

He felt that René had hit upon the weak spots that he had felt and yet failed to recognize. In four hours the sea-scape was finished, and as he stepped back into the window to look at it, he felt that the ray of misty light showing rather on the water than on the air, had effected wonders, and added immensely to the poetry of the picture.

"I have only just time to change, and get there in time," he said, with a very unlover-like tone of regret, as he hastily threw off his painting blouse, ate a piece of bread left over from breakfast, and drank a glass of wine. He glanced many times at the picture.

"Curious," he muttered, "how blind men are to their own work. I can detect a weak point in another man's work in a moment, and yet, though I felt that something was wrong, I could not see what it was in my own. If I succeed as well with the other as I have done with this I shall be satisfied indeed."

"You are a quarter of an hour late, sir," Mary said, holding up her finger in reproof as he entered. "The idea of keeping me waiting, the very first time after our engagement. I tremble when I look forward to the future."

"I have been painting, Mary, and when one is painting one forgets how time flies; but I feel greatly ashamed of myself, and am deeply contrite."

"You don't look contrite at all, Cuthbert. Not one bit."

"Well, I will not press for forgiveness now, I think when you see what I have been doing you will overlook the offence."

"What have you been doing? I thought you told me that you had quite finished the two pictures, the day you came to say good-bye before you started for Brussels."

"René has been criticising them and has shown me where I committed two egregious blunders."

"Then I think it was very impertinent of him," Mary said in a tone of vexation. "I am sure nothing could have been nicer than they were even when I saw them, I am certain there were no blunders in them, and I don't see how they could be improved."

"Wait until you see them again, Mary. I altered one this morning, but the other will take me three or four days steady work. I am not so sure of success there, but if you don't like it when you see it, I promise you that I will restore it to its former condition, now let us be off; if I am not mistaken there is something going on, I saw several battalions of National Guards marching through the streets; and there is a report that 50,000 men are to march against Versailles. We may as well see them start, it may turn out to be an historic event."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE march against Versailles did not take place on the first of April, although the Communists had every reason to believe that they would meet with no opposition, as on the previous night two regiments of the army, forming the advanced guard between Versailles and Paris, came in, together with a battery of artillery, and declared for the Commune. The next morning Cuthbert went up at nine o'clock, as he had arranged to take Mary out early, and to work in the afternoon. Just as he reached the house he heard a cannon-shot.

"Hurry on your things," he said as he met her, "a gun has just fired; it is the first in the Civil War; perhaps the National Guard are starting against Versailles; at any rate it will be worth seeing."

The girl was ready in two or three minutes, and they walked briskly to the Arc de Triomphe. As they did so they could hear not only the boom of cannon, but the distant firing of musketry. Around the Arch a number of people were gathered, looking down the long broad avenue running from it through the Porte Maillot, and then over the Bridge of Neuilly to the column of Courbeil. Heavy firing was going on near the bridge, upon the banks of the river, and away beyond it to the right.

"That firing means that France is saved from the horrors of another red Revolution, Mary," Cuthbert said. "It shows that some of the troops at least are loyal, and in these matters ex-

ample is everything. There was a report that Charrette's Zouaves and the gendarmes have been placed at the outposts, and if the report is true, it was a wise step, indeed, for McMahon to take, for both could be relied upon; and now fighting has begun, there is hope that the troops behind will stand firm."

"Why should they, Cuthbert?"

"Some of the shots from this side are sure to fall among them, and if a few are killed and wounded the rest will get angry, and all idea of fraternizing with the men who are firing on them will be at an end. I should like to see how that crowd of National Guards are behaving."

"Shall we go down and look, Cuthbert. See, there is an omnibus going down the hill, so I don't suppose there can be much danger."

"I don't think that there is any danger at present, Mary; the balls will hardly come so far, but if the troops open fire with cannon, they will send shell right up this avenue."

"Would you go by yourself if I were not here, Cuthbert?"

"Well, I certainly should, but that is no reason why I should go with you."

"I can see women looking out of the windows," she said, "so we will go down together, Cuthbert. We had the German shell falling near us while the siege was going on, and things went on just as usual."

"Come on then, dear; at any rate it will be only field-guns and not heavy siege artillery, and I dare say we can get into one of the houses and look out from them; a twelve-pounder would scarcely do much harm to one of these solid stone buildings."

