and palisades by trees, were the meshes of the net in which the Republican armies were caught.

This whole formed what was called the *Bocage*.

There was the wood of Misdon, which had a pond in its centre, and which was held by Jean Chouan; there was the wood of Genes, which belonged to Taillefer; there was the wood of Huisserie, which belonged to Gouge-le-Bruant; the wood of Charnie, where lurked Courtille-le-Batard, called Saint Paul, chief of the camp of the Vache Noire; the wood of Burgault, which was held by that enigmatical Monsieur Jaques, reserved for a mysterious end in the vault of Juvardell; there was the wood of Charreau, where Pimousse and Petit-Prince, when attacked by the garrison of Châteauneuf, rushed forward and seized the grenadiers in the Republican rank; about the waist and carried them back prisoners; the wood of La Henreuse, the witness of the rout of the military post of Longue-Faze; the wood of Aulne, whence the route between Rennes and Laval could be overlooked; the wood of La Travalle, which a prince of La Tremouille had won at a game of bowls; the wood of Lorges, in the Collis-du-Nord, where Charles de Boisshardy reigned after Bernard de Villeneuve; the wood of Baynard, near Fontenay, where Lescure offered battle to Chalbos, who accepted the challenge, although one against five; the wood of La Durondais, which in old days had been disputed by Alain le Redru and Hérispoux, the son of Charles the Bold; the wood of Croqueloup, upon the edge of that moor where Coquereau sheared the prisoners; the wood of Croix-Bataille, which witnessed the Homeric insults of Jambe d'Argent to Morière, and of Morière to Jambe d'Argent; the wood of La Saudraie, which we have seen being searched by a Paris regiment. There were many others besides. In several of these forests and woods there were not only subterranean villages grouped about the burrow of the chief, but also actual hamlets of low huts, hidden under the trees, sometimes so numerous that the forest was filled with them. Frequently they were betrayed by the smoke. Two of these hamlets of the wood of Misdon have remained famous; Lorrière, near the pond, and the group of cabins called the Rue de Bau, on the side toward Saint-Ouen-les-Torts.

The women lived in the huts and the men in the cellars. In carrying on the war, they utilised the galleries of the fairies and the old Celtic mines. Food was carried to the buried men. Some were forgotten and died of hunger; but these were awkward fellows who had not known how to open the mouth of their well. Usually the cover, made of moss and branches, was so artistically fashioned that although impossible on the outside to distinguish from the surrounding turf, it was very easy to open and close on the inside. These hiding-places were dug with care. The earth taken out of the well was flung into some neighbouring pond. The sides and bottom were carpeted with ferns and moss. These nooks were called "lodges." The men were as comfortable there as could be expected, considering that they lacked light, fire, bread, and air.

It was a difficult matter to unbury themselves and come up among the living without great precaution. They might find themselves between the legs of an army on the march. These were formidable woods; snares with a double trap. The Blues dared not enter, the Whites dared not come out.

(To be continued.)