

Literature, &c.

From Marston; or, the Memoirs of a Statesman.
THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

THREE hours carried me to the French shore. Free from all the vulgar vexations of the road, I had the full enjoyment of one of the most pleasant of all enjoyments—moving at one's ease through a new and interesting country. The road to Paris is now like the road to Windsor, to all the higher portions of my countrymen; but then it was much less known even to them than in latter days, and the circumstances of the time gave it a totally new character. It was the difference between travelling through a country in a state of peace and a country in a state of war; between going to visit some superb palace for the purpose of viewing its paintings and curiosities, and hurrying to see what part of its magnificence had escaped an earthquake. The landscape had literally the look of war; troops were seen encamped in the neighbourhood of the principal towns; the national guards were exercising in the fields; mimic processions of children were beating drums and displaying banners in the streets, and the popular songs were all for the conquest of everything beneath the moon.

But I was to have a higher spectacle. And I shall never forget the mixture of wonder and awe which I felt at the first distant sight of the capital.

It was at the close of a long day's journey, while the twilight gave a mysterious hue to a scene in itself singular and stately.—Glistening spire on spire; massive piles, which in the deepening haze might be either prisons or palaces; vast ranges of buildings, gloomy or glittering as the partial ray fell on them; with the solemn beauty of the Invalides on one wing, the light and lovely elegance of the St. Genevieve on the other, and the frowning majesty of Notre-Dame in the midst, filled the plain with a vision such as I had imaged only in an Arabian tale. Yet the moral was even greater than the visible. I felt that I was within reach of the chief seat of all the leading events of the Continent since the birth of monarchy; every step which I might tread among those piles was historical; within that clouded circumference like the circle of the acromancer, had been raised all the dazzling and all the disturbing spirits of the world. There was the grand display of statesmanship, pomp, ambition, pleasure, and each the most subtle, splendid, daring, and prodigal ever seen among men. And, was it not now to assume even a powerful influence on the fates of mankind? Was not the falling of the monarchical forest of so many centuries, about to lay the land open to a new, and perhaps a more powerful produce; where the free blasts of nature were to rear new forms, and demand new arts of cultivation? The monarchy was falling—but was not the space, cleared of its ruins, to be filled with some new structure, statelier still? Or, if the Government of the Bourbons were to sink for ever from the eyes of men, were there to be no treasures found in the recesses thus thrown open to the eye for the first time; no mines in the discovered strata—no fountains of inexhaustible freshness and flow opened by thus piercing into the bowels of the land?

There are moments on which the destiny of a nation, perhaps of an age, turns. I had reached Paris at one of those moments. As my caleche wound its slow way round the base of Montmartre, I perceived, through the deepening twilight, a long train of flame, spreading from the horizon to the gates of the city. Shouts were heard, with now and then a heavy sound of cannon. This produced a dead stop in my progress. My postilion stoutly protested against venturing his caleche, his horses, and what he probably regarded much more than either, himself, into the heart of what he pronounced a counter-revolution. My courier, freighted with despatches, which might have been high treason to the majesty of the mob, and who saw nothing less than suspension from the first lamp post in their discovery, protested, with about the same number of *saecres*; and my diplomatic beams seemed in a fair way to be shorn.

But this was the actual thing which I had come to see; Paris in its new existence; the capital of the populace; the headquarters of the grand army of insurgency; the living centre of all those flashes of fantasy, fury, and fire which were already darting out towards every throne of Europe. I determined to have a voice on the occasion, and I exerted it with such vigour that I roused the inmates of a block house, a party of the National Guard, who, early as it was, had been as fast asleep as if they had been a *posse* of city watchmen. They clustered round us, applauded my resolve, to see what was to be seen, as perfectly national, *vraiment Francais*; kicked my postilion till he mounted his horse, beat my sulky courier with the flats of their little swords, and would have bastinadoed, or probably hanged him, if I had not interposed; and finally, hoisting me into the caleche, which they loaded with half a dozen of their number before and behind, commenced our march into Paris. This was evidently not the age of discipline.

It may have been owing to this curious escort that I got in at all; for at the gate I found a strong guard of the regular troops, who drove back a long succession of carriages which had preceded me. But my cortege was so thoroughly in the new fashion, they danced the "earmagnole" so boisterously, and sang patriotic rhymes with such strength of lungs, that it was impossible to refuse admission to patriots of such sonorosity. The popular conjectures, too, which fell to my share, vastly increased my importance. In the course of the five minu-

tes spent in wading through the crowd of the rejected, I bore fifty different characters—I was a state prisoner—a deputy from Marseilles, a part of the kingdom then in particular favour; an ex-general; a captain of banditti, and an ambassador from England or America; in either case, an especially honoured missionary, for England was then pronounced by all the Parisian authorities to be on the verge of a revolution. Though, I believe, Jonathan had the preference, for the double reason, that the love of Jean Francois for John Bull is of a rather precarious order, and that the American Revolution was an egg hatched by the warmth of the Gallic bird itself a secondary sort of parentage.

