

THE BEAUTIFUL PRISONER.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.

CHAPTER I.

"THE RED CAP."

An icy wind sweeps the streets of the old, good and rich city of Bordeaux, and a stranger would hardly believe that he was in the south of France, on the vine-clad shores of the Garonne. It is the middle of November in the year 1793, but Bordeaux at this season looks rarely so grey and sad. Damp and cold blows the westerly wind from the near ocean; a thick, grey sky is lying melancholy over the country, and the broad Garonne, muddier than ever from the late heavy rains, is hurrying down its waters past the capital of the department of the Gironde, which is spread crescent-like on its left. Scarcely a person is seen in the streets, which look gloomy and desolate, both in the old city with its high wooden houses and narrow, angular lanes, and in the suburb Les Chartrons which was built in a beautiful and rich style, fifty years before, by the royal intendant, Aubert de Tournay. Now and then an oil-lamp of a lantern, suspended by a chain across the street, is shedding its dim reddish light on the muddy pavement, or a few roguish-looking fellows, clad in clogs, jackets, and their greasy red cotton caps on their heads, are passing to repair to the nightly meeting of the Jacobin Club, one of them with a dark lantern showing the road and cursing at the heaps of sweepings, gathered in the streets. Every good citizen prefers staying at home and shutting himself up with his family in the most distant room, in order not to remind his best friend of his existence; for inexorable and terrible rules the revolution, headed by Robespierre, St. Just, Couthon, and the bloody train of the revolutionary tribunals. No one is certain that he will survive the next day; or that he will not be denounced as suspicious by some one, and then be imprisoned and tried by the form of law. Such trials in this time of terror are, however, but a dragging of the prisoner before the tribunal and from thence to the guillotine. The great revolution is calling its enemies to a fearful account, cutting down both the innocent and the guilty, in order that the idea of equality may enter into the perception of the nation.

It was therefore strange to notice the glare of a light through the two basement windows of one of the old houses which stand near the large, gloomy cathedral in the square, and this light was bright enough to be seen from a considerable distance. Above the small front-door a red glass lamp is placed which sheds its light on a black sign-board bearing the inscription: "The Red Cap." This is father Claudet's wine-house, and was for long years in the old city a notorious place for the best Graves and Macon being tapped from the cask. Before "The Red Cap" had gained credit as the emblem of the *Sans-culottes* in France, father Claudet's wine-house bore another name, and was called and known in Bordeaux for more than thirty years as "The Three Crowns." But such a name was no longer lawful, since France had become a republic, and had banished all words and signs recalling in the least the emblems of royalty.

Father Claudet, moreover, was a good patriot, belonging with his whole body and soul to the republic; he, therefore, one fine day, of his own accord, removed his old sign-board and replaced it with the one bearing the above *Sans-culotte* inscription. All patriots and Jacobins were well pleased with this change, and if ever there was in the old city a tavern where a genuine *Sans-culotte* considered it patriotic to ally his thirst for wine, it was at "The Red Cap."

There were that evening a number of guests in the not very large, more deep than broad, room, the back part of which served as the bar. Everything was plain and simple at father Claudet's, as had always been the case and is becoming to a true Jacobin who is ever ready to suspect the rich. This bar is an eaken counter provided with shelves and drawers, and on this counter are arranged the long, high and greenish glasses and earthen cans, in which the wine is filled for the guests, from the cask. Along the wall behind the bar there are placed on a trestle the different casks containing the pressed products of the shores of the Garonne, the white Graves and blood-red Montferat. This is about all that father Claudet possesses to satisfy his guests, tables and chairs of course excepted, and republican plainness did not require any more. In the room there is a long, unpolished oaken table which does not present at night the cleanliness which it possessed in the morning. A smaller table is placed against the window-sill and another round one in the corner formed by the chimney on the other side of the room. Along the walls behind the tables reddish-brown benches are placed, whilst in the inner part of the room wooden chairs of the same colour are arranged for the visitors. The only ornament which is noticed on the tables, is a bright, high bowl of brass used as a receptacle for the tobacco ash, and a cup with paper tapers to light the pipes. As it is evening, father Claudet has placed on all the tables brass candle-sticks with lighted

tallow candles to the snuffing of which he attends himself, if one of the guests does not save him that trouble by snuffing the candle with his fingers.

