

FONTENAY, THE SWORDSMAN. A MILITARY NOVEL. BY FORTUNE DU BOISGHEBY.

(Translated by H. L. Williams.)

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

"Oh, I know very well they are always fighting with America. When I was a child they blockaded us at Martinique."

"And again since the rupture of the peace of Amiens. We shall never make it up with them. But, between ourselves, I would rather contend with them than with these garlic-eaters who torture their prisoners. An officer captured by the red-coats is honorably treated."

"I do not care to try the experiment."

"Nor I; but one never knows what may happen, and it is always a comfort to expect no flying alive or roasting over a slow fire. However, the Emperor is going to beat them thoroughly. He is marching straight upon them with Soulé. They will fall upon their flank. Not one will ever embark again. But it will be hard work. We have to manoeuvre in a mountainous country."

"Naturally; this confounded Spain is mountainous everywhere."

"True; but it will be in the dead of winter, and, if the weather turns bad, our troops will suffer much more than in Navarre and Aragon."

Fontenay snapped his fingers. He had not crossed the Pyrenees to loll at his ease. He was resigned before hand to all privations provided he conquered promotion, and he expected occasions in this fresh campaign would not be wanting for him to distinguish himself.

"From which side do the English come?" inquired he.

"The same where you went on scout the other day. They will try to get through the neck of the Guadarrama, but we shall get there before them and cut them into crumblers. They do not suspect our waiting for them and will be caught in a trap."

"Unless these rascally Spanish warn them. They have their spies everywhere—in Madrid, and perhaps even here at headquarters."

"Then the British will beat a retreat and we will drive them into the sea."

Fontenay, who had seen everything on the bright side at the outset, was no longer such an optimist, and he thought the captain's predictions required diluting.

"So," he asked without any transition, "we are not going toward Teruel?"

"Teruel! where is your Teruel?"

"A little town of Aragon."

"We are turning our backs on Aragon; what does it matter to you? do you particularly want to visit Teruel? I suppose that it must be some vile seaport, according to our troopers."

"I am convinced of it and I do not know why I asked the question. It little matters where I go so long as there is fighting."

The captain believed as much as he liked of this. He finished transcribing the order and rose to take Paul's arm and draw him into a corner of the room.

"Well," he inquired with a joking air, "how about your call which retained you in Madrid? it strikes me as a lengthy one."

"I had much difficulty in finding out the bank."

"Then you really were going to the bank?"

"Indeed, yes; I repeat, for some information."

"Well, did you obtain it?"

"Not precisely, but I did not waste my time."

Paul did not intend to impart his business to Vergencey, who was a frank chatterer, but the latter, who did not want to know it, contented himself with this evasive reply.

"We are to start in the morning," he observed. "You will receive your marching order this evening. I believe you will be in the vanguard, and I, also. My packing up is done. I advise you to get all ready and return to dine with me."

"Most willingly! that is agreed."

Fontenay longed to be alone to meditate upon the new situation made for him by the departure of the army. He was not satisfied in his heart. He had grown used to doing something for his beloved at the same time as he served Napoleon. But here was the Emperor about to drag him to the other end of Spain, far beyond the province where she owned the property he had sworn to regain for her, and where her uncle threatened her prospects.

Farewell to the chase of the Tio, which he had begun without bringing him to bay, though he had calculated upon renewing it with better success! Farewell to the hope of avenging himself for the shot of pistol and blunderbuss. Blas de Montalvan, soul of the revolt and head of the guerillas, would certainly not quit the center of the national insurrection to join the British, who had no need of auxiliaries of his kind. He would remain in Aragon or in Navarre, unless he continued to conceal himself in Madrid to direct from there the operations of the bands holding the country-side.

Oh, how Fontenay regretted that he had not charged him in the street, sword in hand, instead of constraining himself to "logging" him as a police-officer would

have done as well—not to say better. By piercing the brigand, he would not have regained the Segura treasure, but he would have delivered the Segura's heiress of an implacable enemy.

Now he had missed the chance, which most probably would never again offer itself.

