

CHAPTER XXV.

Armed with his pass Cuthbert started for the city at ten o'clock next morning. A dense pall of smoke hung over Paris. On the south side of the river the conflict was still raging, as it was also on the north and east, but the insurgents' shells were no longer bursting up the Champs Elysées and the firing had ceased at the Place de la Concorde. It was evident that the insurgents, after performing their work of destruction, had evacuated their position there. On reaching the bottom of the Champs Elysées he found that a breach had been made in the barricade and that a considerable number of troops were bivouacked in the Place de la Concorde itself.

The fire-engines from Versailles, St. Denis, and other places round were already at work, but their efforts seemed futile indeed in face of the tremendous bodies of fire with which they had to cope. Just as Cuthbert, after passing through the breach in the barricade, on the presentation of his pass to the sentries, arrived at the end of the Rue Rivoli, a mounted officer dashed up to the two engines at work opposite the building that had first been fired, and said—

"You can do no good here. Take your engines to the courtyard of the Tuileries and aid the troops in preventing the fire from spreading to the Louvre. That is the only place where there is any hope of doing good. Now, monsieur," he said to Cuthbert, "You must fall in and aid the Pompiers. The orders are that all able-bodied men are to help in extinguishing the fire."

Cuthbert was glad to be of use, and joining the firemen ran along with the engines down the Rue Rivoli and turned in with them into the courtyard of the palace. The western end, containing the State apartments, was a mass of fire from end to end, and the flames were creeping along both wings towards the Louvre. In the palace itself a battalion of infantry were at work.

Some were throwing furniture, pictures and curtains through the window into the courtyard; others were hacking off doors and tearing up floors, while strong parties were engaged on the roofs in stripping off the slates and tearing down the beams and linings.

Other engines presently arrived, for telegrams had been sent off soon after the fires broke out to all the principal towns of France, and even to London, asking for engines and men to work them, and those from Amiens, Lille, and Rouen had already reached Paris by train.

After working for three hours Cuthbert showed his pass to the officer and was permitted to pass on, a large number of citizens being by this time available for the work, having been fetched from all the suburbs occupied by the troops. Before going very much farther Cuthbert was stopped by a line of sentries across the street.

"You cannot pass here," the officer in charge said, as Cuthbert produced his permit, "the island is still in the hands of the Communists, and the fire from their barricade across the bridge sweeps the street twenty yards farther on, and it would be certain death to show yourself there; besides, they are still in force beyond the Hôtel de Ville. You can, of course, work round by the left, but I should strongly advise you to go no farther. There is desperate fighting going on in the Place de la Bastille. The insurgent batteries are shelling the Boulevards hotly, and, worst of all, you are liable to be shot from the upper windows and cellars. There are scores of those scoundrels still in the houses; there has been no time to unearth them yet, and a good many men have been killed by their fire."

"Thank you, sir. I will take your advice," Cuthbert said.

He found, indeed, that there was no seeing anything that was going on in the way of fighting without running great risks, and he accordingly made his way back to the Trocadero. Here he could see that a number of fires had broken out at various points since morning, even in the part of the town occupied by the troops; and though some of these might be caused by the Communists' shell it was more probable that they were the work of the incendiary. He had, indeed, heard from some of the citizens

to whom he had spoken while at work at the pumps, that orders had been issued that all gratings and windows giving light to cellars, should be closed by wet sacks being piled against them, and should then be covered thickly with earth, as several women had been caught in the act of pouring petroleum into the cellars and then dropping lighted matches down upon it.

These wretches had been shot instantly, but the fresh fires continually springing up showed that the work was still going on.

