

FONTENAY,

THE SWORDSMAN.

A MILITARY NOVEL.

BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOREY.

(Translated by H. L. Williams.)

CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

To listen Fontenay stopped behind a mound of the dead; here had been a hand-to-hand combat of French light-horse and English dragoons. Men had fallen with cleft skull or perforated breast, and two horses lay there, shot dead with small arms. Lying upon one another they formed a breastwork behind which a stubborn soldier might have sheltered himself to maintain firing, in imitation of the American hunters who made their ponies lie down, and kneel themselves to shoot over them, resting the rifle-barrel on the side of the animal trained to be a living rampart.

With outstretched neck and attentive ear, Fontenay turned his back on this cadaveric pile. He was so near it that his cloak hem brushed the helmet of a dragoon extended across a horse opened by a shell. He did not think of turning as, since a few seconds, he seemed to hear at a distance bugle-calls, sounded in a low tone—short notes repeated at regular intervals.

"Tournesol has got across," said Paul to himself, "he has made his report—the marshal has issued the order for all to mount—and as my man will take the head of the first troop, our men cannot miss the ford and they will not require more than a quarter of an hour to cross. I hope I shall not be frozen stiff before then," he mentally added; "I feel the chill rising to my heart, and I have not my spirit flask. I fancy a sup of brandy would set me right. I hope Tournesol has not drunk all his, and when he comes he will save my life a second time—but by the strong waters!"

He resumed stamping where he stood from inability to run up and down to keep warm. He still listened with attentiveness, and soon very distinctly heard splashes as from a heavy body falling about in the water.

"These they are!" he muttered. Then a horse neighed. No farther doubt was possible; a detachment had ridden into the stream and would soon be over unless some accident supervened.

The sub-lieutenant felt like going to meet the horsemen so impatiently awaited; but he reflected that they would land rather pell-mell and tumultuously race over the level land toward Benavente, which they would hope to take by surprise. If he were in their road, they might trample upon him, taking him for a marauder, from knowing no better, or cut him down without warning. This is why Fontenay deemed it more prudent not to stir from his stopping-place a little aside on a knoll.

At this emergency other sounds attracted his attention—not coming from the river-side and inexplicable at the first. It was like a rumbling on the far edge of the plain, perhaps from heavily laden vehicles on a paved road. He quickly guessed that it was the enemy's artillery galloping off with the rearward evacuating the town. Had the English been advised that the French cavalry were coming to attack them or had they received orders from their head-quarters to fall back on their main body, beating the retreat? It little mattered which if they were retiring. The French horsemen had still ample time to pursue them, if on the point of landing. At any instant Fontenay expected to see them appear with Tournesol at their head.

He was not deceived, for almost instantly burst forth hurrahs and bugles sounding the "Forward!"

Fontenay had been for the past instant looking toward Benavente. On these warlike sounds heralding his comrades he was turning to see them when a man sprang up abruptly from behind the rampart of corpses, threw himself on him with a dagger in his hand and struck at him, yelling in Spanish:

"Die devil!"

Paul received the stab full in the chest, and so violent was the shock that he fell backward. In falling he could hear Tournesol's call:

"Lieutenant! Where are you, lieutenant?"

That was all.

Tournesol had passed over the shallows at the head of the file and was first to land on the right bank. He had done his duty in guiding his comrades, but he was not bound to dash in chase of the foe retiring from Benavente. While the light-cavalry were forming for the ride, Tournesol dismounted and came in search of his officer, loudly calling him. He knew pretty nearly where he had left him and was not long finding him lying on the frozen ground, speechless, and without movement.

He believed him dead; he rushed forward to lift him up and on taking him in his arms, felt that Fontenay's heart still throbbed. A thin thread of blood trickled over the stabbed officer's uniform coat, and Tournesol, an expert in such matters, saw immediately that a bullet had not inflicted that wound. Was it the cut of a sword or a bayonet? Who could have delivered it? None was here but the

dead, and the wounded man was in no state to furnish explanations to Tournesol, who remained in despair unable to help him or carry him away.