You could observe from the outside through the badly closed red curtains, that there was still at this late hour a large and merry crowd at "The Red Cap." After entering the hall and opening the door of the guests' room, an aristocratic nose could hardly venture to penetrate further, as a hot and disagreeable vapour of wine and tobacco fills the air, which falls heavily on the lungs and eyes, but in which a genuine patriot is pleased to carouse. Father Claudet first claims your attention, bustling about in shirt-sleeves, . . . and clogs, snuffing candles, fetching fresh wine and otherwise attending to his guests. He was a portly man of fifty, badly marked with small pox; by his vacant gaze and hanging underlip you might easily imagine that he had no more intellect than was actually necessary for his business; yet those who saw father Claudet at other hours, knew that he was cunning, and perhaps one of his cleverest tricks was when he removed his sign with the three crowns of Aquitania, England and France—to which Bordeaux belonged successively—and hoisted in its stead the flag of the red cap.

On a chair at the corner of the bar sits mother Claudet knitting her blue woollen stockings. She is a little thin woman with an honest, clever face, paying apparently no attention to the conversation of the guests but superintending the cash. On her lap lies a thick leather port-folio into which she puts all the assignats her husband faithfully delivers to her; she also takes from this port-folio the worthless bills she gives as change. At that time paper-money was of little value; an old louis-d'or was worth 3000 francs and sometimes more, and many a guest at father Claudet's spent on a few pints of Medoc 500 francs of assignats, while the lucky one, who had yet silver, could pay the same with one franc and might still receive from mother Claudet a few copper sous as change.

When there is a pause in this money-exchanging business mother Claudet talks to her daughter who is busy behind the bar tapping the wine into glasses or cans,—the latter is a gentle, quiet, dark-haired girl of eighteen, with large fiery eyes which she sometimes casts around upon the table and guests. Lucie is not the only child of father Claudet, he has a son who

In such a time of Jacobin virtue, an aristocratic coat could easily cause its wearer to be suspected, and everyone took good care not to show too much sympathy with the tailor. Honor and security now belonged to poverty, and the citizen, if he wished to be appreciated, wore a black shaggy jacket and carnagnole. Everything appeared upside down—a world of disorder had crept in and the seats of the gods were taken by men who had been kicked before by their fellowmen in their madness for superiority, and now commenced acting the part of gods themselves.

"I tell you, cousin, it served them right," cried Gilbert, continuing a dispute he had conducted chiefly with a tall, stout man of his own age. "Those Girondists were traitors, and it is well that their heads are cut off at last. The twenty-two, the men of Brissot and Gaudet, of Bergniaud and Gensonne, were the villains that tried to upset the republic."

"Brissotins," furiously responded a little thin man, whose character as a clerk could not be mistaken. "The 31st of October, when the d— took them, is a day of glory. Let us drink to it, friends!"

The little man lifted his can of wine and, apparently, took a long draught, then set it upon the table with a great noise. The others followed his example.

"Well," said the cousin of Gilbert, Henry Tourguet, a sausage dealer, with a good-natured, intelligent appearance, "now a days, when more persons' heads fall than chickens, there is no great consequence about those twenty-two. But," continued he, pointing to the latest number of the "Père-Duchêne," one of those cynic papers published in Paris by the picture brankers, Herbert and Chaumette, "it is not necessary to abuse the dead."

"Abuse them? what do you mean by it?" asked Gilbert. "Do you wish us to praise these villains?"

"This is not a French custom," exclaimed Henry.

"But it is patriotic, patriotic," shouted the little clerk.

"Just so, Timm," retorted Gilbert Cardourel, the member of the revolutionary committee. "Cousin Henry should well understand that. Ha," he said, addressing himself to the latter, "do you think that Madame Veto would have been executed, if those Brissotins had been spared? Do you regret them also?"

"Wherefore regret them?" answered Henry; "what . . ."

