

FONTENAY, THE SWORDSMAN.

A MILITARY NOVEL.

BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOREY.

(Translated by H. L. Williams.)

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

The night which had commenced so vilely, passed tranquilly. Diego snored in a corner near his horses, and the gypsy stretched himself across the doorway, the door having no fastenings.

CHAPTER X.

A STROKE OF CLEMENCY.

Before dawn the guide called the officer up to tell him it was time to ride toward the Escorial, which was situated quite close to the inn, but very far from Chamartin.

Fontenay might have excused himself from finishing his journey of reconnaissance, from his knowing that neither the monastery nor the two villages, its dependencies were occupied by the Spanish; but to refuse to go thither would have been confessing that he heard and understood the conference of the insurgent chiefs, and he took care not to grumble over taking to the road. Diego was in a more jovial humor, and much more communicative than on the eve. He was doubtlessly congratulating himself—not on having contributed to the officer's safety—but on having had his infernal plan adopted which would terminate in the massacre of several hundred of his foes.

Fontenay resolved to make him pay dear for his subtle treachery.

It was cold weather, but the sky was clear and everything promised a fine day.

The creole inhaled with eager lungs the air refreshed by the Sierra's snows, shutting out the western horizon. Never had he felt so happy. He had escaped a dreadful death by a miracle, though he could not believe that he had definitely saved himself from now knowing the true sentiments of Diego.

"Senor," said this double-faced guide, "have you really any intention of visiting the Escorial palace?"

"I will wait for another time when I have more leisure," responded the lieutenant. "I would rather study the people in the village."

In Havana College, his studies had not been carried very far, but at least they comprised the statement that the gloomy edifice was built and resided in by King Philip II., son of Charles V.

"That will be a speedy matter, though there are two villages—one above and the other below the palace-monastery. The good fathers who have remained are not dangerous, for the five of them number four hundred full years together, and they will take pleasure in offering you breakfast."

"It will have to be a hasty meal, then, for I have no time to lose."

A little gallop carried them to the entrance to the lower village. Fontenay's horse seemed to conform to Diego's humor; he had no more whims as over-night; he obeyed the hand and knee, and was not inclined to hang back.

The dwellings were abandoned and the streets deserted. All the inhabitants had fled, and they could not be suspected of being ambushed in the environs, as there were no trees. Fontenay made short work of inspecting these hovels and deemed it fruitless to go on as far as the other hamlet, perched on rocks not easily climbed.

He cursorily viewed the palace gardens, built—the fit word, as there is more architecture than vegetation visible—on superposed terraces; only the four walls were left in hastily passing through the palace cellars. Still, he would have examined them with more care if he had not known in advance the state of things. The council in old Laguna's inn had edified him, and he was now sure that these solitudes contained no insurgents. He executed his reconnaissance for form's sake.

Still convinced that the officer knew not a word of Spanish, Diego did not hesitate to announce before him, to the good monks, that they would soon have to accommodate three or four insurgent contingents, who would lie in wait to cut the French to pieces.

After accepting the frugal repast offered by the monks, Fontenay gave the signal for the departure, and Diego did not require any pressing.

They went through Torro Lodones, where the gypsy—taking in the sunshine, *tomar el sol*, on his doorstep—hailed them with a wish for their pleasant journey. They saw again the leafy tree which no longer harbored the revolutionists, and went on at so good a pace that they were not very far from Chamartin at noon.

The West Indian was determined to have the traitor guide shot, but he took a grim pleasure in drawing him out on the road in chat, the better to convince himself of the knave's duplicity. Diego poured forth invectives against the former government of Spain. He flaunted the most extravagant liberalism; he proclaimed the benefits of the French Revolution which, by the sword of the great general, had regenerated all nations and beaten down all the tyrants. In an earlier period, at the Jacobin's Club, no other language was used by the orators. Undoubtedly this unfringed student in

theology deserved about a dozen bullets as the price of his treachery, and his declamation against the Catholic kings. And yet Fontenay, knowing him to the core by this time, could not help seeing that the man was a patriot. He played the infamous part to serve his country. He was a spy through devotedness, and a traitor out of virtue. If he did not belong to the Spanish aristocracy, he was one of the enlightened middle class, and he dared an ignominious death every day for the right cause.