As we advanced through the streets, my noisy "compagnons de voyage" dropped off one by one, some to the lowest places of entertainment, and some tired of the jest; and I proceeded to the Place de Vendome, where was my hotel, at my leisure. The streets were now solitary, to a degree that was almost startling. As I wound my way through long lines of houses, tortuous, narrow, and dark as Erebus, I saw the cause of the singular success which had attended all Parisian insurrections. A chain across one of these dismal streets, an overturned cart, a pile of stones, would convert it at once into an impassable defile. Walls and windows, massive, lofty, and nearly touching each other from above, afforded a perpetual fortification; lanes innumerable, and extending from one depth of darkness and intricacy into another, a network of attack and ambush, obviously gave an extraordinary advantage to the irregular daring of men accustomed to thread those wretched and dismal dens, crowded with one of the fiercest and most capricious populations in the world. Times have strikingly changed since. The "fifteen fortresses" are but so many strong bars of the great cage, and they are neither too strong nor too many. Paris is now the only city on earth which is defended against itself, garrisoned on the outside and protected by a perpetual Prætorian band against a national mania of insurrection.

But on turning into the Boulevards, the scene changed with the rapidity of magic. Before me were raging thousands, the multitude which I had seen advancing to the gates. The houses, as far as the eye could reach, were lighted up with lamps, torches, and every kind of hurried illumination. Banners of all hues were waving from the casements, and borne along by the people; and in the midst of the wild procession were seen at a distance a train of travelling carriages, loaded on the roofs with the basest of the rabble. A mixed crowd of National Guards, covered with dust, and dropping under the fatigue of the road, poissards drunk, dancing, screaming the most horrid blasphemies and a still wider circle, which seemed to be recruited from all the jails of Paris, surrounded the carriages, which I at length understood to be those of the royal family. They had attempted to escape to the frontier, had been arrested and were now returning as prisoners. I caught a glimpse, by the torchlight, of the illustrious sufferers, as they passed the spot where I stood. The Queen was pale, but exhibited that stately countenance for which she was memorable to the last, she sat with the dauphiness pressed in her arms. The king looked overcome with exhaustion; the Dauphin gazed at the populace with a child's curiosity.

At the moment when the carriages were passing, an incident occurred terribly characteristic of the time. A man of a noble presence, and with an order of St. Louis on his breast, who had been giving me a hurried and anxious explanation of the scene, excited by sudden feeling, rushed forward through the escort, and laying one hand on the royal carriage, with the other waved his hat, and shouted "Vive le Roi!" In another instant I saw him stagger; a pike was darted into his bosom, and he fell dead under the wheel. Before the confusion of this frightful catastrophe had subsided, a casement was opened immediately above my head, and a woman, superbly dressed, rushed out on the balcony, waving a white scarf, and crying, "Vive Marie Antoinette!" The muskets of the escort were turned upon her, and a volley was fired at the balcony. She started back at the shock, and a long gush of blood down her white robe showed that she had been wounded. But she again waved the scarf, and again uttered the loyal cry. Successive shots were fired at her by the monsters beneath; but she still stood. At length she received the mortal blow; she tottered and fell; yet still clinging to the front of the balcony, she waved the scarf, and constantly attempted to pronounce the words of her generous and devoted heart, until she expired. I saw the scene with an emotion beyond my power to describe; all the enthusiasm of popular change was chilled within me; my boyish imaginations of republicanism were extinguished by this plunge into innocent blood; and I never felt more relieved than when the whole fearful procession at length moved on, and I was left to make my way once more, through dim and silent streets, to my dwelling.

I pass by a considerable portion of the time which followed. The Revolution was like the tiger, it advanced couching; though, when it sprang, its bound was sudden and irresistible. My time was occupied in my official functions, which became constantly more important, and of which I received flattering opinions from Downing Street. I mingled extensively in general society, and it was never more animated, or more characteristic, than at the period in Paris. The leaders of faction and the leaders of fashion, classes so different in every other part of the world, were there often the same. The woman who danced the ball room, was frequently the confidante of the deepest designs of party. The coterie in a *salon*, covered with gilding, and filled with *chefs d'œuvre* of the

arts, was often as subtle as a conspiracy in the cells of the Jacobins; and the dance or the masquerade only the preliminary to an outbreak which shattered a ministry into fragments. All the remarkable men of France passed before me, and I acknowledge that I was frequently delighted and surprised by their extraordinary attainments. The age of the *Encyclopedie* was in its wane, but some of its brilliant names still illustrated the Parisian *salons*. I recognised the style of Buffon and Rousseau in a crowd of their successors; and the most important knowledge was frequently communicated in language the most eloquent and captivating. Even the mixture of society which had been created by the Revolution, gave an original force and freshness to these assemblies, infinitely more attractive than the most elaborate polish of the old *regime*.