Dissatisfied, the lover mused once more upon his betrothed, for forgetting whom he had reproached himself sometimes since he was with the army. The events of the war banished the recollection of Mlle. de Gavre, which raced back to him on the days when he met a disappointment. In this he resembled "Le Joueur," in Regnard's immortal comedy, who little cared about his lovely Angélique when he had won, but adored her when he lost.

Fontenay felt another and less gentle passion awake and grow—that for adventure and warlike exploits, which creates great generals. He dreamed more often of battle than of conjugal bliss.

"If this goes on, I shall end by loving nothing but glory," he said to himself on regaining his lodging through streets full of soldiers.

Tournesol made a diversion in the ideas engrossing him. Fontenay announced the expedition, and on the orderly learning that they were going to fall upon the "beef-eaters," he expressed his joy, as became a "frog-eater." He had never fought with them, but he hated them. He had heard from his school-master that they had once occupied Gascony, and he never forgave them for having quaffed the good wine of his ancestors, the Tournesols of the fourteenth century.

On another point he shared the feelings of Captain Vergencey. He congratulated himself on no longer having to carry on war with any but a civilized nation, who treated its enemies humanely, instead of daily exposing himself to being impaled or quartered by ferocious guerilleros.

Lieutenant and private, both entered into the change of conflict better equipped than when they came to Spain. Fontenay, who had money, had renewed his stud at Chamartin at little expense, as horses were not dear after the recent battles. He had bought two splendid ones, his battle-charger among them being a splendid dark bay with Arab blood. As an officer of the imperial staff, he had two men to groom them and lead them on the march, so that Tournesol's post became almost a sinecure.

Fontenay had also been newly attired by a master tailor of the guard, so that he might have ridden without blushing for his appearance before the Empress on the Tuilleries palace balcony in the Carrousel square, or even before Marguerite de Gavre—who would have been proud of him.

Alas! Paris was remote, and many of those departing for war on the morrow would never more behold it.

But Fontenay relied upon his lucky star; and Tournesol, who was not homesick, never fretted to know in what corner of the earth he laid his bones.

But Paul more than ever deplored the absence of his friend George. He longed to say good-bye to him before marching on the enemy, and speak at full length of Marguerite. The note left by the auditor had not soothed his disquiet and he did not expect to receive another during the opening campaign.

To drive away his dark ideas, the lieutenant dined at the staff-mess that evening. Bumpers were drained to the annihilation of "perfidious Albion," the extermination of irregular bands, to Joseph I., King of Spain, and to Napoleon, Emperor of the French, then to the sweethearts left behind them, so deeply that many lost their wits.

This was pardonable in young officers who daily risked their lives. Our hero kept his coolness, and the wine did not cheer him for he came out of the mild revel with gloomy ideas and a bad headache.

If only he had been ordered to march toward Teruel he should have been less sad, for he chafed at having to go far from Aragon, the land of the Seguras, with no hope of ever again seeing this promised land.

He forgot the wise proverb which says that "All roads lead to Rome."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE KEY TO THE SITUATION.

For six days the French army had been marching. They had not encountered the British, but at the foot of the Guadarrama Mountains, it had met the terrible winter of the high level-land of the Castiles. Notified by the Spanish that the Emperor in person was advancing to block their way, the English had fallen back by forced marches and nothing had been seen of them but their rear-guard, which the French had not been able to overtake.

It snowed, and the furious gales drove it blindingly upon the soldiers' faces. Thick ice covered the steep road winding down the Sierra's side. Men fell and the horses floundered.

In advance of his staff, Napoleon strode about, leaning on Berthier's arm, without any escorting platoon.

Paul Fontenay had kept his footing, as the ever-prescient Tournesol had his horses and the lieutenant's rough-shod; but Fontenay, if dismounted, would not have ventured to shun the fatigue of the ascent when the Emperor trudged like the meanest camp-follower.

