Part 1
An Ambuscade

Early in the year VIII., at the beginning of Vendemiaire, or, to conform to our own calendar, towards the close of September, 1799, a hundred or so of peasants and a large number of citizens, who had left Fougeres in the morning on their way to Mayenne, were going up the little mountain of La Pelerine, half-way between Fougeres and Ernee, a small town where travellers along that road are in the habit of resting. This company, divided into groups that were more or less numerous, presented a collection of such fantastic costumes and a mixture of individuals belonging to so many and diverse localities and professions that it will be well to describe their characteristic differences, in order to give to this history the vivid local coloring to which so much value is attached in these days,—though some critics do assert that it injures the representation of sentiments.

Many of the peasants, in fact the greater number, were barefooted, and wore no other garments than a large goatskin, which covered them from the neck to the knees, and trousers of white and very coarse linen, the ill-woven texture of which betrayed the slovenly industrial habits of the region. The straight locks of their long hair mingling with those of the goatskin hid their faces, which were bent on the ground, so completely that the garment might have been thought their own skin, and they themselves mistaken at first sight for a species of the animal which served them as clothing. But through this tangle of hair their eyes were presently seen to shine like dew-drops in a thicket, and their glances, full of human intelligence, caused fear rather than pleasure to those who met them. Their heads were covered with a dirty head-gear of red flannel, not unlike the Phrygian cap which the Republic had lately adopted as an emblem of liberty. Each man carried over his shoulder a heavy stick of knotted oak, at the end of which hung a linen bag with little in it. Some wore, over the red cap, a coarse felt hat, with a broad brim adorned by a sort of woollen chenille of many colors which was fastened round it. Others were clothed entirely in the coarse linen of which the trousers and wallets of all were made, and showed nothing that was distinctive of the new order of civilization. Their long hair fell upon the collar of a round jacket with square pockets, which reached to the hips only, a garment peculiar to the peasantry of western France. Beneath this jacket, which was worn open, a waistcoat of the same linen with large buttons was visible. Some of the company marched in wooden shoes; others, by way of economy, carried them in their hand. This costume, soiled by long usage, blackened with sweat and dust, and less original than that of the other men, had the historic merit of serving as a transition between

the goatskins and the brilliant, almost sumptuous, dress of a few individuals dispersed here and there among the groups, where they shone like flowers. In fact, the blue linen trousers of these last, and their red or yellow waistcoats, adorned with two parallel rows of brass buttons and not unlike breast-plates, stood out as vividly among the white linen and shaggy skins of their companions as the corn- flowers and poppies in a wheat-field. Some of them wore wooden shoes, which the peasants of Brittany make for themselves; but the greater number had heavy hob-nailed boots, and coats of coarse cloth cut in the fashion of the old regime, the shape of which the peasants have religiously retained even to the present day. The collars of their shirts were held together by buttons in the shape of hearts or anchors. The wallets of these men seemed to be better than those of their companions, and several of them added to their marching outfit a flask, probably full of brandy, slung round their necks by a bit of twine. A few burgesses were to be seen in the midst of these semi- savages, as if to show the extremes of civilization in this region. Wearing round hats, or flapping brims or caps, high-topped boots, or shoes and gaiters, they exhibited as many and as remarkable differences in their costume as the peasants themselves. About a dozen of them wore the republican jacket known by the name of "la carmagnole." Others, well-to-do mechanics, no doubt, were clothed from head to foot in one color. Those who had most pretension to their dress wore swallow-tail coats or surtouts of blue or green cloth, more or less defaced. These last, evidently characters, marched in boots of various kinds, swinging heavy canes with the air and manner of those who take heart under misfortune. A few heads carefully powdered, and some queues tolerably well braided showed the sort of care which a beginning of education or prosperity inspires. A casual spectator observing these men, all surprised to find themselves in one another's company, would have thought them the inhabitants of a village driven out by a conflagration. But the period and the region in which they were gave an altogether different interest to this body of men. Any one initiated into the secrets of the civil discords which were then agitating the whole of France could easily have distinguished the few individuals on whose fidelity the Republic might count among these groups, almost entirely made up of men who four years earlier were at war with her.

