

## FONTENAY, THE SWORDSMAN.

A MILITARY NOVEL.

BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOBEY.

(Translated by H. L. Williams.)

### CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

He was not lying, as he had under his coat the Empress Josephine's letter; but it was an ill-selected moment to hand it to Napoleon and this was not his intention. He aimed to be within scope of the cavalry charging, and he succeeded in this point, as he was soon mingled with the cavalry drawn up for action, and capably placed to see what the Emperor did. The latter would not care to deal with him at this juncture, as he was violently upbraiding a cavalry colonel, who had returned from the attack, declaring loudly that the position was impregnable. Fontenay heard Napoleon irritably exclaim with a wrathful gesture: "What! are Spanish peasants to hold my guards in check?" while Colonel de Piré, a hero, if ever there was one, repeated without emotion: "Sire, it is impregnable." Another superior officer, Philippe de Ségur retorted to him: "But the Emperor believes to the contrary!" whereupon the colonel answered bluffly: "Come with me and see for yourself!"

This scene is recorded in history which our lieutenant at twenty had the fortune to witness as a reward for crossing the Atlantic.

The colonel of the Polish lancers of the escort was fretting for the order to charge. "Commandant," called out Ségur to him, "the Emperor wishes an end to be put to this. We have the honor. Fall in by files! Forward—charge!"

With his sabre drawn he rode to range himself beside the colonel at the head of the regiment, which hurled itself onward like an avalanche.

Napoleon saluted the brave men as they flew by unto an almost certain death, but as though to a feast. He did not notice Paul Fontenay, who was galloping alone on the flank of the column, full of joy at having attained his goal.

Before dashing off he had been afraid of being frightened; now, intoxicated by the rapidity of the charge and inflamed by the ambition to distinguish himself under the great Napoleon's eyes, he was no longer disquieted by the danger and felt capable of riding on thus into Madrid. Nevertheless, forty thousand gunshots and forty canisters of grape-shot were ready to receive him every minute.

He learned something of this as soon as he passed the rock protecting the Emperor from the projectiles.

The fortified slope blazed up like a volcano. Nothing was visible but clouds of white smoke, furrowed by flashes of lightning, and nothing was audible but the thunder of the cannonade.

Three batteries, one above the other, belched destruction; twelve thousand Spaniards, massed upon the tableland, fired at easy range so accurately on the storming party that disorder soon appeared among them. Men and horses fell under this hail of lead and iron slugs; but the heroic regiment reformed at the voice of its colonel and renewed the charge after closing up the decimated ranks.

Fontenay was astonished at being still alive, but he urged his horse to bound over the corpses. He was not a hundred yards from the first trench when the boot of a horseman jostled his leg and he heard a voice close to him say at the same instant: "Here we are, lieutenant!"

It was the Pole who overtook him, mounted on Tournesol's horse. Had he taken it by force, or had the soldier consented to yield it up? It will readily be believed that Paul did not seek to learn, but the intrepid lancer's presence exalted his courage and he thought of nothing except arriving before him at the battery of which the fire doubled in intensity. One shot did not wait for the next, and each volley mowed down whole files.

In five minutes more the regiment would have disappeared.

But the closer the assaults drew, the more uncertain became the Spaniards' almost perpendicular fire, and the former had only a short slope to cross to reach the intrenchments. The gunners defending them began to lose their coolness, and the upper batteries could not fire without risk of dropping shot upon them. In the embrasures showed red-capped heads and naked arms brandishing pikes, which would not preserve them from the longer Polish lances.

A little on the left hand Paul took notice of one of the port-holes apparently larger than the others, and he said to himself:

"That's the one I mean to enter by."

The Pole seemed to make the same choice as himself, and to be foremost he ploughed up his horse's sides with the rowels. Fontenay used his own with fury in his resolution not to be surpassed.

Suddenly a man rose upon the epaulet, an earthen sidewalk; he was tall, and he held a trabucco, or blunderbuss, the favorite fire-arm of the lower orders of Spanish; its wide barrel held about a pound of bullets.