It was strangely silent in the streets. With the exception of the sentries at every corner there were few persons indeed abroad. Many were looking from the windows, but few, indeed, ventured out. They knew not what orders had been given to the sentries and feared arrest were they to stir beyond their doors. Moreover, the occasional crash of a shell from the insurgent batteries, the whistling of bullets, and the frequent discharge of musket shots still kept up by groups of desperate Communists who had taken refuge in the houses, was sufficient alone to deter them from making any attempt to learn what was going on. But in the absence of footfalls in the street and of the sound of vehicles, the distant noises were strangely audible. The rustle of the flames at the Hôtel de Ville and the great fires across the river, the crash of the falling roofs and walls, the incessant rattle of distant musketry, and the boom of cannon, formed a weird contrast to the silence that prevailed in the quarter. Cuthbert felt that he breathed more freely when he issued out again into the Champs Elysées.

The next day he did not go down. The advance continued, but progress was slow. On the following morning Paris was horrified by the news published in the papers at Versailles that statements of prisoners left no doubt that the Archbishop of Paris and many other priests, in all a hundred persons, had been massacred in cold blood, the methods of the first revolution being closely followed, and the prisoners made to walk out one by one from the gate of the prison, and being shot down as they issued out. Another statement of a scarcely less appalling nature was that the female fiends of the Commune not only

continued their work of destruction by fire, but were poisoning the troops. Several instances of this occurred. In one case ten men were poisoned by one of these furies, who came out as they passed, and expressing joy at the defeat of the Commune, offered them wine. They drank it unsuspectingly, and within an hour were all dead. Orders, were consequently issued that no soldier should on any account accept drink or food of any kind offered them by women.

"This horrible massacre of the Archbishop and the other prisoners is next door to madness," Cuthbert said, as he read the account at breakfast. "The Communists could have no personal feeling of hostility against their victims, indeed, the Archbishop was, I know, most popular. Upon the other hand it seals the fate of thousands. The fury excited by such a deed will be so great that the troops will refuse to give quarter and the prisoners taken will have to suffer to the utmost for the crime committed by perhaps a handful of desperate wretches. The omnibuses began to run yesterday from Sevres, and I propose, Mary, that we go over to Versailles to-day and get out of sound of the firing. They say there are fully 20,000 prisoners there."

"I don't want to see the prisoners," Mary said, with a shudder. "I should like to go to Versailles, but let us keep away from horrors."

And so for a day they left the sound of battle behind, wandered together through the Park at Versailles, and carefully abstained from all allusion to the public events of the past six months. The next day Cuthbert returned to Paris and made his way down to the Place de la Bastille, where, for the sum of half a Napoleon, he obtained permission to ascend to the upper window of a house. The scene here was terrible. On the side on which he was standing a great drapery establishment, known as the Bon Marché, embracing a dozen houses, was in flames. In the square itself three batteries of artillery belonging to Ladmiraault's Division, were sending their shell up the various streets debouching on the place.

Most of the houses on the opposite side were in flames. The

insurgent batteries on the Buttes de Chaumont were replying to the guns of the troops. The infantry were already pressing their way upwards. Some of the barricades were so desperately defended that the method by which alone the troops on the south side had been able to capture these defences, was adopted; the troops taking possession of the houses and breaking their way with crow-bar and pick-axe through the party wall, and so, step by step, making their way along under cover until they approached the barricades, which they were then able to make untenable by their musketry fire from the windows. Cuthbert remained here for an hour or two, and then making a detour came out on the Boulevards higher up.

The Theatre of Porte St. Martin was in flames, as were many other buildings. A large number of troops with piled arms occupied the centre of the street, taking their turn to rest before they relieved their comrades in the work of assault. Presently he saw down a side street a party of soldiers with some prisoners. He turned down to see what was going on. The officer in command of the party came up to him.

"Monsieur has doubtless a pass," he said, politely.

Cuthbert produced it.

"Ah, you are English, monsieur. It is well for you that your country does not breed such wretches as these. Every one of them has been caught in the course of the last hour in the act of setting houses alight. They are now to be shot."

"It is an unpleasant duty, monsieur," Cuthbert said.

