

# FONTENAY,

THE SWORNMAN.  
A MILITARY NOVEL.  
BY FORTUNE DU BOISGOBEY.

(Translated by H. L. Williams.)

## CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

It need not be said that Tournesol remained his orderly, and the journey they made on horseback through two insurgent provinces had furnished the faithful and ingenious Gascon with more than one occasion to demonstrate again his bravery, devotedness, and the resources of a mind fertile in expedients.

They reached Saragossa two days after the general assault of the 27th of January, which had not entirely succeeded. Two out of four storming columns sent at once on different points, had been repulsed by the besieged; the third had taken a breach and maintained itself there with much difficulty; but the most important, the centre, had captured with enormous loss the fortified Santa Eufemia Convent towering over all the out-works of the Spanish. This partial success was decisive, for it forced the defenders to abandon their advanced positions and shut themselves up in the town.

The war on the ramparts was succeeded by that in the streets, ten times more dreadful.

As at Somo Sierra, the American arrived at the critical time.

It was the close of the day and the setting sun fully illumined the imposing cathedral of Our Lady del Pilar, with its quaint three-stories belfry and small glazed tiled domes in the Moorish style; the slender Seo tower and the octagonal one which leans over like that of Pisa. The picture was splendid and the sight-seer might have believed he was at the gates of a rich and peaceful capital but for the continuous thunder of the cannonading.

Tournesol declared that he had never seen anything finer in Spain and that Saragossa would make a good garrison city when taken.

But his captain had not come to admire the site, and he hastened to make himself known at the first post they met. The officer commanding informed him that Marshal Lannes would certainly not receive him that evening in the house where he had established his quarters, behind the trenches, as he was not well. He pointed out to him a place where were camped the Fourteenth Foot and a regiment of the Vistula Legion, and gave him a soldier to conduct him there.

Followed by Tournesol, Fontenay found the French and Polish officers installed in the ruins of a villa half demolished by the cannon on the plaza; their men were no better lodged for, shelter being deficient, they had dug lairs and covered them with boughs. Tournesol turned into these burrows with them and was received as a comrade, while the officers feasted his captain.

Hospitality is a royal virtue and it was held high in honor by the French army in Spain. Besides, Fontenay brought news to men deprived of it, for letters from home were scarce and newspapers still more so. He was listened to like an oracle, although he knew nothing very novel, and he was everybody's friend by the time he had taken his portion of a tough sheep shot in the pasturage bordering the Ebro. His boon companions were under orders to take up arms at three A. M., and, on leaving table, many threw themselves on trusses of straw to sleep.

Fontenay would have done the same but for the pleasure he took in listening to an old captain of the Vistula Legion whose conversation interested him. This Pole had gone through the 1806 and '7 campaigns and been at several sieges, including the long and murderous one of Dantzic. He spoke from experience about military matters, and his knowledge was not bounded by them. He had seen a great deal but had also read much and remembered well. Without reckoning Polish and Russian, he spoke French most purely, German, Spanish and Latin. Yet this polyglot was neither pedantic nor talkative. He was amiable, although he wore rather a sad air, and Fontenay, who liked to learn, gladly questioned him upon the country, the people and the probable issue of the war.

"Now that we are inside Saragossa, I suppose its capitulation is only a question of days—perhaps, hours, eh, captain?" he inquired.

"My dear comrade," said the Polish officer smiling, "you do not understand these people. There is a local song which you may have heard sung:

"*Lal, tozida y valiente  
Es de Zuragosa gente!*"

which signifies the people of Saragossa are loyal, valiant and stubborn."

"I understood it."

"It is true. I forgot you knew the tongue. But I wager that you do not know how an Aragonese is told. A popular saying asserts that when a son is born, its mother strikes him on the head with a plate. If it breaks, the boy is a true Aragonese."

"But if the skull is shattered?" queried Fontenay, bursting with laughter.

"So much the worse for the babe."

"Then they have thick, hard heads, and your conclusion is—"

"That they will be killed to the very last before giving up their city."

"But how can they defend it?" it is ours since the assault."

"They will defend it house by house, floor by floor, and when only a stone or two of the foundation wall remains, they will blow themselves up with it. They are commanded by a hero of the antique school—one out of *Plutarch's Lives*."

"What is his name?"

"Palafox. This is like you French—you do not know the name of the enemy you most should dread."

"In the first place I am not a Frenchman of France, and again, the French are satisfied with vanquishing a foe."

"Well retorted, my dear fellow! I believe with you that we shall take him and destroy Saragossa, but at what a price! all the blood shed so far is nothing in comparison with what will flow."

"My dear captain, you are not encouraging," said Fontenay, somewhat irritated by the Pole's sombre predictions.