Only the cavalry laggards passed by, thinking but of joining their squadron. The infantry would not come up till the following day when a bridge of boats would be constructed, and with them the munition and hospital corps. Would there be time to save Fontenay? Would he live long enough? Tournesol feared not, but he did all he could to revive him. His canteen, which he never laid by, was still half-full of brandy. He poured a mouthful between the wounded man's lips, whose eyes opened. He heaved a deep sigh and tried to sit up. Surprised and delighted by this miraculous resurrection, the orderly aided and supported him and renewed the alcoholic remedy—his only one available. Evidently Paul was not death-stricken, since he could drink. It was through cold that he had lost consciousness rather than the stab.

"I feel better," he stammered.

"It will be nothing," said the orderly.

"But, lieutenant, who treated you in this manner?"

"I hardly know—I was freezing—I fancy I fell asleep."

"But this!" went on Tournesol, unbuttoning the officer's coat, "it looks like the stab of a fencing foil. Yet you have not been fighting a small-sword duel?"

Paul drew his hand across his chest and removed it smeared with blood. Memory returned to him and he muttered:

"Yes, I remember now—a man rushed at me and stabbed me—I thought it was a blow with the fist, but it was so heavy that I fell."

"It was a knife cut—in the right place—just over the heart. Luckily the point did not penetrate deeply, for you would have been killed outright. Your cape seems to have been doubled there, so that you owe your life perhaps to your tailor."

Fontenay felt over his shirt and found ensanguined the talisman he always wore next his skin—the sachet embroidered by Marguerite de Gavre. This was wadded and had broken the blow so that the knife had only gashed the flesh.

"I had a forewarning that it would save me," thought Paul, raising his eyes in gratitude to heaven which had protected him.

"What a piece of luck that the ruffian did not finish you," observed Tournesol. "What was he like? did you see his face?"

"Scarcely—yet it seems to me it was not unknown—I believe, Spanish."

"Well my idea is that it is the scoundrel who tried to lure us into that hole! he spoke French in calling out for us to oblique instead of keeping straight on."

"I have it!" exclaimed Fontenay, beating his brow; "it's that wretch Diego!"

"Who's Diego?"

"The guide given me at Chamartin to conduct me to the Escurial. I did not recognize him at the moment when he assailed me but I am now sure. He speaks French as well as you and I."

"Only to think that you might have had him shot at Chamartin when you learned he betrayed you! he rewards you richly for letting him off!"

"A while ago when he hid away after giving us the false advice, he did not know he had to deal with me, and when he stabbed me he could not see my face."

"What! are you taking up his defense? Oh, lieutenant, you do not know what a people these are! they make less bone over slaying a Frenchman than a dog."

Fontenay did not argue; the *eau de vie* had revived him for a space, but he felt weakening again. The cold spread and his eyes closed in spite of himself so that Tournesol, who had seen soldiers die in the icy bogs of Poland, doubted not that his officer would never wake if he slumbered now. He caught him up in his arms, forced him to stand erect and with incredible efforts contrived to hoist him upon his horse which he had led along by the bridle.

Fontenay helped him slightly and could hold up in the saddle, though feebly. Their goal was Benavente where they might find a house, if not a hospital to shelter the wounded man, and a bed to lay him upon.

They reached it with pains but without impediment, without any idea that it was the last stage in this unfortunate expedition. Fontenay lived and his wound was not serious, but one of those fearful fevers seized him next day, which decimate armies and attack soldiers exhausted by fatigue and privations. The doctors who saw him did not conceal from Tournesol that they had scant hope of saving him. This was known among the staff, who believed him lost; that not one brother-of-arms came to bid him farewell, although the Emperor stopped many days in Benavente, previous to resuming pursuit of the English.

Fontenay wavered for a fortnight between life and death until the vigor of his constitution prevailed and he entered into convalescence at the beginning of the third week in the new year, 1809.

Tournesol, never quitting him, had watched him with a father's care and might boast of having materially contributed to his cure.

Fontenay had deeply suffered without much consciousness of his state, for delirium had not left him. In his sickbed dreams he saw the atrocious visage of

Uncle Blas, and sometimes Diego Perez's, as he bounded, dagger in hand, over the mound of corpses. He called on Marguerite incessantly.