One other and rather noticeable sign left no doubt upon the opinions which divided the detachment. The Republicans alone marched with an air of gaiety. As to the other individuals of the troop, if their clothes showed marked differences, their faces at least and their attitudes wore a

uniform expression of ill-fortune. Citizens and peasantry, their faces all bore the imprint of deepest melancholy; their silence had something sullen in it; they all seemed crushed under the yoke of a single thought, terrible no doubt but carefully concealed, for their faces were impenetrable, the slowness of their gait alone betraying their inward communings. From time to time a few of them, noticeable for the rosaries hanging from their necks (dangerous as it was to carry that sign of a religion which was suppressed, rather than abolished) shook their long hair and raised their heads defiantly. They covertly examined the woods, and paths, and masses of rock which flanked the road, after the manner of a dog with his nose to the wind trying to scent his game; and then, hearing nothing but the monotonous tramp of the silent company, they lowered their heads once more with the old expression of despair, like criminals on their way to the galleys to live or die.

The march of this column upon Mayenne, the heterogeneous elements of which it was composed, and the divers sentiments which evidently pervaded it, will explain the presence of another troop which formed the head of the detachment. About a hundred and fifty soldiers, with arms and baggage, marched in the advance, commanded by the *chief of a half-brigade*. We may mention here, for the benefit of those who did not witness the drama of the Revolution, that this title was made to supersede that of colonel, proscribed by patriots as too aristocratic. These soldiers belonged to a demi-brigade of infantry quartered at Mayenne. During these troublous times the inhabitants of the west of France called all the soldiers of the Republic "Blues." This nickname came originally from their blue and red uniforms, the memory of which is still so fresh as to render a description superfluous. A detachment of the Blues was therefore on this occasion escorting a body of recruits, or rather conscripts, all displeased at being taken to Mayenne where military discipline was about to force upon them the uniformity of thought, clothing, and gait which they now lacked entirely.

This column was a contingent slowly and with difficulty raised in the district of Fougeres, from which it was due under the levy ordered by the executive Directory of the Republic on the preceding 10th Messidor. The government had asked for a hundred million of francs and a hundred thousand men as immediate reinforcements for the armies then fighting the Austrians in Italy, the Prussians in Germany, and menaced in Switzerland by the Russians, in whom Suwarow had inspired hopes of the conquest of France. The departments of the West, known under the name of La Vendee, Brittany, and a portion of Lower Normandy,

which had been tranquil for the last three years (thanks to the action of General Hoche), after a struggle lasting nearly four, seemed to have seized this new occasion of danger to the nation to break out again. In presence of such aggressions the Republic recovered its pristine energy. It provided in the first place for the defence of the threatened departments by giving the responsibility to the loyal and patriotic portion of the inhabitants. In fact, the government in Paris, having neither troops nor money to send to the interior, evaded the difficulty by a parliamentary gasconade. Not being able to send material aid to the faithful citizens of the insurgent departments, it gave them its "confidence." Possibly the government hoped that this measure, by arming the insurgents against each other, would stifle the insurrection at its birth. This ordinance, the cause of future fatal reprisals, was thus worded: "Independent companies of troops shall be organized in the Western departments." This impolitic step drove the West as a body into so hostile an attitude that the Directory despaired of immediately subduing it. Consequently, it asked the Assemblies to pass certain special measures relating to the independent companies authorized by the ordinance. In response to this request a new law had been promulgated a few days before this history begins, organizing into regular legions the various weak and scattered companies. These legions were to bear the names of the departments,— Sarthe, Orne, Mayenne, Ille-et-Vilaine, Morbihan, Loire-Inferieure, and Maine-et-Loire. "These legions," said the law, "will be specially employed to fight the Chouans, and cannot, under any pretence, be sent to the frontier."

The foregoing irksome details will explain both the weakness of the Directory and the movement of this troop of men under escort of the Blues. It may not be superfluous to add that these finely patriotic Directorial decrees had no realization beyond their insertion among the statutes. No longer restrained, as formerly, by great moral ideas, by patriotism, nor by terror, which enforced their execution, these later decrees of the Republic created millions and drafted soldiers without the slightest benefit accruing to its exchequer or its armies. The mainspring of the Revolution was worn-out by clumsy handling, and the application of the laws took the impress of circumstances instead of controlling them.