The creole could not forget that he owed his life to him. Diego had not saved him out of any friendship, but he had saved him. If he had not intervened between the mysterious and important chief and the prisoner whom he had condemned, the latter would have been stabbed. And was Fontenay to recompense him for this vital service by yielding him up to the provost-marshal of the army, who would swiftly execute him? He need but say a word to have it done; and they had already passed the outposts guarding the head quarters at Chamartin.

It was his duty, for it might cost the French dear if he let this unalterable foe depart; though not this time, for in giving an account of his mission, the lieutenant would not fail to reveal the plan he had overheard from the guerilla leaders; but how much bloodshed might not this fellow cause if he did not hand him over to the firing-party?

In spite of everything, he inclined to clemency.

In the best human sentiments a little selfishness enters, and Marguerite's betrothed thought that forgiveness might bring him fortune. The recollection of his idol swayed him.

A hundred yards from the toll-bar of Chamartin, he reined in his horse.

"I have no further need of you—go!" he said to Diego, who replied:

"Excuse me, senor, I was promised fifty *duros* if I brought you back safe and sound, and I must call for them on the staff-treasurer in person, to say nothing of the horse you ride being mine, and one I do not care to lose."

"Do you value this jade and fifty *paisers* more than your life?"

"What does your lordship mean?"

Fontenay looked him straight in the eyes, and said to him in the purest Castilian:

"I speak Spanish as well as you. I am not deaf, and I was not asleep last evening in the gypsy's house. Do you understand now?"

Diego turned pale, wheeled his horse round and started off at the gallop, shouting this equivocal farewell to the officer: "I thank you, Sir Frenchman, we are quits. Pray God that we never meet again!"

This might be interpreted in more than one way, but Fontenay did not wait to puzzle out the enigma. He was in haste to complete his errand by making his report to the major-general. But he did not like to go there on Diego's horse, which might oblige him to explain why the guide had given it up without claiming the promised gratification, and he had resolved not to relate the events as they had occurred. He would be blamed for letting the traitor escape. The main thing was for the staff-officer to know that the Escorial was not yet occupied by the Spaniards, although it would be.

Knowing that his treason was discovered, Diego would take good heed not to offer his services again to the French.

Therefore, Fontenay stopped at the house where he entertained his friend George. To him alone he intended to tell the truth of his adventures. At the door, smoking his inevitable pipe, stood Tournesol, who noisily manifested his delight at his officer's return.

"Take my pistols out of the holsters," ordered the latter, alighting.

"Right, my lieutenant. But this horse? Am I to put it up in our stable?" inquired Tournesol, astonished not to see the guide.

"Drive it out of town—or sell it, if you can find a purchaser."

"Then that Spaniard who looked so evil—"

"He deserted me on the road, and will not return."

"A good riddance! He had a rascal's front-piece. I was not easy when I saw you going off with the scoundrel. I will sell the horse if only for ten crowns. But what about the saddle, lieutenant?"

"Sell all together. Any news?"

"An hour ago Captain Vergencey looked in to ask if you had come home."

"I am going to see him presently at staff-quarters. I will walk and I have no time to go up to my room. I will change my dress and freshen up on my return from seeing the major-general. Is M. de Prégny upstairs?"

"No, lieutenant."

"He cannot be far then, as Chamartin is not a large place. Try to find him and tell him I have come back and would like him to wait for me."

"I beg your pardon, lieutenant, but M. de Prégny went away this morning."

"Yes, indeed—in the carriage that brought him and with the escort he had with him yesterday. The Emperor sent him back to Paris."

"Within twenty-four hours! This is sharp work!" cried Fontenay, grating his teeth. "If I had only foreseen it—"

"He left some writing for you, lieutenant, in your room—shall I run up after it?"

"No," returned his master in ill humor; "I must go and report. I will read it afterward." He strode away, grumbling: "And I was reckoning upon charging him with a letter for Marguerite! How warfare does upset things!"