Brisson, the common printer, but a man of singular strength of thought, there figured by Condorcet, the noble and the man of science. St. Etienne, the little bustling partizan, yet the man of talent, mingled with the chief advocates of the Parisian court; or Servan fenced with his subtle knowledge of the world against Vergniaud, the romantic Girondist, but the most Ciceronian of orators. Talleyrand, already known as the most sarcastic of men, and Maury by far the most powerful debater of France since Mirabeau—figured among the chief ornaments of the salons of De Stael. Roland, and the showy and witty Theresa Cabarrus, and even the flutter of La Fayette, the most tinsel of heroes, and the sullen sententiousness of Robespierre, then known only as a provincial deputy, furnished a background which increased the prominence of the grouping.

But the greatest wonder of France still escaped the general eye. At a ball, at the Hotel de Stael, I remember to have been struck with the energetic denunciation of some rabble insult to the Royal Family, by an officer whom nobody knew. As a circle were standing in conversation on the topic of the day, the little officer started from his seat, pushed into the group, and expressed his utter contempt for the supineness of the Government on those occasions, so strongly as to turn all eyes upon him. "Where the troops, where the gus?" he exclaimed. "If such things are suffered, all is over with royalty; a squadron of horse, and a couple of six-pounders, would have swept away the whole swarm of scoundrels like so many flies." Having thus discharged his soul, he started back again, flung himself into a chair, and did not utter another word through the evening. I little dreamed that in the meagre frame, and long, thin physiognomy, I saw Napoleon.

I must hasten to other things. Yet I still cast many a lingering glance over these times. The vividness of the collision was incomparable. The wit, the eccentricity, the anecdote, the eloquence of those assemblages, were of a character wholly their own. They had, too, a substantial nutriment, the want of which had made the conversation of the preceding age rapid, with all its elegance—Public events of the most powerful order fed the flame. It was the creation of a vast national excitement; the rush of sparks from the great electrical machine, turned by the hands of thirty millions. The flashes were still but matters of sport and surprise. The time was nigh when those flashes were to be fatal, and that gay lustre was to do the work of conflagration.

I had now been a year in Paris, without returning, or wishing to return, to London. A letter now and then informed me of the state of those who still drew my feelings towards England. But I was in the centre of all that awoke, agitated, or alarmed Europe; and, compared with the glow and rapidity of events in France, the rest of Europe appeared asleep, or to open its eyes solely when some new explosion shook it from its slumber.

My position, too, was a matchless school for the learner in diplomacy, France was the stage to which every eye in Europe was turned, whether for comedy or tragedy; and I was behind the scenes. But the charge was at hand.

One night I found an individual, of a very marked appearance, waiting for me at my hotel. His countenance was evidently Jewish, and he introduced himself as one of the secret police of the ministry. The man handed me a letter—it was from Mordecai, and directed to be given with the utmost secrecy. It was in his usual succinct and rapid style.

"I write this in the midst of a tumult of business. My friend Mendoza will give you such knowledge and assistance as may be necessary. France is on the point of an explosion. Every thing is prepared. It is impossible that it can be delayed above a week or two, and the only origin of the delay is in the determination to make the overthrow final. Acquaint your English officials with this. The monarchy of the Bourbons has signed its death-warrant. By suffering a legislature to be formed by the vote of the mere multitude, it has put property within the power of all beggars; rank has been left at the mercy of the rabble; and the church has been sacrificed to please a faction. Thus the true pillars of society have been cut away; and the throne is left in the air. Mendoza will tell you more. The train is already laid. A letter from the confidential agent tells us that the day is fixed. At all events, avoid the mine. There is no pleasure in being blown up, even in company with kings."

A postscript briefly told me—that his daughter sent her recollections; that Clotilde was still indisposed; De Fontaine giddier than ever; and, as to proof of his own confidence in his views, that he had just sold out 100,000 three per cent consols.