The wind had driven away the smoke, and the outline of this bold defender was sharply defined on the snow-covered scarp. He would have no time to reload, but he

doubtless expected to exterminate several lancers before abandoning his post. But he seemed before firing to want to choose among those he sought to destroy, for he did not hasten to lift his brass blunderbuss to his shoulder.

Fontenay was forming prayers for the choice not to be in his favor, when on rising to collect his horse's powers for a leap at the not very high embrasure, he recognized the daring gunner. It was the thief in the thicket of Malmaison, who shot him squarely in the face and eluded him. This time he was not going to inflict a flesh wound. Paul felt he was doomed. With only a sword he could not parry the terrible discharge which he would receive point-blank. It appeared to him as though the Spaniard recognized him also, for he quickly brought his gun to his shoulder and took aim at him. He closed his eyes instinctively, while the Pole threw himself with his horse toward the shot, which went off at the same moment; he was hurled back upon Paul, and both were thrown out of the saddle. The American was not killed, but he remained lying at the foot of the parapet under the body of the generous soldier who had sacrificed himself to save him. He had hard work to disengage himself, and when he succeeded he saw none but the dead around him.

The battery had been taken, and the Poles were pursuing the Spaniards, who fled toward the crests.

The lieutenant ran his hands over himself and perceived that one slug had gone through the flesh of the left arm; the blood flowed upon his coat, as it had on his face at Malmaison; but this time he was wounded fighting for his mother country.

"So this is a battle," he thought, astonished to be on his feet again. "It seems to be nothing to brag about, but I may see more and they may not resemble this."

He recollected the unfortunate lancer who stiffened at his feet, riddled with bullets, having received the blunderbuss load so nearly that his uniform smoldered. He was slain outright, and Fontenay, who owed his life to this obscure hero, could not fail from musing on the singularities of destiny. This man had been brought from the depths of Poland to be killed in the heart of Spain, while saving a native of the West Indies, met by chance beside a bivouac fire!

But sentimental pondering was unreasonable, and the American could not forget that he bore a letter from the Empress. It had almost failed reaching its address from going under fire; and it was high time that it was handed to the Emperor. The hour was propitious at the heels of a victory, in which Fontenay had taken a little share.

The horses had not been hit. Paul mounted his, took the other's reins, and walked them down the slope, up which he had galloped under the grape-shot.

He was not long spying Jean Tournesol running toward him with uplifted arms as quickly as the roughness of the ground allowed.

"Hurrah, lieutenant!" shouted the soldier. "I never believed I would see you again. Alive, eh? and not badly damaged since you are in the saddle. Wounded—in the flesh of the arm? oh, that's nothing! But I will guide you to the ambulance."

"Not now," interrupted Fontenay. "Where is the Emperor?"

"Yonder, on the highway. You can see him from here."

Indeed, the Emperor was in sight, surrounded by a staff of general officers. At the time of the charge, which would decide the day, he had stepped from behind the sheltering rock. On such occasions "his greatness did not keep him on the shore," as Louis XIV held himself during the crossing of the Rhine by the royal troops; the warrior wished to see with his own eye and he had watched all the incidents of the action.

"Our horses are not disabled," remarked Tournesol, "that's a great piece of luck; but it is not my fault that mine went into the bull-room. Just imagine, lieutenant, when I got off my horse and was holding it that mad Pole banged up against me and jumped into the saddle without using the stirrup. The cunning rogue had followed us on foot from the turn of the road. And away he dashed like a bullet from a gun behind his own charging regiment. There was nothing to be seen but the fire. Where the mischief has he gone?"

"He remains yonder," answered Paul. "He was slain instantly by a blunderbuss discharge, which would have 'made hash' of me if he had not thrown himself before me."

"The brave man! Well, there's some good in these Polish lancers, after all!"

The funeral oration was a little meager, but Tournesol was not skilful in turning sentences, although glib of speech, and Fontenay was too deeply touched to add any ornaments to it. There is no time in war to weep over the fallen.

The fighting was over. The three higher batteries, though more advantageously placed than the lowermost, were given up by their defenders, terrified by the success of the Polish lancers. The French infantry, sustaining them, ran up into them without meeting a musket shot. The Spaniards were flying in disorder upon the reverse side of the Sierra. The road to

Madrid was clear, and after doubting his fortune for a space, Napoleon was victorious once more.