CHAPTER XI.

AN ODD BANK PRESIDENT.

A fortnight after his eventful expedition, Fontenay was still at Chamartin, which the Emperor also had not quitted.

All had passed pleasantly at the major-general's, who applauded him on perfectly accomplishing a difficult task and had immediately utilized the information brought by the sub-lieutenant. He had not been received by Napoleon, overburdened by labor in the palace, where the fate of Spain was under decision; but he knew that Napoleon was satisfied with him, and he asked no more. But he could not comfort himself for having missed Prégny, forced to travel suddenly. The letter he left contained these lines only:

"Rely on me, and follow my counsel. Stay in Spain if the Emperor returns into France. At la Malmaison and the Tuilleries all will be agreeable. Hunt up that *Tio Bias* and make him disgorge. Send me news of you."

This laconic note had not calmed the West Indian's vexation, and he fumed at the friend who was not to blame as he retraced his road by the imperial command and he was not in fault because Paul had not returned sooner. What most vexed the latter was his inability to hand him a love letter for Mlle. de Gavre. He chafed the more as he could not take the liberty of writing by the post to a young lady of the Empress' household, and, even then, a battalion of soldiers would be required to escort the courier, often attacked by guerillas on the highway; unless he liked his note to light the cigarette of a Spanish insurgent.

So he was compelled to champ his curb while awaiting new war operations to come and distract him, for life at Chamartin had a desperate monotony.

The Emperor remained with his staff but the army had entered Madrid after its capitulation and occupied it to receive the new king, Joseph. He was still in France for the good reason that his subjects were inclined to receive him too warmly.

In appearance Madrid was tranquil, but the May revolt was in fresh memory, and the imperial staff-officers were not allowed to go about separately.

Yet pining away in a suburb at the gates of a capital was a torture of Tantalus, and some found the means to elude the interdict. One of these was Vergencey, and one fine morning about the middle of December, he suggested Fontenay's accompanying him inside the city walls. The creole did not long to go. His comrade's enthusiastic description had left him cold. His heart was elsewhere, and he would probably have refused to view the sights of Madrid if he had not recalled one of George de Prégny's recommendations for him to verify if Mlle. de Gavre's millions were still in the Bank of Madrid. He had no regular power to draw them; but, if there, the Emperor would probably not refuse to have them restored to the lady who had the right to claim them.

It was a good occasion to try to ascertain the facts, and the chances were that the person who stole the certificate of deposit at la Malmaison had not had time to handle the cash.

On the 30th of November he had faced Fontenay at Somo Sierra and he would hardly have the audacity to enter Madrid, fallen into the power of the French. In all likelihood he would have remained with the rebel bands holding the surrounding country; but he would not stay there indefinitely, and it was important to outstrip him in celerity.

The love-enthralled lieutenant let himself be persuaded therefore, and after being assured that the staff-officer would wink at his few hours absence on the excursion, he followed Vergencey.

It was the first time in his life that the American entered a conquered capital, but he had heard the officers relate their experiences. Generally the defeated people furnished enough sycophants to cheer the vanquishers. Fontenay doubted this would have been done by the Spaniards, but he expected a peaceful visit in a city under military guard.

He was not mistaken in the sense of no shoes being fired upon him and Vergencey, as they passed in at the Alcalá gate; but he was not long in perceiving that the inhabitants would have done it, if they had arms.

The promenades preceding the gate were lonely. In the *Prado* walks, not a woman was to be seen, and very few in the street running into the *Puerta del Sol*. Men, muffled up in their cloaks, darted hateful glances on the two visitors, and the infrequent *Manolas* who passed by ostentatiously averted their heads not to see them, while slyly flashing looks to which Vergencey replied by twirling the points of his mustache. In those days the *Manola* had not disappeared from Madrid, the type of Castilian ease and elegance, in her short bell-shaped skirt, scarlet stockings, narrow slippers, mantilla, and the long plait of hair, caught up by a very large tortoise-shell comb sloped over one ear.

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