"It would be horrible at any other time," the officer said. "But we cannot consider these creatures as human beings. They are wild beasts and I verily believe the women are worse than the men. There is only one I would spare, though she is the worst of all. At every barricade where the fighting has been fiercest for the last four days she has been conspicuous. The troops got to know her by her red cap and dress. She has been seen to shoot down men who attempted to retire, and she has led a charmed life or she would have been killed a thousand times. When she was taken she had on an old dress over her red one, and a hideous bonnet in place of the cap. She was

caught just as she had dropped a lighted match into a cellar. The flames flashed up at once, and two soldiers near ran up and arrested her. She stabbed one, but the other broke her wrist with a blow from the butt of his musket.

"Then came a curious thing. A man who had been standing in a doorway on the opposite side of the street ran out and declared that he was a sharer in her crime. His air was that of a madman, and the men would have pushed him away, but he exclaimed, 'I am Arnold Dampierre, one of the leaders of the Commune. This is my wife.' Then the woman said, 'The man is mad. I have never seen him before. I know Arnold Dampierre—everyone knows him. He does not resemble this man, whose proper place is a lunatic asylum.' So they contended, and both were brought before the drumhead Court Martial.

"The man had so wild an air that we should not have believed his story, but on his being searched his American passport was found upon him. Then the woman threw herself into his arms. 'We will die together then!' she said. 'I would have saved you if you would have let me.' Then she turned to us. 'Yes, I am guilty. I have fought against you on the barricades,' and she tore off her outer dress and bonnet. 'I have kindled twenty fires, but in this I am guilty alone. He stood by me on the barricades, but he would have nothing to do with firing houses. But I am a Parisian. I am the daughter of Martin Dufaure, who was killed an hour since, and my duty was to the Commune first, and to my husband afterwards. I hate and despise you slaves of tyrants. You have conquered us but we have taught a lesson to the men who fatten on our suffering.'

"Of course they were both ordered to be shot. I have given them all five minutes, but the time is up. Range them by the wall, men," he said, turning to the soldiers.

Cuthbert glanced for a moment and then turned away. The other women were mostly old, or at least middle-aged, and they stood scowling at the soldiers, and some of them pouring out the foulest imprecations upon them.

Minette stood in the centre of the line conspicuous by her red dress. One hand grasped that of Arnold, who was gazing upon her as if oblivious to all else. Her head was held erect and she looked at her executioners with an air of proud defiance.

Cuthbert hurried away, filled with an intense feeling of pity and regret. He heard Minette cry in a loud clear voice, "Vive la Commune!" Then there was a sharp volley and all was over, and a minute later the soldiers passed him on the way to join their comrades.

He stood for a time at the corner of the street irresolute. He had seen scores of dead in the streets. He had thought he could see nothing worse than he had witnessed, but he felt that he could not go back, as he had first thought of doing, to the scene of execution. Comrades had fallen by his side in the fight at Champigny, but he had not felt for them as for this comrade who lay behind him, or for the girl who, with her talents, might have had a bright future before her had she been thrown amid other surroundings. He wondered whether he could obtain their bodies for burial.

It did not seem to him possible. Vehicles could not be obtained at any price. The very request would seem suspicious, and suspicion at that hour was enough to condemn a man unheard. The difficulties in the way would be enormous. Indeed, it would matter nothing. Arnold and Minette. They had fallen together and would lie together in one of the great common graves in which the dead would be buried. It would be little short of a mockery to have the burial service read over her, and had Arnold been consulted he would have preferred to lie beside her to being laid in a grave apart.

So after a pause of five minutes Cuthbert moved away without venturing a single look back at the group huddled down by the wall, but walked away feeling crushed and overwhelmed by the untimely fate that had befallen two persons of whom he had seen so much during the past year, and feeling as feeble as he did when he first arose from his bed in the American ambulance.

