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Barlasch of the Guard

By HENRY SETON MERRIMAN

(Continued.)
The first Antoine Sebastian, played the part well enough when he remembered that he was a part to play, and Sebastian, with a kind attention to the story of a very old lady, who, it seemed, had been married herself, but it was so long ago that the human interest of it all was in a pot of old detail which was all she could recall. Before the story was half finished Sebastian's attention had strayed elsewhere though his spare figure remained in its attitude of attention and polite forbearance. His mind had, it would seem, a trick of wandering away and leaving his body rigid in the last attitude that it had dictated.

Sebastian did not notice that the door was open and all the guests were waiting for him to lead the way.

"Now, old dreamer," whispered Desiree with a quick look at him, "take us upstairs to the dining-room and give her wine. You are to drink our health, remember."

"Is there wine?" he asked with a vague smile. "Where has it come from?"

"Like other good things, my father-in-law," replied the girl, "has brought it from France."

They spoke together thus in confidence in the language of that same sunny land. But when Sebastian turned again to the old lady, still recalling the details of that wedding, he addressed her in German, offered his arm with a sudden stiffness of gesture which he seemed to put on with the change of tongue.

They passed up the low, time-worn steps arm in arm, and beneath the high carved doorway, whereon some pious merchant had inscribed his belief that if God be in the house there is no need of a watchman, emphasizing his creed by bolts and locks of enormous strength, and bars to every window.

The servant, in her Samlaid Sunday dress, having shaken her fist at the child, closed the door behind the last guest, and so far as Emmanuelle was concerned, the exciting incident was over. From the open window came only the murmur of quiet voices, the clink of glasses at the drinking of a toast, or a laugh in the clear voice of the bride herself. For Desiree persisted in her optimistic view of these proceedings though her husband scarcely helped her now at all, and seemed a different man since the passage through the Pfaffen-gasse of that dusty travelling carriage which had played the part of the stormy petrel from end to end of Europe.

CHAPTER II.

A Campaigner

Not what I am, but what I do is my kingdom.

Desiree had made all her own wedding-dress. "Her poor little marriage basket," she called it. She had even made the cake which was now cut with some ceremony by her father.

"I tremble," she exclaimed, aloud, "to think what it may be like in the middle." And Mathilde was the only person there who did not smile at the unconscious admission. The cake was still under discussion, and the Gräfin had just admitted that it was almost as good as that other cake which had been consumed in the days of Frederick the Great, when the great Frederick had been in the room.

"It is a soldier," she said, in a whisper, at the head of the stairs. "He has a paper in his hand. I know what that means. He is quartered on us."

Desiree hurried down stairs. In the narrow entrance hall, a broad-built little man in a red coat and a top hat, with a sword at his side, stood at the door. He was a snuff-blower, and he was a snuff-blower. He was a snuff-blower, and he was a snuff-blower.

He frowned at Desiree while she read the paper in his hand. He was a snuff-blower, and he was a snuff-blower. He was a snuff-blower, and he was a snuff-blower.

Then he turned to the servant, who stood, comely and breathless, looking him up and down.

"Papa Barlasch," he added, for her education, and he drew down his face to a snuff-blower, and he was a snuff-blower.

"Does this mean that you are quartered upon us?" asked Desiree, without seeking to hide her disgust. She spoke in her own tongue.

"French?" said the soldier, looking at her. "Good. Yes. I am quartered here. Thirty-Six, Frauengasse Sebastian, musician. You are lucky to get me. I always give satisfaction."

He gave a curt laugh in one syllable only. His left arm was curved round a bundle of wood bound together by a red pocket-handkerchief not innocent of snuff. He held out his bundle to Desiree, as Solomon may have held out some great gift to the Queen of Sheba to smooth the first stumbling steps of friendship.

Desiree accepted the gift and stood in her wedding-dress holding the bundle of wood against her breast. Then a gleam of the one gray eye that was visible conveyed to her the fact that this walnut-faced warrior was smiling. She laughed again.

"It is well," said Barlasch. "We are friends. You are lucky to get me. You may not think so now. Would this woman like me to speak to her in Polish or German?"

"Do you speak so many languages?" He shrugged his shoulders and spread out his arms as far as many bundles allowed. For he was hung round with a hundred parcels and packages.

"The Old Guard," he said, "can always make itself understood."

He rubbed his hands together with the air of a brisk man ready for any sort of work.

"Now, where shall I sleep?" he asked. "One is not particular, you understand. A few minutes and one is at home—perhaps peeling the potatoes. It is only a civilian who is ashamed of using his knife on a potato. Papa Barlasch, they call me."

Without waiting an invitation he went forward toward the kitchen. He seemed to know the house by instinct. His progress was accompanied by a clatter of utensils like that which heralds the coming of a carrier's cart.

the servant, but he said nothing. He looked round at the polished utensils, at the table and floor, both alike scrubbed clean by a vigorous northern arm. And he was kind enough to nod approval.

"On a campaign," he said, to no one in particular, "a little bit of horse thrust into the cinders on the end of a bayonet—bust in time of peace."

He broke off and made a gesture toward the saucapane which indicated quite clearly that he was between campaigns—inclined to good living.

"I am a rude folk," he jerked to Desiree over his shoulder in the dialect of the Cotes du Nord.

"How long will you be here?" asked Desiree, who was eminently practical. A bill was a misfortune which Charles Dardagon had hitherto succeeded in warding off. He had some small influence as an officer of the head-quarters staff.

Barlasch held up a reproving hand. The question, he seemed to think, was not quite delicate.

"I pay my own," he said. "Give and take—that is my motto. When you have nothing to give, offer a smile."

With a gesture he indicated the bundle of firewood, which Desiree still absently carried against her white dress.