They went quietly down the road. No whiz of bullet or crash of shell was heard, and without interruption they continued their course until they arrived near the gate. Near it were two battalions of the National Guard, who were in a state of utter disorder. Some of the men were quietly walking away with their rifles slung behind them, in spite of a line of sentries placed across the road and the efforts of their officers. Cuthbert questioned some of the men, as they came along, as to what had

happened, but the most contradictory answers were given. They had been fired upon from Fort Valerien; they had been attacked from Courbevoie; they had been betrayed; they had been sent out without any cannon: ammunition was short; they were not going to stay to be shot down; they were going to the Hôtel de Ville to turn out the traitors who had sent them out without a proper supply of ammunition. That they had some ammunition was evident from the fact that several muskets went off accidentally, the result of nervousness on the part of those that held them.

"We won't stay here to risk being shot by these cowardly fools," Cuthbert said, "let us get into one of the houses."

They went back a short distance, and Cuthbert spoke to a man standing at his door. "This lady and myself are English," he said, "would you allow us to go up and stand at one of the windows to see what is going on?"

The request was at once acceded to, and they were soon posted at a window on the fifth floor.

"Look at them," Cuthbert said in disgust, "these are the heroes who clamored to go out and destroy the Germans."

The scene below was certainly singular—the bugles and drums sounded the assembly and beat the *rappel* alternately, but the men paid not the slightest attention to the call, but continued to slink away until the drummers and buglers remained alone. Of the two battalions, some fifty men posted at the loop-holes of the crenelated wall by the gate remained; the rest had melted away. From the balcony at the window a fine view was obtained across the country. A heavy musket-fire was still maintained along the river-side, and there was a continuous roll of musketry at Courbevoie, where, as one of the National Guard had told them, a battalion which occupied the barracks there had been cut off by the advance of the troops. Artillery and musketry were both at work there, but elsewhere there was no artillery fire.

Close to the bridge at Neuilly the struggle was maintained for a time, and presently a column of troops were seen advancing against the bridge. As it did so the firing there ceased at once,

and it was soon evident that the troops had gained the position. Numbers of National Guards soon came trooping in at the gate. A very few remained there; the rest, without waiting for orders, hurried on into Paris. A dark group now appeared on the road leading up to Courbeil; there was a white puff of smoke and a shell exploded a hundred yards on the other side of the gate. A steady fire was now kept up by two guns, the greater part of the shells exploded beyond the outer works; but several came up the avenue, two of them striking houses, and others exploding in the roadway. Each time when the whistle of a shell was heard approaching, Cuthbert drew Mary back from the balcony into the room.

"I fancy," he said, "the troops have an idea that there are masses of the Communists assembled near the gates in readiness for a sortie, and they are firing to prevent their coming out, until they have fortified the bridge and the other points they have occupied."

The firing continued for some time. At other windows the inhabitants were watching the conflict, and Cuthbert pointed out, to Mary's great amusement, the precautions that some of them were taking to ensure their personal safety. One woman had drawn down the Venetian blinds, and was looking between them, another was peering out with a pillow held over her head. The few National Guards who remained at their post were men of courage, for they showed no signs of flinching even when shells exploded within a few yards of the position they occupied. Presently there was a sound of wheels, and two four-pounder guns were brought up and placed one on each side of the gate to sweep the approaches.

Between one and two o'clock several battalions of National Guards came leisurely up, piled their arms and sat down under shelter of the wall. It was evident they had no idea of making a sortie, but had been brought up to defend the gate in case it was attacked. Soon after their arrival, a party that had remained near the river returned and it was clear that at least a portion of the troops had proved faithless, for with them were forty or fifty soldiers, who had come over during the fight.

They were disarmed and then escorted into the town, where, as Cuthbert afterwards learned, they were received with enthusiasm by the mob.

"It is evident that there is no idea of any attempt being made to recapture the bridge at present, Mary; I don't know how you feel but I am getting desperately hungry, so I think we may as well be going back. I should like to see what is going on in the city. Will you come with me? I have no doubt we shall be able to get a voiture up at the arch, and we can have lunch there."

Mary was as anxious to see what is going on as he was, and in a quarter of an hour they alighted in the Rue Rivoli. As yet the population had heard but vague reports that fighting was going on, and matters were comparatively quiet, for so many rumors had pervaded the town during the last few days, that they were not generally believed. Accordingly, after lunch, Cuthbert took Mary home in a fiacre.

"I have been quite alarmed about you, my dear, where have you been?" Madame Michaud said as they entered.

"We have been seeing the fighting, madame, and the Reds have been beaten."

"I have heard all sorts of stories about it, but most of them say that the Versailles people got the worst of it."

"Then the stories were not true," Mary said, "most of the National Guard wouldn't fight at all, and the regiments all broke away and went into Paris without firing a shot, the troops have taken the bridge of Neuilly."