The departments of Mayenne and Ille-et-Vilaine were at this time under the command of an old officer who, judging on the spot of the measures that were most opportune to take, was anxious to wring from Brittany every one of her contingents, more especially that of Fougeres, which was known to be a hot-bed of "Chouannerie." He hoped by this

means to weaken its strength in these formidable districts. This devoted soldier made use of the illusory provisions of the new law to declare that he would equip and arm at once all recruits, and he announced that he held at their disposal the one month's advanced pay promised by the government to these exceptional levies. Though Brittany had hitherto refused all kinds of military service under the Republic, the levies were made under the new law on the faith of its promises, and with such promptness that even the commander was startled. But he was one of those wary old watch-dogs who are hard to catch napping. He no sooner saw the contingents arriving one after the other than he suspected some secret motive for such prompt action. Possibly he was right in ascribing it to the fact of getting arms. At any rate, no sooner were the Fougeres recruits obtained than, without delaying for laggards, he took immediate steps to fall back towards Alencon, so as to be near a loyal neighborhood,—though the growing disaffection along the route made the success of this measure problematical. This old officer, who, under instruction of his superiors, kept secret the disasters of our armies in Italy and Germany and the disturbing news from La Vendee, was attempting on the morning when this history begins, to make a forced march on Mayenne, where he was resolved to execute the law according to his own good pleasure, and fill the half- empty companies of his own brigade with his Breton conscripts. The word "conscript" which later became so celebrated, had just now for the first time taken the place in the government decrees of the word *requisitionnaire* hitherto applied to all Republican recruits.

Before leaving Fougeres the chief secretly issued to his own men ample supplies of ammunition and sufficient rations of bread for the whole detachment, so as to conceal from the conscripts the length of the march before them. He intended not to stop at Ernee (the last stage before Mayenne), where the men of the contingent might find a way of communicating with the Chouans who were no doubt hanging on his flanks. The dead silence which reigned among the recruits, surprised at the manoeuvring of the old republican, and their lagging march up the mountain excited to the very utmost the distrust and watchfulness of the chief—whose name was Hulot. All the striking points in the foregoing description had been to him matters of the keenest interest; he marched in silence, surrounded by five young officers, each of whom respected the evident preoccupation of their leader. But just as Hulot reached the summit of La Pelerine he turned his head, as if by instinct, to inspect the anxious faces of the recruits, and suddenly broke silence. The slow

advance of the Bretons had put a distance of three or four hundred feet between themselves and their escort. Hulot's face contorted after a fashion peculiar to himself.

"What the devil are those dandies up to?" he exclaimed in a sonorous voice. "Creeping instead of marching, I call it."

At his first words the officers who accompanied him turned spasmodically, as if startled out of sleep by a sudden noise. The sergeants and corporals followed their example, and the whole company paused in its march without receiving the wished for "Halt!" Though the officers cast a first look at the detachment, which was creeping like an elongated tortoise up the mountain of La Pelerine, these young men, all dragged, like many others, from important studies to defend their country, and in whom war had not yet smothered the sentiment of art, were so much struck by the scene which lay spread before their eyes that they made no answer to their chief's remark, the real significance of which was unknown to them. Though they had come from Fougeres, where the scene which now presented itself to their eyes is also visible (but with certain differences caused by the change of perspective), they could not resist pausing to admire it again, like those dilettanti who enjoy all music the more when familiar with its construction.

From the summit of La Pelerine the traveller's eye can range over the great valley of Couesnon, at one of the farthest points of which, along the horizon, lay the town of Fougeres. From here the officers could see, to its full extent, the basin of this intervale, as remarkable for the fertility of its soil as for the variety of its aspects. Mountains of gneiss and slate rose on all sides, like an ampitheatre, hiding their ruddy flanks behind forests of oak, and forming on their declivities other and lesser valleys full of dewy freshness. These rocky heights made a vast enclosure, circular in form, in the centre of which a meadow lay softly stretched, like the lawn of an English garden. A number of evergreen hedges, defining irregular pieces of property which were planted with trees, gave to this carpet of verdure a character of its own, and one that is somewhat unusual among the landscapes of France; it held the teeming secrets of many beauties in its various contrasts, the effects of which were fine enough to arrest the eye of the most indifferent spectator.