He turned and opened a cupboard low down on the floor at the left-hand side of the fireplace. He seemed to know by an instinct usually possessed by charwomen and other domesticated persons of experience where the firewood was kept. Lisa gave a little exclamation of surprise at his impudence and his perspicacity.

He took the firewood, unknotted his handkerchief, and threw his offering into the cupboard. Then he turned, and perceived for the first time that Desiree had a bright ribbon at her waist and on her shoulders; that a thin chain of gold was round her throat, and that there were flowers at her breast.

"A fete?" he inquired, curiously. "My marriage fete," she answered. "I was married half an hour ago."

He looked at her beneath his grizzled brows. His face was only capable of producing one expression—a shaggy weather-beaten fierceness. But, like a dog, which can express more than many human beings, by a hundred instinctive gestures he could, it seemed, dispense with words on occasion and get on quite as well without them.

He clearly disapproved of Desiree's marriage, and drew her attention to the fact that she was no more than a school-girl, with an inconsequent brain, and little limbs too slight to fight a successful war in a world full of cruelty and danger.

Then he made a gesture full of apology, as if recognizing that it was no business of his, and turned away thoughtfully.

"I had troubles of that sort myself," he explained, putting together the embers on the hearth with the point of a twisted, rusty bayonet, "but that was long ago. Well, I can drink your health all the same, mademoiselle."

He turned to Lisa with a friendly nod and put out his tongue, in the manner of the people, to indicate that his lips were dry.

Desiree had always been the house-keeper. It was to her that Lisa naturally turned in her extremity at the invasion of her kitchen by Papa Barlasch.

And when that warrior had been supplied with beer, it was with Desiree, in an agitated whisper in the great dark dining-room with its gloomy old pictures and heavy carvings, that she took counsel as to where he should be quartered.

The object of their solitude himself interrupted their hurried consultation by opening the door and putting his shaggy head round the corner of it.

"It is not worth while to consult long about it," he said. "There is a little room behind the kitchen, that opens into the yard. It is full of boxes. But we can move them—a little straw—and there!"

With a gesture he described a condition of domestic peace and comfort which far exceeded his humble requirements.

"The black beetles and I are old friends," he concluded cheerfully.

"There are no black beetles in the house, monieur," said Desiree, hesitating to accept his proposal.

"Then I shall resign myself to my solitude," he answered. "It is quiet. I shall not hear the patron touching on his violin. It is that which occupies his leisure, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Desiree, still considering the question.

"I too am a musician," said Papa Barlasch, turning toward the kitchen again. "I played a drum at Marenco."

And as he led the way to the little room in the yard, the back of the kitchen, he expressed by a shake of the head a fellow-feeling for the gentleman upstairs, whose acquaintance he had not yet made, who occupied his leisure by touching the violin.

They stood together in the small apartment which Barlasch, with the promptitude of an experienced conqueror, had set apart for his own accommodation.

"Those trunks," he observed, casually, "were made in France—a mental note which he happened to make aloud, as some do for better remembrance. "This solid girl and I will soon move them. And you, mademoiselle, go back to your wedding."

"The good God be merciful to you," he added, under his breath, when Desiree had gone. She laughed as she mounted the stairs, a slim white figure amid the heavy woodwork long since blackened by time. The stairs made no sound beneath her light step. How many weary feet had climbed them since they were built! For the Dardagons have been a people of sorrow, torn by wars, starved by siege, tossed from one conqueror to another from the beginning until now.

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Feb. 13 .. LAKE ERIE .. Mar. 2
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No. 2—Express for Halifax, Sydney and Campbellton .. 7.00
No. 3—Mixed train to Montreal .. 7.30
No. 4—Express for Point du Chene, H. B. and Pictou .. 12.25
No. 5—Express for Sydney .. 12.35
No. 134—Express for Quebec and Montreal .. 12.40
No. 135—Express for Montreal .. 12.45
No. 136—Express for Montreal .. 12.50
No. 137—Express for Montreal .. 12.55
No. 138—Express for Montreal .. 1.00
No. 139—Express for Montreal .. 1.05
No. 140—Express for Montreal .. 1.10
No. 141—Express for Montreal .. 1.15
No. 142—Express for Montreal .. 1.20
No. 143—Express for Montreal .. 1.25
No. 144—Express for Montreal .. 1.30
No. 145—Express for Montreal .. 1.35
No. 146—Express for Montreal .. 1.40
No. 147—Express for Montreal .. 1.45
No. 148—Express for Montreal .. 1.50
No. 149—Express for Montreal .. 1.55
No. 150—Express for Montreal .. 2.00

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No. 2—From Halifax and Sydney .. 6.20
No. 3—From Montreal .. 6.50
No. 4—From Point du Chene, H. B. and Pictou .. 12.45
No. 5—From Sydney .. 12.55
No. 134—From Quebec and Montreal .. 12.40
No. 135—From Montreal .. 12.45
No. 136—From Montreal .. 12.50
No. 137—From Montreal .. 12.55
No. 138—From Montreal .. 1.00
No. 139—From Montreal .. 1.05
No. 140—From Montreal .. 1.10
No. 141—From Montreal .. 1.15
No. 142—From Montreal .. 1.20
No. 143—From Montreal .. 1.25
No. 144—From Montreal .. 1.30
No. 145—From Montreal .. 1.35
No. 146—From Montreal .. 1.40
No. 147—From Montreal .. 1.45
No. 148—From Montreal .. 1.50
No. 149—From Montreal .. 1.55
No. 150—From Montreal .. 2.00

All trains run by Atlantic Standard Time.

D. POTTINGER, General Manager.

ST. JOHN, N.B., Oct. 15, 1935.

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