"The Austrian woman!" put in Timm, the clerk, interrupting him. "She will no more plot against us. Ha! friends, long live Samson, who has cut her throat." Again lifting his can he drank a long draught as before.

"The scoundrel Dumouriez! was he not one of the plotters also?" retorted Gilbert, challenging his cousin. "Did they not attack Robespierre, the great Robespierre, who watches for the safety of the republic?"

"And which were the persons with whom the infamous Corday, who assassinated the great Marat, hazarded and made friendship?" added an old grim-looking man, in a deep bass voice. "Those Girondists!"

"Yes, with Barbaroux," affirmed Gilbert, finishing his can.

"For this reason he has been beheaded," said Henry Tourguet. "He was half dead when they dragged him on the scaffold."

"Justice does not allow a criminal to take his own life, and Balaze's body, with

twenty-one other Girondists, were executed in Paris. If Barbaroux, after he had attempted, in the cavern of St. Emilion, to shoot himself, had died,—he would have been treated like Balaze and been beheaded in the same manner at Bordeaux, together with his associates, Gaudet and Salles."

"Yes, cousin," said Henry Tourguet in a tone of persuasion. "He himself has conspired against those Girondists. Have not Pethion and Buzot been torn to pieces by wolves near Bordeaux?"

"You see," added Gilbert triumphantly; "not one of them will be left behind!"

"If they do escape the guillotine, Satan will take them in another way," affirmed the old man. "The air in the republic must become purified."

"Air and light!" shouted Timm. "Long live the republic! and may the hangman take all its enemies!"

Timm taking again his can and drinking apparently with great thirst, the old man seized his arm, exclaiming in a jeering tone: "Little man! how soon will you finish this bird's bowl, if you take these long draughts?"

This question was answered by a shout of laughter to the great annoyance of the little clerk, who, considering his half can of wine as an inexhaustible fountain, though it was long since finished, would have liked to continue drinking with emphasis his toasts for the great republic and its government of terror. He was quietly bearing his sorrow for not being better rewarded by the republic, and not being able to pay for more than a half can of wine.

"I thought," answered he timidly, "that there was yet wine left in the can."

"It shall be again filled," cried Gilbert. "You are a true *Sans-culotte*, Timm, you are thirsting for blood."

"Yes, yes!" affirmed the little man. "Blood has to flow. Ha! citizen Cardourel, you are a model of patriotism and fraternity!"



The Beautiful Prisoner.—"Is this the hand of a moderate?"

serves as a true *Sans-culotte* in the army and has fought on the Rhine against the Prussians.

The principal customers sit round the long table, discussing politics and frequently become noisy and excited. The greatest brawler amongst them is a young man of twenty-eight, with a bloated face and debauched appearance; he might be considered handsome with his blonde locks which fall in disorder round his forehead, had not passion and roughness impressed upon him the stamp of vulgarity. The pursed-up mouth, the flabby cheeks, the strong chin on which a thin downy beard grows, show plainly the low character of this man, and the devastation which dissipation and bad inclinations have wrought on him. But Gilbert Cardourel was at that time a much dreaded man. He being the son of a wealthy vintager near Bordeaux, sacrificed his whole inheritance in the service of the revolution, spending four years of his life in drinking at the wine-houses of Bordeaux, flirting with the girls as though he were in Paris, and shaming like a true Jacobin in all revolts and riots, and firing the populace by his exciting speeches. After the fall of the Girondists, who had their stronghold in Bordeaux, which he and many other *Sans-culottes*, after a bloody conflict, had subdued, he became a member of the revolutionary committee, one of those 44,000 Jacobin tribunals which the all-powerful mother society of Paris had instituted in all parts of France, to prepare the work for the accusers and hangmen.

This member of the committee, by whose information the mirmidons of the law brought any citizen to prison and before the revolutionary tribunals, had not a very dignified appearance. A long jacket of grey woollen stuff, knee-breeches of blue sailors' cloth, blue woollen stockings, and clogs, a rather dirty shirt which left his thick neck and a portion of his chest bare—this was the costume of Gilbert Cardourel, a truly patriotic costume which was not surpassed in elegance by any at the table.