"The good God be thanked," Madame Michaud said piously, "my husband was afraid the troops would not fight, and that we were going to have terrible times; but there is a hope now, that the Commune will be put down."

"Every hope, madame," Cuthbert said. "I was sure this scum of Paris would not fight if the troops would do so. They have too much regard for their worthless skins. It may be some time before McMahan can get a force together sufficient to take Paris, but sooner or later he will do so, though it will be a serious business with the forts all in the hands of the

Communists. If they had but handed over one or two of the forts to the gendarmes, or kept a company or two of sailors there, there would have been a line by which the troops could have approached the town, as it is they will have to bring up siege-guns and silence Issy and Vanves before much can be done."

An hour later Monsieur Michaud arrived; he too had been in the city and was in ignorance of what had taken place during the morning.

"That accounts for it," he said, "we are all ordered to be under arms at eight o'clock this evening."

"But you will not go?" his wife exclaimed anxiously.

"But I must go, my dear. I have no desire to be shot, and I think there is much more fear of my being shot, if I don't answer to the call of my name than there will be if I do. In the first place, we may not go out beyond the wall, in the second place, if there is I may see a chance of running away, for mind you, though I hope I should have fought as bravely as others if the Germans had come, I do not feel myself called upon to fight against Frenchmen and in a cause I hate."

"You will find yourself in good company anyhow, Monsieur Michaud," Cuthbert laughed. "We have seen nineteen hundred and fifty men out of two thousand march off without firing a shot to-day."

"So much the better, monsieur, four out of five of the National Guards hate it all as much as I do. Will you dine with us to-day, monsieur, and then we can go down together afterwards."

Cuthbert accepted the invitation willingly. "Yes, you can come down with us, Mary," he went on, in answer to a look of appeal from her. "I will bring her back safely, Madame Michaud, the sight will be well worth seeing. Before I go I will have a look round and see if I can get a bed for the night, it is a long way out from my lodgings and I should like to be out here by daylight, for if they mean to march on Versailles they are sure to start as soon as it is light."

"We have a spare room," Madame Michaud said, "and it is

quite at your disposal. It will be doing us a kindness if you will accept it, for when my husband is away I always feel nervous without a man in the house, and as it is but ten minutes' walk from here to the Arc de Triomphe, you will be on the spot, and indeed from the roof of this house you can obtain a view all over the country."

A great change had taken place in the appearance of Paris when they went down in the evening, the town was in a state of the wildest excitement, everywhere drums were beating and trumpets sounding, everywhere National Guards mustering. The streets were crowded, the most violent language uttered by the lower classes, and threats of all kinds poured out against the 'butchers of Versailles.' On the walls were red placards issued by the Commune and headed "Men of Paris. The butchers of Versailles are slaughtering your brethren !!!"

"As a rule the brethren decline to be slaughtered, Mary," Cuthbert said as they read the proclamation. "You see, if the troops fire they are butchers, if the National Guards fire they are heroes. Considering that Paris has ten armed men to every one McMahan has got, even if all the troops could be relied upon, the Parisians must indeed be of a mild temper if they submit to be butchered."

Monsieur Michaud now left them to take his place in the ranks of his battalion. It was not long before the National Guards were in motion, and for hours columns of troops moved up the Champs Elysées. The Rue Rivoli was actually choked with the men; the mob shouted "Vive la Commune" until they were hoarse, and the battalions from the working quarters lustily sang the chorus of the Marseillaise.

At ten o'clock Cuthbert and Mary arrived at the Arc de Triomphe on their way back. Along the whole line from the Tuileries the National Guard were bivouacked. The arms were piled down the centre of the road, and many of the men had already wrapped themselves in their blankets and lain down to sleep with their heads on their knapsacks. The wine-shops in the neighborhood were all crowded, and it was evident that many of the men had determined to keep it up all night.

Madame Michaud had coffee ready for them on their return, and after drinking it they went to their rooms, Mary being completely tired out with the fatigue and excitement of the day. At five o'clock Cuthbert was up; he had told Mary the night before that he would return for her at eight. On arriving at the Arc de Triomphe he found the National Guards pouring down the avenue to the Fort Maillot. Three heavy columns were marching along the roads which converged at the Bridge of Neuilly. Here Cuthbert expected a desperate struggle, but a few shots only were fired, and then a small body of troops covered by a party of skirmishers, retired up the hill, and then turning off made their way towards Fort Valerien.