At this particular moment the scene was brightened by the fleeting glow with which Nature delights at times in heightening the beauty of her imperishable creations. While the detachment was crossing the valley, the rising sun had slowly scattered the fleecy mists which float above the meadows of a September morning. As the soldiers turned to

look back, an invisible hand seemed to lift from the landscape the last of these veils—a delicate vapor, like a diaphanous gauze through which the glow of precious jewels excites our curiosity. Not a cloud could be seen on the wide horizon to mark by its silvery whiteness that the vast blue arch was the firmament; it seemed, on the contrary, a dais of silk, held up by the summits of the mountains and placed in the atmosphere, to protect that beautiful assemblage of fields and meadows and groves and brooks.

The group of young officers paused to examine a scene so filled with natural beauties. The eyes of some roved among the copses, which the sterner tints of autumn were already enriching with their russet tones, contrasting the more with the emerald-green of the meadows in which they grew; others took note of a different contrast, made by the ruddy fields, where the buckwheat had been cut and tied in sheaves (like stands of arms around a bivouac), adjoining other fields of rich ploughed land, from which the rye was already harvested. Here and there were dark slate roofs above which puffs of white smoke were rising. The glittering silver threads of the winding brooks caught the eye, here and there, by one of those optic lures which render the soul —one knows not how or why—perplexed and dreamy. The fragrant freshness of the autumn breeze, the stronger odors of the forest, rose like a waft of incense to the admirers of this beautiful region, who noticed with delight its rare wild-flowers, its vigorous vegetation, and its verdure, worthy of England, the very word being common to the two languages. A few cattle gave life to the scene, already so dramatic. The birds sang, filling the valley with a sweet, vague melody that quivered in the air. If a quiet imagination will picture to itself these rich fluctuations of light and shade, the vaporous outline of the mountains, the mysterious perspectives which were seen where the trees gave an opening, or the streamlets ran, or some coquettish little glade fled away in the distance; if memory will color, as it were, this sketch, as fleeting as the moment when it was taken, the persons for whom such pictures are not without charm will have an imperfect image of the magic scene which delighted the still impressionable souls of the young officers.

Thinking that the poor recruits must be leaving, with regret, their own country and their beloved customs, to die, perhaps, in foreign lands, they involuntarily excused a tardiness their feelings comprehended. Then, with the generosity natural to soldiers, they disguised their indulgence under an apparent desire to examine into the military position of the land. But Hulot, whom we shall henceforth call the commandant, to

avoid giving him the inharmonious title of "chief of a half-brigade" was one of those soldiers who, in critical moments, cannot be caught by the charms of a landscape, were they even those of a terrestrial paradise. He shook his head with an impatient gesture and contracted the thick, black eyebrows which gave so stern an expression to his face.

"Why the devil don't they come up?" he said, for the second time, in a hoarse voice, roughened by the toils of war.

"You ask why?" replied a voice.

Hearing these words, which seemed to issue from a horn, such as the peasants of the western valleys use to call their flocks, the commandant turned sharply round, as if pricked by a sword, and beheld, close behind him, a personage even more fantastic in appearance than any of those who were now being escorted to Mayenne to serve the Republic. This unknown man, short and thick-set in figure and broad- shouldered, had a head like a bull, to which, in fact, he bore more than one resemblance. His nose seemed shorter than it was, on account of the thick nostrils. His full lips, drawn from the teeth which were white as snow, his large and round black eyes with their shaggy brows, his hanging ears and tawny hair,—seemed to belong far less to our fine Caucasian race than to a breed of herbivorous animals. The total absence of all the usual characteristics of the social man made that bare head still more remarkable. The face, bronzed by the sun (its angular outlines presenting a sort of vague likeness to the granite which forms the soil of the region), was the only visible portion of the body of this singular being. From the neck down he was wrapped in a "sarrau" or smock, a sort of russet linen blouse, coarser in texture than that of the trousers of the less fortunate conscripts. This "sarrau," in which an antiquary would have recognized the "saye," or the "sayon" of the Gauls, ended at his middle, where it was fastened to two leggings of goatskin by slivers, or thongs of wood, roughly cut,—some of them still covered with their peel or bark. These hides of the nanny-goat (to give them the name by which they were known to the peasantry) covered his legs and thighs, and masked all appearance of human shape. Enormous sabots hid his feet. His long and shining hair fell straight, like the goat's hair, on either side of his face, being parted in the centre like the hair of certain statues of the Middle-Ages which are still to be seen in our cathedrals. In place of the knotty stick which the conscripts carried over their shoulders, this man held against his breast as though it were a musket, a heavy whip, the lash of which was closely braided and seemed to be twice as long as that of an ordinary whip. The sudden apparition of this strange being seemed easily explained. At first sight some of the

officers took him for a recruit or conscript (the words were used indiscriminately) who had outstripped the column. But the commandant himself was singularly surprised by the man's presence; he showed no alarm, but his face grew thoughtful. After looking the intruder well over, he repeated, mechanically, as if preoccupied with anxious thought: "Yes, why don't they come on? do you know, you?"