The sub-lieutenant began to suffer from the wound received in his "baptism by fire," and had lost much blood.

"Bandage my arm with the handkerchief which you will find in my pocket," he said to Tournesol, as he alighted at the foot of the slope. "Now," he added, when this was done, "unbutton my cape; rip up the lining and take out a letter which should be sewn between it and the cloth."

"I have it, lieutenant."

"Right! Guard the horses and wait for me on the road."

"But, lieutenant, are you not going to have your wound dressed?"

"I have plenty of time. Do as you are told."

Tournesol made no reply, and his officer proceeded toward the imperial party, with that letter in his hand, which ought to serve as passport to the Emperor. He no longer regretted having failed to deliver it before the combat, in which he had, he believed, distinguished himself—and he hoped to be the better welcomed from presenting himself covered with marks of his bravery. The letter was in a large envelope, sealed with the arms of the empire with red wax, and he held it over his head like a talisman that would open a passage.

Upon the magical phrase: "A despatch for the Emperor!" with which the young officer supported the display, the sentinels stood aside and he was enabled to walk alone toward Napoleon. Sitting on his horse he was waiting for the return of his aides-de-camp sent off in all directions to bring him news of the conflict.

Fontenay had never seen the glorious Sovereign but in the Tuileries drawing-room or at a distance reviewing his guards in the Carrousel court-yard. The monarch had never addressed a word to him.

The young officer felt very small as he went up to the crowned general, who, though he had begun his career like him, now dictated laws to Europe. Still he had some of the self confidence inspiring sons of his fervid country, and, without being too greatly abashed, he bore the luster of that gaze which seemed to read in the very profundities of the soul.

"Who are you? What do you want?" brusquely demanded the Emperor.

"Sire, I bring to your majesty a letter from the Empress."

"Do you come from Paris?"

"And from la Malmaison, sire, where I learned from the Empress direct that your majesty designed to attach me to the imperial party, and to grant me the officer's epaulet."

"Your name is Paul Fontenay? You were born in America?"

"Yes, sire: in Martinique."

"When did you join the army?"

"An hour ago, sire."

"Why did you not present yourself immediately to me?"

"Sire, the Polish lancers of the Guard were charging the enemy at the moment when I came up—and—and I charged with them."

"Without having the order?"

"Sire, I was impatient to merit the favor your majesty showed in naming me a sub-lieutenant."

"You merited being put under arrest, monsieur, for not having waited for my command. Your place was behind me, since you formed part of my staff."

Fontenay had not expected treatment of this sort. He wished he could sink into the earth and he did not venture to justify himself.

Napoleon took the letter held out to him, opened it, read it at a glance, and said to him in a less stern tone:

"The Empress writes to me that you know Spanish."

"Yes, sire; I understand it and I speak it fluently."

"That is well. You may be useful to me—when you are wiser," added the Emperor, half smiling.

His glance had become milder, and Paul was now commencing to recover from the agitation into which the master's early words had thrown him, when he was suddenly asked:

"Are you wounded?"

"It is nothing, sire—a scratch which will not prevent me serving."

"Begin by getting healed. Go to the ambulance—and try to be so restored as to follow me to-morrow. In three days I shall be in Madrid, where you can complete your convalescence. I may need you."

A curt gesture dismissed Fontenay. The colloquy had not lasted three minutes, but, among the officers who had watched it from a distance, more than one envied the fortune of this beardless soldier to whom the Emperor had listened as he did not always listen to his generals. Fontenay walked away, intoxicated with gladness, to rejoin Tournesol, who had kept on the road, and to be led by him straight to the tents pitched near there in a ravine sheltered from Spanish bullets.

A dreadful spectacle awaited him there. The surgeons were amputating the leg at the thigh of a quartermaster of the chasseur of the guards—a handsome blade not much older than the creole. A surgeon major came up to receive the sub-lieutenant, examined the arm perforated by one of the bullets of the terrible blunderbuss and lightly said:

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