Several times he had to pause and lean against the wall, and

when he had passed the barricade at the Place de la Concorde, towards which he had almost instinctively made his way, he sat down on one of the deserted seats in the Champs Elysées, and burst into tears. It had hardly come upon him as a surprise, for he had felt that, conspicuous as he had made himself, the chances of Arnold making his escape were small indeed, especially as Minette would cling to the Commune until the very end. Still it never struck him as being possible that he himself might witness the end. He had thought that the same obscurity that hung over the fate of most of the other leaders of the Commune would envelop that of Arnold. He would have fallen, but how or when would never have been known. He would simply have disappeared. Rumor would have mentioned his name for a few days, the rumor that was already busy with the fate of other leaders of the insurrection, and he had never dreamt that it would be brought home to him in this fashion. After a time Cuthbert pulled himself together, waited until a fiacre came along—for on this side of Paris things were gradually regaining their usual aspect—and then drove back to Passy.

"What is the matter, Cuthbert?" Mary exclaimed as she caught sight of his face. "Are you ill? You look terribly pale and quite unlike yourself. What has happened?"

"I have had a shock, Mary," he said, with a faint attempt at a smile, "a very bad shock. Don't ask me about it just at present. Please get me some brandy. I have never fainted in my life, but I feel very near it just at present."

Mary hurried away to Madame Michaud, who now always discreetly withdrew as soon as Cuthbert was announced, and returned with some cognac, a tumbler, and water. She poured him out a glass that seemed to herself to be almost alarmingly strong, but he drank it at a draught.

"Don't be alarmed, Mary," he said, with a smile, at the consternation in her face. "You won't often see me do this, and I can assure you that spirit-drinking is not an habitual vice with me, but I really wanted it then. They are still fighting fiercely from Porte St. Martin down to the Place de la Bastille. I be-

lieve all resistance has been crushed out on the south side of the river, and in a couple of days the whole thing will be over."

"Fancy a week of fighting. It is awful to think of, Cuthbert. How many do you suppose will be killed altogether?"

"I have not the least idea, and I don't suppose it will ever be known; but if the resistance is as desperate for the next two days as it has been for the last three, I should say fully 20,000 will have fallen, besides those taken with arms in their hands, tried, and shot. I hear there are two general court-martials sitting permanently, and that seven or eight hundred prisoners are shot every day. Then there are some eighteen or twenty thousand at Versailles, but as these will not be tried until the fighting is over, and men's blood cooled down somewhat, no doubt much greater leniency will be shown."

"There is a terrible cloud of smoke over Paris, still."

"Yes, fresh fires are constantly breaking out. The Louvre is safe, and the firemen have checked the spread of the flames at the public buildings, but there are streets where every house is alight for a distance of a quarter of a mile; and yet, except at these spots, the damage is less than you would expect considering how fierce a battle has been raging. There are streets where scarce a bullet mark is to be seen on the walls or a broken pane of glass in a window, while at points where barricades have been defended, the scene of ruin is terrible."

Two days later a strange stillness succeeded the din and uproar that had for a week gone on without cessation night and day. Paris was conquered, the Commune was stamped out, its chiefs dead or fugitives, its rank and file slaughtered, or prisoners awaiting trial. France breathed again. It had been saved from a danger infinitely more terrible than a German occupation. In a short time the hotels were opened and visitors began to pour into Paris to gaze at the work of destruction wrought by the orgie of the Commune. One day Cuthbert, who was now installed in his own lodging, went up to Passy.

"I hear that the English Church is to be open to-morrow, Mary. I called on the clergyman to-day and told him that I should probably require his services next week."

"Cuthbert!" Mary exclaimed in surprise, "you cannot mean——" and a flush of color completed the sentence.

"Yes, that is just what I do mean, Mary. You have kept me waiting three years and I am not going to wait a day longer."

"I have given up much of my belief in women's rights, Cuthbert, but there are some I still maintain, and one of these is that a woman has a right to be consulted in a matter of this kind."