"Heaven forbid I should try to discourage you! I love France; I am ready to give my life for it and for your Emperor, who will make Poland free, but I know what this war has already cost and I do not cherish any illusions. We will all rest here—but I am resigned—I no longer care for life."

This was spoken in a tone of such sadness that Fontenay was keenly affected.

"Why?" he inquired, "Brave and learned as you are, the future is your own. You will be a general."

"I strongly doubt it, and the marshal's baton would not console me."

Fontenay felt a craving to learn what was his sorrow, but he dared not speak lest he awoke in the veterans' hearts some painful grief. But, perceiving black craps worn on the captain's arm, he said with a questioning glance:

"You are in mourning?"

"Yes, for my brother," muttered the Pole.

"A brother, whom you have recently lost?" Fontenay inquired with interest.

"It will be two months to-morrow," came the answer.

"And you have only just received the news of his death! Yes, Poland is so far."

"My brother was not in Poland."

"An older brother than you, no doubt?"

"Ten years my junior. I educated him and loved him like a son. Our mother is still living in our home-country. On leaving for Spain, I thought I might never see her again, but I might hope that her youngest son would remain by her! but he has died before me! and the poor old dame may not know it at present speaking, for it is four hundred leagues from here to Wilna."

"Oh, you belong to Wilna?"

"To the neighborhood, which is why I can tell you that, on the day when your Emperor called the Lithuanians into his service, all marched out with enthusiasm. Very few students remain in the university. I was then serving in the Vistula regiment, as an officer. It is I whom heaven ought to have taken, and not a boy, who, compelled by love of his country, enlisted as a soldier."

"What! in the army for Spain?"

"As a private trooper—in our lancers, and in their ranks he fell gloriously, at Somo Sierra."

"I was there. There I saw fire for the first time and I was witness of the heroism of those brave fellows—I charged by their side."

"And had the fortune to return unhurt. But how many remained! the body of my poor Ladislaus was never found—"

"Was Ladislaus his name?" muttered Paul, struck by a memory.

"Ladislaus Zolnycki."

The Christian name had flashed on Fontenay's mind; the family one enlightened it completely. He quickly unbuttoned his coat, from the bosom took the letters and the portrait which Tournesol had brought off the battle-field on the night of the 30th of November, and he had presented them, without uttering a word to the captain.

"It is my brother's writing," he said, turning pale as he took them into his hand and becoming deeply affected; "this miniature is his betrothed; how does this come to pass?"

"He fell in front of me, and saved my life in dying, for the shots which he received were intended for me."

The captain contemplated these relics of a beloved brother and tears coursed down his rugged cheeks. Almost under as much emotion, Fontenay kept silent not to disturb the sorrow of the old soldier who perhaps had never shed a tear before.

"I thank you, brother!" said Zolnycki, after this silence. "I liked you before—now I would give my life for you."

He did not ask any details upon the day when his brother and the French officer had fought side by side; but the latter related how he had met the brave youth and how he had been killed upon Tournesol's horse when he might have excused himself from charging on account of being unhorsed. The Pole listened without his face betraying his emotion. He had become master of himself again and it was in a steady voice that he said:

"Heaven hath taken him from me. The will of heaven be done! the lives of everyone of us are in its hand. It may be my turn to-morrow, but so long as I live, rely on me. At present, my dear companion-in-arms, how can I serve you? You have just arrived—"

"As an officer on Marshal Lannes' staff,

without knowing him or his officers. What kind of a man is he?"

"Before all and above all, he is brave. I have never seen anybody stand fire like him, and without any display—he has simple bravery, the rarest of all kinds. But he is also a great general, which I cannot say of many others of his rank."

"I am eager to see him, and learn at what he will employ me. We staff-officers are neither flesh nor fowl, and are sent up to table with all sauces. I commenced in the cavalry, but cavalry are not employed in a siege."

"Excuse me. We have a brigade scouting in the Ebro valley to cover our operations, and it often comes to blows with the insurgents—the Thirteenth Cuirassiers and the Fourth Hussars."

The cuirassiers named were the regiment of Commander Carénac. Fontenay had not forgotten him, but it was most untimely to ask news of the swordsman with whom he had an old score to wipe out.

"Still it is true," proceeded Zolnycki, "that the roughest works falls to us marching regiments. So I counsel you to ask to move with us, which will be toward danger—and the marshal will make a good note of that in his mind. He likes officers who seek perilous posts. He ventures his own person, and wants others to act in his guise."

"I ask no better fate and wish I could begin to-morrow. But where shall I find him. I could not get near him this evening."

"Because he had to take some rest; he is spent with weariness. But I am quite sure that by nine to-morrow morning, he will be on the positions we took the day before yesterday. That's the best place you could choose to make acquaintance. I will conduct you thither, if you like. My company is in the trenches, it happens. The marshal will not refuse you the favor of going on service for one day with us. I warrant that he will be pleased with your asking it."