"Because," said the gloomy apparition, with an accent which proved his difficulty in speaking French, "there Maine begins" (pointing with his huge, rough hand towards Ernee), "and Bretagne ends."

Then he struck the ground sharply with the handle of his heavy whip close to the commandant's feet. The impression produced on the spectators by the laconic harangue of the stranger was like that of a tom-tom in the midst of tender music. But the word "harangue" is insufficient to reproduce the hatred, the desires of vengeance expressed by the haughty gesture of the hand, the brevity of the speech, and the look of sullen and cool-blooded energy on the countenance of the speaker. The coarseness and roughness of the man,— chopped out, as it seemed by an axe, with his rough bark still left on him,—and the stupid ignorance of his features, made him seem, for the moment, like some half-savage demigod. He stood stock-still in a prophetic attitude, as though he were the Genius of Brittany rising from a slumber of three years, to renew a war in which victory could only be followed by twofold mourning.

"A pretty fellow this!" thought Hulot; "he looks to me like the emissary of men who mean to argue with their muskets."

Having growled these words between his teeth, the commandant cast his eyes in turn from the man to the valley, from the valley to the detachment, from the detachment to the steep acclivities on the right of the road, the ridges of which were covered with the broom and gorse of Brittany; then he suddenly turned them full on the stranger, whom he subjected to a mute interrogation, which he ended at last by roughly demanding, "Where do you come from?"

His eager, piercing eye strove to detect the secrets of that impenetrable face, which never changed from the vacant, torpid expression in which a peasant when doing nothing wraps himself.

"From the country of the Gars," replied the man, without showing any uneasiness.

"Your name?"

"Marche-a-Terre."

"Why do you call yourself by your Chouan name in defiance of the law?"

Marche-a-Terre, to use the name he gave to himself, looked at the commandant with so genuine an air of stupidity that the soldier believed the man had not understood him.

"Do you belong to the recruits from Fougeres?"

To this inquiry Marche-a-Terre replied by the bucolic "I don't know," the hopeless imbecility of which puts an end to all inquiry. He seated himself by the roadside, drew from his smock a few pieces of thin, black buckwheat-bread,—a national delicacy, the dismal delights of which none but a Breton can understand,—and began to eat with stolid indifference. There seemed such a total absence of all human intelligence about the man that the officers compared him in turn to the cattle browsing in the valley pastures, to the savages of America, or the aboriginal inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope. Deceived by his behavior, the commandant himself was about to turn a deaf ear to his own misgivings, when, casting a last prudence glance on the man whom he had taken for the herald of an approaching carnage, he suddenly noticed that the hair, the smock, and the goatskin leggings of the stranger were full of thorns, scraps of leaves, and bits of trees and bushes, as though this Chouan had lately made his way for a long distance through thickets and underbrush. Hulot looked significantly at his adjutant Gerard who stood beside him, pressed his hand firmly, and said in a low voice: "We came for wool, but we shall go back sheared."

The officers looked at each other silently in astonishment.

It is necessary here to make a digression, or the fears of the commandant will not be intelligible to those stay-at-home persons who are in the habit of doubting everything because they have seen nothing, and who might therefore deny the existence of Marche-a-Terre and the peasantry of the West, whose conduct, in the times we are speaking of, was often sublime.

The word "gars" pronounced "ga" is a relic of the Celtic language. It has passed from low Breton into French, and the word in our present speech has more ancient associations than any other. The "gais" was the principal weapon of the Gauls; "gaisde" meant armed; "gais" courage; "gas," force. The word has an analogy with the Latin word "vir" man, the root of "virtus" strength, courage. The present dissertation is excusable as of national interest; besides, it may help to restore the use of such words as: "gars, garcon, garconette, garce, garcette," now discarded from our speech as unseemly; whereas their origin is so warlike that we shall use them from time to time in the course of this history. "She is a famous 'garce'!" was a compliment little understood by Madame de Stael when it

was paid to her in a little village of La Vendee, where she spent a few days of her exile.