My first visit next morning was to the British embassy. But the ambassador was absent in the country, and the functionary who had been left in charge was taking lessons on the guitar, and extremely unwilling to be disturbed, by matters comparatively trifling as the fate of

dynasties. I explained, but explained in vain. The hour was at hand when his horses were to be at the door for a ride in the Bois de Boulogne. I recommended a ride after the ambassador. It was impossible. He was to be the escort of a duchess; then to go dinner at the Russian embassy, and was under engagement to three balls in the course of the evening. Nothing could be clearer than that such duties must supercede the slight concerns of office. I left him under the hands of his valet, curling his ringlets, and preparing him to be the admiration of mankind.

I saw Mendoza secretly again; received from him additional intelligence; and, as I was not inclined to make a second experiment on the "elegant extract" of diplomacy, and escort of duchesses, I went, as soon as the nightfall concealed my visit, to the hotel of the Foreign Minister. This was my first interview with the celebrated Dumourier.

He received me with the courtesy of a man accustomed to high life; and I entered on the purport of my visit at once. He was perfectly astonished at my tidings. He had known that strong resolutions had been adopted by the party opposed to the Cabinet; but was startled by the distinct avowal of its intention to overthrow the monarchy.

I was struck with the appearance, his quickness of conception, and the mixture of sprightliness and depth, which I had found characteristic of the higher orders of French society. He was short in stature, but proportioned for activity; his countenance bold, but with smiling lips and a most penetrating grey eye. His name as a soldier was at this period wholly unknown, but I could imagine in him a leader, equally subtle and daring;—he soon realized my conjecture.

Within twenty-four hours of this interview the ministry was dissolved! Dumourier was gone post haste to the command of one of the armies on the frontier, merely to save his life from the mob; and I went to bed, in the Place Vendome, by the light of Lafayette burned in effigy in the centre of the square. So much for popularity.

At dusk, on the memorable ninth of August, as I was sitting in a cafe of the Palais Royal, listening to the mountain songs of a party of Swiss minstrels in front of the door, Mendoza, passing through the crowd, made me a signal; I immediately followed him to an obscure corner of one of the galleries.

"The insurrection is fixed for to night," was the startling announcement. "At twelve by the clock of Notre Dame, all the sections will be under arms. The Jacobin club, the club of the Cordeliers, and the Faubourg St. Antoine, are the alarm posts. The Marseillais are posted at the Cordeliers, and are to head the attack. Danton is already among them, and has published his address."

He gave me the placard. It was brief and bold.

"Citizens—The country is betrayed. France is in the hands of her enemies. The Austrians are advancing. Our troops are retreating, and Paris must be defended by her brave sons alone. But we have traitors in the camp. Our legislators are their accomplices: Lafayette, the slave of kings, has been suffered to escape; but the nation must be avenged. The perfidious Louis is about to follow his example and fly, after having devoted the capital to conflagration. Delay a moment, and you will have to fight by the flame of your houses, and to bleed over the ashes of your wives and children. March, and victory is yours. To arms! To arms!! To arms!!!"

"Does Danton lead the insurrection?"
"No—for two reasons: he is an incendiary but no soldier; and they cannot trust him in case of success. A secret meeting of the heads of the party was held two days since, to decide on a leader of the sections. It was difficult, and had nearly been finished by the dagger. Billaud de Varennes, Vanquelin, St. Angely, and Danton, were successively proposed. Robespierre objected to them all. At length an old German refugee, a beggar, but a soldier, was fixed on; and Westerman is to take the command. By one o'clock the tocsin is to be rung, and the insurgents are instantly to move from all points on the Tuileries."

"What is the object?"
"The seizure, or death, of the king and Royal Family!"

"And the result of that object?"
"The proclamation of a Republic!"
"Is this known at the palace?"
"Not a syllable. All there are in perfect security; to communicate intelligence there is not in my department."

And I looked at the keen eye and dark physiognomy of my informant, there was an expression of surprise in mine at this extraordinary coolness, which saved me the trouble of asking the question.

"You doubt me," said he, "you feel distrust of information unpaid and voluntary. But I have been ordered by Mordecai, the chief of our tribe in England, to watch over you; and this information is a part of my obedience to the command." He suddenly darted away.

Notwithstanding the steadiness of his assertions I still doubted their probability, and to examine the point for myself I strayed toward the palace. All there was tranquil; a few lights were scattered through the galleries, but every sound of life, much less of watchfulness and preparation was still. The only human beings in sight were some dismounted cavalry, and a battalion of the national guard lounging about the square. As I found it impossible of my rest till I knew the truth or falsehood of my information, I next wandered along the Boulevards, in the direction of the Faubourg St. Antoine, the focus of all the tumults of Paris; but all along this fine avenue was hushed as if a general slumber had fallen over the city. The