The West Indian had never been at "such a fête," and suffered much more than the others from the Siberian temperature. But he held out sturdily, and Tournesol, who followed him, dragging along the two extra horses bought at Chamartin, did his best to sustain and enliven him. Cold and fatigue had not extinguished his Gascon gaiety, and he joked incessantly instead of grumbling. He bantered the English as "lobsters," because they were clad in scarlet and because they "walked backwards," he derided the Spaniards because they had not shown the tips of their noses since there was no more sunshine to warm them; he even made sport of the weather which had turned against the French, saying that it ought not to "look blue" when gray, and that, being grey, it should be neutral.

Fontenay admired the recklessness of the trooper, who had no promotion to expect, for he hardly knew his betters, and he said:

"The Emperor needs fifty thousand soldiers like you. He could dispense with the others. Did you heard them a while ago?"

"Which lot?" inquired Tournesol. "Lapissés' division? dainty dogs who growl because the way is not as wide as the Paris to Toulouse highway, and because their 'bread-basket' has been empty these twenty-four hours? If I were Napoleon I would have a dozen of them shot! But you will see, lieutenant, that they will sing, another tune when they have had something to eat this evening. I am hungry, too, and I am freezing, but I do not complain like those whippersnappers who ought to be packed back into France."

"I dare say they would not be sorry!"

"They are nice ones to complain, when the Poles, who had no bones to pick with the Spanish, have come five hundred leagues under the Emperor's order to be knocked over the pate in this scoundrelly country."

"Yes; they are brave fellows. I like serving them; but they have remained with the Aragon army and we are not taking the right road to meet them."

"It may come round to that, lieutenant!"

This dialogue was interrupted by Captain Vergencey, who had stopped by the roadside unable to go any further; he waited for Fontenay to ask if he had not a drink of brandy to offer him.

Tournesol held out his canteen, which he had taken care to fill that morning, and the captain took a draught which thawed out his legs and unfettered his tongue. Less resigned than Paul, he considered this march in the snow devoid of charm, and he did not shrink from expressing his discontent aloud.

"What a trade!" he said; "oh, when are we going to make war in Germany? What would I not give for the quarrel to break out with Austria! The Emperor would be obliged to cross the Rhine and we should be in the game, while—if he obstinately sticks to personally commanding his armies in Spain—the end will be his assassination and all of us remaining here. While, if we moved upon Vienna, we might get three or four days in Paris."

"My own wish!" sighed Fontenay, thinking of—we know whom.

"Your friend the auditor is there toasting himself in a warm fire-place corner, while we are shivering here. Oh, those civilians! they have the soft life, the Tuilleries court, balls, theatres—and we, the bullets and bruises, mud, bivouac under the snow, all the thunder and no sun beams! I should not mind it if we had any fighting, but you will see, my dear fellow, that not a shot will be fired. The English will not make stand. Their coming was not enough in earnest for us to disturb ourselves. Chamartin was not full of maddening joviality, but we were not so badly off; and, again, there was Madrid at the door, and in time we might have tamed the Spanish."

"I doubt it," observed the American, shaking his head, "and I am glad I did not please them."

"Oh, we know where your heart is! Friend George told me about it before he set out homeward. But I do not complain you because it is not merry to be betrothed when unsure about seeing the lady. I never think of wedlock. It will be time enough for that when the treaty of universal peace is signed!"

Fontenay said not a word; he thought the captain right, and envied his philosophy. But it did not depend on him to partake of it, as his heart was gone, and he did not yearn for this confidant, little suited to understand his love. Vergencey did not persist and went off to rejoin the staff, soon stopping with the Emperor on the culminating point, where a colossal lion in granite marked the boundary of the two Castiles. Fontenay halted here also, but not for long.

At the end of an hour Napoleon resumed the journey, and the descent, more arduous than the ascent only ended with night.

It was worse next day and the following ones. The frost was succeeded by rain falling in torrents. The English were in full retreat and closely pressed, but they were superior in swiftness, and though the roads were so precipitous, left behind them not a gun, caisson or even a live horse. Their cavalry had the order to shoot dead any unit for marching, and to prove the order had been fulfilled, they had to cut off and send in the foot

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