Brittany is the region in all France where the manners and customs of the Gauls have left their strongest imprint. That portion of the province where, even to our own times, the savage life and superstitious ideas of our rude ancestors still continue—if we may use the word—rampant, is called "the country of the Gars." When a canton (or district) is inhabited by a number of half-savages like the one who has just appeared upon the scene, the inhabitants call them "the Gars of such or such a parish." This classic name is a reward for the fidelity with which they struggle to preserve the traditions of the language and manners of their Gaelic ancestors; their lives show to this day many remarkable and deeply embedded vestiges of the beliefs and superstitious practices of those ancient times. Feudal customs are still maintained. Antiquaries find Druidic monuments still standing. The genius of modern civilization shrinks from forcing its way through those impenetrable primordial forests. An unheard-of ferociousness, a brutal obstinacy, but also a regard for the sanctity of an oath; a complete ignoring of our laws, our customs, our dress, our modern coins, our language, but withal a patriarchal simplicity and virtues that are heroic,—unite in keeping the inhabitants of this region more impoverished as to all intellectual knowledge than the Redskins, but also as proud, as crafty, and as enduring as they. The position which Brittany occupies in the centre of Europe makes it more interesting to observe than Canada. Surrounded by light whose beneficent warmth never reaches it, this region is like a frozen coal left black in the middle of a glowing fire. The efforts made by several noble minds to win this glorious part of France, so rich in neglected treasures, to social life and to prosperity have all, even when sustained by government, come to nought against the inflexibility of a population given over to the habits of immemorial routine. This unfortunate condition is partly accounted for by the nature of the land, broken by ravines, mountain torrents, lakes, and marshes, and bristling with hedges or earth-works which make a sort of citadel of every field; without roads, without canals, and at the mercy of prejudices which scorn our modern agriculture. These will further be shown with all their dangers in our present history.

The picturesque lay of the land and the superstitions of the inhabitants prevent the formation of communities and the benefits arising from the exchange and comparison of ideas. There are no villages. The rickety buildings which the people call homes are sparsely scattered through the wilderness. Each family lives as in a desert. The only meetings among

them are on Sundays and feast-days in the parish church. These silent assemblies, under the eye of the rector (the only ruler of these rough minds) last some hours. After listening to the awful words of the priest they return to their noisome hovels for another week; they leave them only to work, they return to them only to sleep. No one ever visits them, unless it is the rector. Consequently, it was the voice of the priesthood which roused Brittany against the Republic, and sent thousands of men, five years before this history begins, to the support of the first Chouannerie. The brothers Cottereau, whose name was given to that first uprising, were bold smugglers, plying their perilous trade between Laval and Fougeres. The insurrections of Brittany had nothing fine or noble about them; and it may be truly said that if La Vendee turned its brigandage into a great war, Brittany turned war into a brigandage. The proscription of princes, the destruction of religion, far from inspiring great sacrifices, were to the Chouans pretexts for mere pillage; and the events of this intestine warfare had all the savage moroseness of their own natures. When the real defenders of the monarchy came to recruit men among these ignorant and violent people they vainly tried to give, for the honor of the white flag, some grandeur to the enterprises which had hitherto rendered the brigands odious; the Chouans remain in history as a memorable example of the danger of uprousing the uncivilized masses of the nation.

The sketch here made of a Breton valley and of the Breton men in the detachment of recruits, more especially that of the "gars" who so suddenly appeared on the summit of Mont Pelerine, gives a brief but faithful picture of the province and its inhabitants. A trained imagination can by the help of these details obtain some idea of the theatre of the war and of the men who were its instruments. The flowering hedges of the beautiful valleys concealed the combatants. Each field was a fortress, every tree an ambush; the hollow trunk of each old willow hid a stratagem. The place for a fight was everywhere. Sharpshooters were lurking at every turn for the Blues, whom laughing young girls, unmindful of their perfidy, attracted within range,—for had they not made pilgrimages with their fathers and their brothers, imploring to be taught wiles, and receiving absolution from their wayside Virgin of rotten wood? Religion, or rather the fetichism of these ignorant creatures, absolved such murders of remorse.

Thus, when the struggle had once begun, every part of the country was dangerous,—in fact, all things were full of peril, sound as well as silence, attraction as well as fear, the family hearth or the open country.