"Be it so! I will be charmed to perform my novitiate under your direction."

"And I to teach you how to dodge the bullets an art I learned last year at Dantzic."

"I will try to profit by your lessons, my dear companion—but I wonder how it is Marshal Lannes, incessantly exposed, has not yet been hit."

"More than once it happened, but his bones have a singular property not to splinter when the bullet strikes—they force it around them instead of giving way."

"There is a difference in bullets," remarked Fontenay, shaking his head.

This time he was a true prophet without knowledge of his powers. In less than four months, on the plain of Essling, the illustrious marshal fell with both legs broken by an Austrian cannon-ball. This fatal missile was perhaps not yet cast when the betrothed of Marguerite de Gavre discoursed on the chances in warfare with the polish officer. Their interview was prolonged, but sleep was necessary to men who had to rise before dawn, and Fontenay did not open his eyes until aroused by his new friend.

It was still dark, and the company took up arms without any call of the clarion.

Tournesol crept out of his burrow, enchanted with the Poles who had admitted him there. He placed himself under his captain's orders with no need to be entreated to come when he heard they were going under fire. He regretted having no musket, but his comrades of the subterranean chamber consoled him by saying he might use that of the first soldier killed.

Fontenay was a little astonished to see Zolnycki array himself in full dress; new epaulets and all his medals and clasps—he wore three on the breast.

"Days of battle are our holidays," he smilingly said, "and I am sure that there will be hot work this time."

They silently made their way toward the Casa Gonzales, one of the houses occupied by the regiment since the evening after having been repulsed from it on the day of the assault; its connection was just completed by one trench with another for the attack on Saint Monica Convent where the besieged were defending themselves with unparalleled fury.

## CHAPTER XVI.

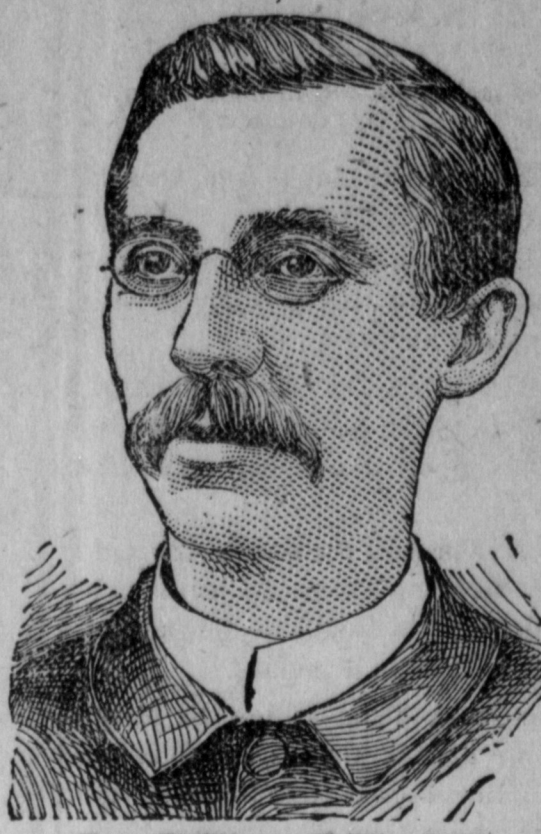
### RUNNING THE GAUNTLET.

The sun had not risen and only a few dropping shots disturbed the stillness of the long January night. On both sides, the aurora was awaited to recommence the massacre.

When it appeared our amateur in sizes could view the position. The works were but slowly driven forward in a soil hardened by winter, under a well-aimed fire, against which the often toppled-over gabions did not sufficiently protect them. The goal was a massive building, whence issued a ceaseless fusillade, and one was exposed to the bullets from the nunnery, loop-holed from foundation to coping-stone and lined with Spaniards who fired without relaxing upon any one approaching the head of the sap.

"They seem to rain from heaven," said Fontenay, without blanching under the plunging fire.

"They come from the roofs," tranquilly responded Zolnycki. "By help of their serge shoes these daring Aragonese circulate upon them with as much ease as cats, and they kill most from overhead. You will see this better presently, when we are well within range."



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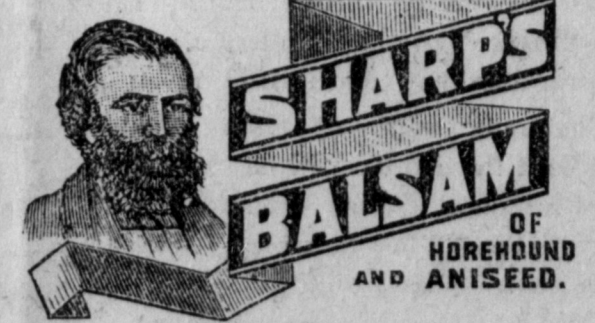
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