The force was evidently insufficient to hold the bridge against the masses of revolutionists advancing against it, and the real resistance to the forces of the Commune would commence further back. Crossing the bridge the National Guard spread out to the right and left and mounted the hill, as they did so some eighteen-pounder guns which had been the day before mounted on the Fort, opened fire on the bridge, and for a time the forward movement ceased, and the regiment on their way down towards the gate were halted. Cuthbert chatted for some time with one of the officers and learnt from him that this was not the real point of attack,

"It is from the other side of the river that the great stroke against the Versaillaise will be struck," he said, "a hundred and fifty thousand National Guards advanced on that side; they will cross the heights of Meudon, and move straight to Versailles. We have but some twenty-five thousand here, and shall advance as soon as the others have attacked Meudon."

In an hour the forward movement had again commenced, a heavy column poured across the bridge, the firing from Valerien having now ceased. Cuthbert watched the black mass advancing up the slope towards Courbeil. It was not until they reached the top of the slope that Valerien suddenly opened fire. Puff after puff of white smoke darted out from its crest in quick succession, the shells bursting in and around the heavy column. In a moment its character changed; it had been literally cut

in half by the iron shower. Those in front of the point where the storm had struck it, broke off and fled to the village of Nanterre on the left, where they took shelter among the houses. The other portion of the column broke up as suddenly, and became at once a disorganized mob, who at the top of their speed rushed down to the slope again to the bridge at Neuilly. Across this they poured in wild confusion and made no halt until they had passed the Fort Maillot. There the officers attempted to rally them, but in vain; many had thrown their muskets away in their flight, the rest slung them behind them, and continued their way to Paris, all vowing that they had been betrayed, and that they would have vengeance on the Commune. Seeing that there was no more probability of fighting on his side, Cuthbert returned to Madame Michaud's.

"Madame is on the roof," Margot said as he entered; "everyone is up there: she said I was to give you breakfast when you came in; the coffee is ready, and I have an omelette prepared, it will be cooked in three minutes; Madame said that you would be sure to be hungry after being out so long." In a quarter of an hour he ascended to the roof. The resident on the ground-floor had an astronomical telescope with which he was in the habit of reconnoitring the skies from the garden. This he had taken up to the roof, where some twenty persons were gathered. A magnificent view was obtained here of the circle of hills from Valerien round by Meudon, and the whole of the left bank of the river. It needed but a glance to see that the army of the Commune had made but little progress. Although the fighting began soon after two o'clock in the morning, and it was now nearly mid-day, the heights of Meudon were still in the hands of the troops.

From among the trees by the chateau white puffs of smoke shot out, many of the shells bursting in and around the fort of Issy, which replied briskly. The guns of Vanves joined in the combat, their fire being directed towards the plateau of Chatillon, which was held by the troops. Round Issy a force of the National Guard was assembled, but the main body was in the deep valley between the forts and Meudon, and on the slopes

nearly up to the chateau; the rattle of musketry here was continuous, a light smoke drifting up through the trees. After a time it was evident that the line of musketry fire was lower down the hill, descending, showing that the troops were pressing the Communists backwards, and presently one of the batteries near the chateau shifted its position, and took ground some distance down the hill, and this and a battery near the end of the viaduct by the chateau, opened a heavy fire on the forts.

A look through the telescope showed that the Communists were crouching behind walls and houses, occasionally, when the fire of the guns was silent, a few of them would get up and advance into the open, but only to scamper back into shelter as soon as they reopened fire.

"That settles it, monsieur," Cuthbert said, to the owner of the telescope, after taking a long look through it, "hitherto, the Communists have believed that Versailles was at their mercy, and they had but to march out to capture it. They have failed, and failure means their final defeat. They say that the prisoners of war are arriving in Versailles at the rate of two or three thousand a day, and in another fortnight, Thiers will have a force sufficient to take the offensive, and by that time, will doubtless have siege-guns in position. I don't say that Paris may not hold out for a considerable time, but it must fall in the long run, and I fear, that all who have got anything to lose will have a very bad time of it."

"I fear so, monsieur; as these wretches become more desperate, they will proceed to greater lengths. You see they have already insisted that all the National Guard—whatever their opinions—shall join in the defence of the city. They have declared the confiscation of the goods of any member of the Guard who shall leave the town. I hear a decree is likely to be published to-morrow or next day confiscating all Church property; already they have taken possession of the churches, and turned them into clubs. If they do such things now, there is no saying to what lengths they may go as they see their chances of success diminishing daily."

Although the artillery fire was maintained for some time longer, it was by three o'clock evident that the battle was virtually over. The party therefore descended from the roof, and Cuthbert strolled back to the centre of Paris. The streets, that evening, presented a very strong contrast to the scene of excitement that had reigned twenty-four hours before. There was no shouting and singing; no marching of great bodies of troops. An air of gloom pervaded the lower classes, while the bourgeois remained for the most part in their houses, afraid that the deep satisfaction the events of the day had caused them, might betray itself in their faces.