Treachery was everywhere, but it was treachery from conviction. The people were savages serving God and the King after the fashion of Red Indians. To make this sketch of the struggle exact and true at all points, the historian must add that the moment Hoche had signed his peace the whole country subsided into smiles and friendliness. Families who were rending each other to pieces over night, were supping together without danger the next day.

The very moment that Commandant Hulot became aware of the secret treachery betrayed by the hairy skins of Marche-a-Terre, he was convinced that this peace, due to the genius of Hoche, the stability of which he had always doubted, was at an end. The civil war, he felt, was about to be renewed,—doubtless more terrible than ever after a cessation of three years. The Revolution, mitigated by the events of the 9th Thermidor, would doubtless return to the old terrors which had made it odious to sound minds. English gold would, as formerly, assist in the national discords. The Republic, abandoned by young Bonaparte who had seemed to be its tutelary genius, was no longer in a condition to resist its enemies from without and from within,—the worst and most cruel of whom were the last to appear. The Civil War, already threatened by various partial uprisings, would assume a new and far more serious aspect if the Chouans were now to attack so strong an escort. Such were the reflections that filled the mind of the commander (though less succinctly formulated) as soon as he perceived, in the condition of Marche-a-Terre's clothing, the signs of an ambush carefully planned.

The silence which followed the prophetic remark of the commandant to Gerard gave Hulot time to recover his self-possession. The old soldier had been shaken. He could not hinder his brow from clouding as he felt himself surrounded by the horrors of a warfare the atrocities of which would have shamed even cannibals. Captain Merle and the adjutant Gerard could not explain to themselves the evident dread on the face of their leader as he looked at Marche-a-Terre eating his bread by the side of the road. But Hulot's face soon cleared; he began to rejoice in the opportunity to fight for the Republic, and he joyously vowed to escape being the dupe of the Chouans, and to fathom the wily and impenetrable being whom they had done him the honor to employ against him.

Before taking any resolution he set himself to study the position in which it was evident the enemy intended to surprise him. Observing that the road where the column had halted was about to pass through a sort of gorge, short to be sure, but flanked with woods from which several

paths appeared to issue, he frowned heavily, and said to his two friends, in a low voice of some emotion:—

"We're in a devil of a wasp's-nest."

"What do you fear?" asked Gerard.

"Fear? Yes, that's it, *fear*," returned the commandant. "I have always had a fear of being shot like a dog at the edge of a wood, without a chance of crying out 'Who goes there?'"

"Pooh!" said Merle, laughing, "'Who goes there' is all humbug."

"Are we in any real danger?" asked Gerard, as much surprised by Hulot's coolness as he was by his evident alarm.

"Hush!" said the commandant, in a low voice. "We are in the jaws of the wolf; it is as dark as a pocket; and we must get some light. Luckily, we've got the upper end of the slope!"

So saying, he moved, with his two officers, in a way to surround Marche-a-Terre, who rose quickly, pretending to think himself in the way.

"Stay where you are, vagabond!" said Hulot, keeping his eye on the apparently indifferent face of the Breton, and giving him a push which threw him back on the place where he had been sitting.

"Friends," continued Hulot, in a low voice, speaking to the two officers. "It is time I should tell you that it is all up with the army in Paris. The Directory, in consequence of a disturbance in the Assembly, has made another clean sweep of our affairs. Those pentarchs,—puppets, I call them,—those directors have just lost a good blade; Bernadotte has abandoned them."

"Who will take his place?" asked Gerard, eagerly.

"Milet-Mureau, an old blockhead. A pretty time to choose to let fools sail the ship! English rockets from all the headlands, and those cursed Chouan cockchafers in the air! You may rely upon it that some one behind those puppets pulled the wire when they saw we were getting the worst of it."

"How getting the worst of it?"