His situation looked gloomy when he could study it. Benavente was occupied solely by the stores of the army on the march, and hardly any news of the Emperor came here. It was known only that he had reached Astorga and that the English had retired to Corunna, where their fleet awaited them. Nothing was known of his plans.

Fontenay anxiously questioned himself as to what Napoleon might do with him. In a war, as elsewhere, "*les absents ont tort*," and there is little doubt that the Emperor no longer recollected the under-lieutenant charged by him with a perilous commission, but, though he had achieved it, failing to return.

Nothing came from Paris. A whole regiment was required now to escort the mail-carrier.

Despairing in this general silence, Fontenay was beginning to regret that fever had not swept him into the other world, when Tournesol brought him a letter one morning which the commander of the town had received with the official dispatches from head-quarters. This blessed missive came from Captain Vergoney and much surprised Paul on reading it. It was short but taught him much in its few words:

"MY DEAR BROTHER OFFICER!—We believed you were gone, and I swear that I sorrowed for you. We have just learnt that you have victoriously come out of the scrape. No one rejoices more heartily than I, and I try to be the first to announce that you are made a captain! Yes, my dear Fontenay, captain! The Emperor appointed you lieutenant after Somo Sierra, but it appears that some blunderer neglected to inform you officially. This time, on the report of Marshal Bessières, his majesty has promoted you to a captaincy and your commission is on the way to you."

"Two grades in less than two months! splendid! but you have handsomely won them. The marshal says to everybody that he owes the power to cross the Escla to you. All my congratulations! You no more fear water than fire! What a pity you are not coming into Austria with us! you might cross the Danube by swimming! I suppose you know the war is decided upon? To-morrow we leave this vile hole, Astorga; in a week we will be in Paris and in three months in Vienna. But comfort yourself for not being of our party. The Emperor would certainly have brought you along if you had been fit for marching. To give you time to recuperate, he attaches you to Marshal Lannes' staff, who commands the siege of Saragossa, and will be called into Germany as soon as the city is taken. That will not be long and we shall soon meet. So, get ready, my dear Fontenay, and good luck! Do not forget me, and write to me at Paris where I hope we shall spend the winter in company."

"I see," muttered Paul, "it is decreed that I am to leave my bones in Spain, and never to see Marguerite again!"

All predictions do not come true, but Marguerite's betrothed was not at the end of love's labors, though wrong in his forecast.

CHAPTER XV.

A "BROTHER" OFFICER.

In less than a month a complete mental and physical change took place in Paul Fontenay. At Benavente, he could hardly stand, and saw everything under a cloud. On arriving before Saragossa, he was as strong as a bridge, felt happy at being in life and cared not an atom for the future. This is the ordinary effect of unexpected cures, and his promotion to captain's rank had not a little assisted in restoring his good humor; but it must be added that, before starting for Aragon, he had received a letter from George de Prigny putting an end to his loving unrest. Mlle. de Gavre spoke of nobody but her absent worshipper. The Empress had shown her a laconic note from Napoleon written on the 31st of December.

"MON AMI!—I am in pursuit of the English. They flee terrified. Bad weather. Lefebvre is a prisoner. He was skirmishing with three hundred light horse—dare-devils who swam a river and rushed amid the heavy cavalry; they slew many, but Lefebvre had his horse wounded on the return, and was captured. Comfort his wife. Young Fontenay bears himself well, which pleases me. *Adieu mon Ami!*"

Marguerite had learnt this note by heart; she had repeated it verbally to Prigny who transcribed it under her dictation for transmission to his friend. Fontenay was proud of the passage concerning him. The Emperor had written about him, the youngest of his body-guard officers, at the time of sending him upon a commission, and he brilliantly justified the choice. After this testimony to his services from the great warrior, Fontenay might depend on rapid advancement, as he could on the constancy of the adorable girl whom he loved—at a distance, alas! But he hoped to see her soon in Paris after the taking of Saragossa.

Joyous and ready, he arrived to take part under an illustrious leader, in the terrible siege which retained the French army for six weeks before a town unprovided with regular fortifications.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]



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for what it has done for me. It is my wish that this my testimonial shall be published in order that others suffering as I was may learn how to be benefited." Mrs. M. E. MERRICK, 57 Elm Street, Toronto, Ont.

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