For the next few days Cuthbert worked steadily, going up late in the afternoon to Fassy. The Commune had, on the day after the failure against Versailles, issued a decree that all unmarried men from seventeen to thirty-five, should join the ranks, and a house-to-house visitation was ordered to see that none escaped the operation of the decree. One of these parties visited Cuthbert: it consisted of a man with a red sash, and two others in the uniform of the National Guard. As soon as they were satisfied of Cuthbert's nationality, they left, having been much more civil than he had expected. He thought it advisable, however, to go at once to the Hôtel de Ville, where, on producing his passport, he was furnished with a document bearing the seal of the Commune, certifying that being a British subject, Cuthbert Hartington was exempt from service, and was allowed to pass anywhere without molestation.

Equal good luck did not attend the other students, all of whom were, to their intense indignation, enrolled upon the list of the National Guard of their quarter. Cuthbert had difficulty in retaining a perfectly serious countenance, as René, Pierre, and two or three others came in to tell him what had occurred.

"And there is no getting away from it," René said. "If we had thought that it would come to this, of course we would have left Paris directly this affair began, but now it is impossible: no tickets are issued by the railways except to old men, women and children, no one is allowed to pass through the gates without a permit from the Commune, and even if one could manage

to get on to the wall and drop down by a rope one might be taken and shot by the Communist troops outside, or, if one got through them, by the sentries of the army of Versailles. What would you advise us to do, Cuthbert?"

"I am afraid I can't give you any advice whatever, René, it is certainly horribly unpleasant being obliged to fight in a cause you detest, but I don't think there will be a very great deal of fighting till an assault is made on the city, and when that begins, I should say the Communists will be too busy to look for absentees from the ranks."

"We shall be in double danger then," Pierre Leroux put in. "We run the risk of being shot by the Communists for not fighting at the barricades, and if we escape that, we have a chance of being shot by the Versailles as Communists. It is a horrible position to be placed in."

"Well, I should say, Pierre, keep your eyes open and escape if you possibly can before the assault takes place. I should think some might manage to get out as women, but, of course you would have to sacrifice your mustaches. But if you did that, and borrowed the papers of some young woman or other, you might manage it. No doubt it would be awkward if you were found out, but it might be worth trying. If I cannot leave before the assault takes place I mean to go to one of the English hotels here, Meurice's or the Dover, and establish myself there. During such fighting as there may be in the streets, there will be very few questions asked, and one might be shot before one could explain one was a foreigner, but the hotels are not likely to be disturbed. Seriously I should say that the best thing you can all do when the fighting begins in the streets, is to keep out of the way until your battalion is engaged, then burn anything in the way of uniform, get rid of your rifle somehow, and gather at Goudé's. He could vouch for you all as being his pupils, and as being wholly opposed to the Commune. His name should be sufficiently well known, if not to the first officer who may arrive, at least, to many officers, for his testimony to be accepted. Still, I do think that the best plan of all will be to get out of the place when you get a chance."

Some of the students did succeed in getting out. Pierre and two others made their way down through the drains, came out on the river at night, and swam across. One of the youngest went out by train dressed as a woman, but the rest were forced to don the uniform and take their places in the ranks of the National Guard. The question of leaving Paris was frequently discussed by Cuthbert and Mary Brander, but they finally determined to stay. It was morally certain that the troops would enter Paris either at the Port Maillot or at the gate of Pont du Jour; or at any rate, somewhere on that side of Paris. Once inside the walls they would meet with no resistance there—the fighting would only commence when they entered the city itself. Passy was to a large extent inhabited by well-to-do people, and it was not here that the search for Communists would begin. The troops would here be greeted as benefactors.

"I do not think there is the smallest risk, Mary; if there were, I should say at once that we had better be off, and I would escort you down to Cornwall, but as there seems to me no danger whatever, I should say let us stick to our original plan. I own I should like to see the end of it all. You might amuse yourself at present by making a good-sized Union Jack, which you can hang out of your window when the troops enter. When I see the time approaching, I intend to make an arrangement with the Michauds to establish myself here, so as to undertake the task of explaining, if necessary, but I don't think any explanation will be asked. It is likely enough that as soon as the troops enter they will establish themselves in this quarter before making any further advance; they will know that they have hard fighting before them, and until they have overcome all opposition, will have plenty to think about, and will have no time to spare in making domiciliary visits."