"Our armies are beaten at all points," replied Hulot, sinking his voice still lower. "The Chouans have intercepted two couriers; I only received my despatches and last orders by a private messenger sent by Bernadotte just as he was leaving the ministry. Luckily, friends have written me confidentially about this crisis. Fouche has discovered that the tyrant Louis XVIII. has been advised by traitors in Paris to send a leader to his followers in La Vendee. It is thought that Barras is betraying the Republic. At any rate, Pitt and the princes have sent a man, a *ci-devant*, vigorous,

daring, full of talent, who intends, by uniting the Chouans with the Vendeans, to pluck the cap of liberty from the head of the Republic. The fellow has lately landed in the Morbihan; I was the first to hear of it, and I sent the news to those knaves in Paris. 'The Gars' is the name he goes by. All those beasts," he added, pointing to Marche-a-Terre, "stick on names which would give a stomach-ache to honest patriots if they bore them. The Gars is now in this district. The presence of that fellow"—and again he signed to Marche-a-Terre—"as good as tells me he is on our back. But they can't teach an old monkey to make faces; and you've got to help me to get my birds safe into their cage, and as quick as a flash too. A pretty fool I should be if I allowed that *ci-devant*, who dares to come from London with his British gold, to trap me like a crow!"

On learning these secret circumstances, and being well aware that their leader was never unnecessarily alarmed, the two officers saw the dangers of the position. Gerard was about to ask some questions on the political state of Paris, some details of which Hulot had evidently passed over in silence, but a sign from his commander stopped him, and once more drew the eyes of all three to the Chouan. Marche-a-Terre gave no sign of disturbance at being watched. The curiosity of the two officers, who were new to this species of warfare, was greatly excited by this beginning of an affair which seemed to have an almost romantic interest, and they began to joke about it. But Hulot stopped them at once.

"God's thunder!" he cried. "Don't smoke upon the powder-cask; wasting courage for nothing is like carrying water in a basket. Gerard," he added, in the ear of his adjutant, "get nearer, by degrees, to that fellow, and watch him; at the first suspicious action put your sword through him. As for me, I must take measures to carry on the ball if our unseen adversaries choose to open it."

The Chouan paid no attention to the movements of the young officer, and continued to play with his whip, and fling out the lash of it as though he were fishing in the ditch.

Meantime the commandant was saying to Merle, in a low voice: "Give ten picked men to a sergeant, and post them yourself above us on the summit of this slope, just where the path widens to a ledge; there you ought to see the whole length of the route to Ernee. Choose a position where the road is not flanked by woods, and where the sergeant can overlook the country. Take Clef-des-Coeurs; he is very intelligent. This is no laughing matter; I wouldn't give a farthing for our skins if we don't turn the odds in our favor at once."

While Merle was executing this order with a rapidity of which he fully understood the importance, the commandant waved his right hand to enforce silence on the soldiers, who were standing at ease, and laughing and joking around him. With another gesture he ordered them to take up arms. When quiet was restored he turned his eyes from one end of the road to the other, listened with anxious attention as though he hoped to detect some stifled sound, some echo of weapons, or steps which might give warning of the expected attack. His black eye seemed to pierce the woods to an extraordinary depth. Perceiving no indications of danger, he next consulted, like a savage, the ground at his feet, to discover, if possible, the trail of the invisible enemies whose daring was well known to him. Desperate at seeing and hearing nothing to justify his fears, he turned aside from the road and ascended, not without difficulty, one or two hillocks. The other officers and the soldiers, observing the anxiety of a leader in whom they trusted and whose worth was known to them, knew that his extreme watchfulness meant danger; but not suspecting its imminence, they merely stood still and held their breaths by instinct. Like dogs endeavoring to guess the intentions of a huntsman, whose orders are incomprehensible to them though they faithfully obey him, the soldiers gazed in turn at the valley, at the woods by the roadside, at the stern face of their leader, endeavoring to read their fate. They questioned each other with their eyes, and more than one smile ran from lip to lip.

When Hulot returned to his men with an anxious look, Beau-Pied, a young sergeant who passed for the wit of his company, remarked in a low voice: "Where the deuce have we poked ourselves that an old trooper like Hulot should pull such a gloomy face? He's as solemn as a council of war."

Hulot gave the speaker a stern look, silence being ordered in the ranks. In the hush that ensued, the lagging steps of the conscripts on the creaking sand of the road produced a recurrent sound which added a sort of vague emotion to the general excitement. This indefinable feeling can be understood only by those who have felt their hearts beat in the silence of the night from a painful expectation heightened by some noise, the monotonous recurrence of which seems to distil terror into their minds, drop by drop.

The thought of the commandant, as he returned to his men, was: "Can I be mistaken?" He glanced, with a concentrated anger which flashed like lightning from his eyes, at the stolid, immovable Chouan; a look of savage irony which he fancied he detected in the man's eyes, warned him