"Quite so, dear, and therefore I have left the matter open, and I will leave you to fix the day and you can choose any one you like from Monday to Saturday next week."

"But I must have time, Cuthbert," she said, desperately. "I have, of course, things to get."

"The things that you have will do perfectly well, my dear. Besides, many of the shops are open and you can get anything you want. As for a dress for the occasion, if you choose to fix Saturday you will have twelve days, which is twice as long as necessary. Putting aside my objection to waiting any longer I want to get away from here to some quiet place where we can forget the events of the past month, and get our nerves into working order again. If there is any reason that you can declare that you honestly believe to be true and valid of course I must give way, but if not let it be Saturday week. That is right. I see that you have nothing to urge," and a fortnight later they were settled in a chalet high up above the Lake of Lucerne.

René and Pierre acted as Cuthbert's witnesses at the marriage. Pierre had escaped before the fighting began. René had done service with the National Guard until the news came that the troops had entered Paris, then he had gone to M. Goudé's who had hidden him and seven or eight of the other students in an attic. When the troops approached, they had taken refuge on the roof and had remained there until the tide of battle had swept past, and they then descended, and arraying themselves in their painting blouses had taken up their work at the studio; and when, three days later, the general search for Communists began, they were found working so diligently that none suspected that they had ever fired a shot in the ranks of the Communists.

When the salon was opened, long after its usual time, Cuth-

bert's pictures were well hung and obtained an amount of praise that more than satisfied him, although his wife insisted that they were not half as warm as the pictures deserved. It was not until they had been for some time in Switzerland that Mary had learned the details of the deaths of Arnold and Minette Dampierre. That both were dead she knew, for when she mentioned their names for the first time after the close of the fighting, Cuthbert told her that he had learned that both were dead, and begged her to ask no question concerning them until he himself returned to the subject.

Mary wrote to her mother a day or two after she was married giving her the news. An answer was received from Scarborough expressing great satisfaction, and saying that it was probable that the family would settle where they were. Neither Cuthbert nor his wife liked the thought of returning to England, and for the next five years remained abroad. After spending a few months at Dresden, Munich, Rome, and Florence, they settled at Venice. Cuthbert continued to work hard, and each year two or three of his pictures hung on the walls of the Academy and attracted much attention, and were sold at excellent prices. All his earnings in this way and the entire income of Fairclose were put aside to pay off the mortgage, and when, at the end of the five years, Cuthbert, his wife, and two children returned to Fairclose, the greater portion of the mortgage had been paid off, and three years later it was entirely wiped out.

Although very warmly received by the county, Cuthbert retained his preference for London, and during the winter six months always moved up to a house in the artists' quarter at St. John's Wood. Although he no longer painted as if compelled to do so for a living, he worked regularly and steadily while in town, and being able to take his time in carrying out his conceptions, his pictures increased in value and he took a place in the front rank of artists, and some fifteen years after the siege of Paris was elected Academician. Before this he had sold Fairclose and built himself a house in Holland Park, where he was able to indulge his love for art to the fullest extent.

Of his wife's family he saw but little. Mary's sisters both married before he and his wife returned from abroad. Mary went down occasionally to Scarborough, and stayed with her father and mother, but Mr. Brander steadily refused all invitations to visit them in London, and until his death, fifteen years later, never left Scarborough, where he became a very popular man, although no persuasions could induce him to take a part in any of its institutions or public affairs.

Cuthbert has often declared that the most fortunate event in his life was that he was a besieged resident in Paris through its two sieges. As for Mary she has been heard to declare that she has no patience, whatever, with the persons who frequent platforms and talk about women's rights.

Not far from the spot in la Chaise where the pits in which countless numbers of Communists were buried are situated, stands a small marble cross, on whose pedestal are inscribed the words:—"To the memory of Arnold Dampierre and his wife, Minette, whose bodies rest near this place."

THE END.