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entire meal of them. D.W.]

WHEN VALMOND CAME TO PONTIAC

The Story of a Lost Napoleon

By Gilbert Parker

Volume 1.

INTRODUCTION

In one sense this book stands by itself. It is like nothing else I have written, and if one should seek to give it the name of a class, it might be called an historical fantasy.

It followed *The Trail of the Sword* and preceded *The Seats of the Mighty*, and appeared in the summer of 1895. The critics gave it a reception which was extremely gratifying, because, as it seemed to me, they realised what I was trying to do; and that is a great deal. One great journal said it read as though it had been written at a sitting; another called it a tour de force, and the grave *Athenaeum* lauded it in a key which was likely to make me nervous, since it seemed to set a standard which I should find it hard to preserve in the future. But in truth the newspaper was right which said that the book read as though it was written at a sitting, and that it was a tour de force. The facts are that the book was written, printed, revised, and ready for press in five weeks.

The manuscript of the book was complete within four weeks. It possessed me. I wrote night and day. There were times when I went to bed and, unable to sleep, I would get up at two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning and write till breakfast time. A couple of hours' walk after breakfast, and I would write again until nearly two o'clock. Then luncheon; afterwards a couple of hours in the open air, and I would again write till eight o'clock in the evening. The world was shut out. I moved in a dream. The book was begun at Hot Springs, in Virginia, in the annex to the old Hot Springs Hotel. I could not write in the hotel itself, so I went to the annex, and in the big building--in the early spring-time--I worked night and day. There was no one else in the place except the old negro caretaker and his wife. Four-fifths of the book was written in three weeks there. Then I went to New York, and at the Lotus Club, where I had a room, I finished it--but not quite. There were a few pages of the book to do when I went for my walk in Fifth Avenue one afternoon. I could not shake the thing off, the last pages demanded to be written. The sermon which the old Cure was preaching on Valmond's death was running in my head. I could not continue my walk. Then and

there I stepped into the Windsor Hotel, which I was passing, and asked if there was a stenographer at liberty. There was. In the stenographer's office of the Windsor Hotel, with the life of a caravanserai buzzing around me, I dictated the last few pages of *When Valmond Came to Pontiac*. It was practically my only experience of dictation of fiction. I had never been able to do it, and have not been able to do it since, and I am glad that it is so, for I should have a fear of being led into mere rhetoric. It did not, however, seem to matter with this book. It wrote itself anywhere. The proofs of the first quarter of the book were in my hands before I had finished writing the last quarter.

It took me a long time to recover from the great effort of that five weeks, but I never regretted those consuming fires which burned up sleep and energy and ravaged the vitality of my imagination. The story was founded on the incident described in the first pages of the book, which was practically as I experienced it when I was a little child. The picture there drawn of Valmond was the memory of just such a man as stood at the four corners in front of the little hotel and scattered his hot pennies to the children of the village. Also, my father used to tell me as a child a story of Napoleon, whose history he knew as well as any man living, and something of that story may be found in the fifth chapter of the book where Valmond promotes Sergeant Lagroin from non-commissioned rank, first to be captain, then to be colonel, and then to be general, all in a moment, as it were.

I cannot tell the original story as my father told it to me here, but it was the tale of how a sergeant in the Old Guard, having shared his bivouac supper of roasted potatoes with the Emperor, was told by Napoleon that he should sup with his Emperor when they returned to Versailles. The old sergeant appeared at Versailles in course of time and demanded admittance to the Emperor, saying that he had been asked to supper. When Napoleon was informed, he had the veteran shown in and, recognising his comrade of the baked potatoes, said at once that the sergeant should sup with him. The sergeant's reply was: "Sire, how can a non-commissioned officer dine with a general?" It was then, Napoleon, delighted with the humour and the boldness of his grenadier, summoned the Old Guard, and had the sergeant promoted to the rank of captain on the spot.

It was these apparently incongruous things, together with legends that I had heard and read of Napoleon, which gave me the idea of Valmond. First, a sketch of about five thousand words was written, and it looked as though I were going to publish it as a short story; but one day, sitting in a drawing-room in front of a grand piano, on the back of which were a series of miniatures of the noted women who had played their part in Napoleon's life, the incident of the Countess of Carnstadt (I do not use the real name) at St. Helena associated itself with the picture in my memory of the philanthropist of the street corner. Thereupon the whole story of a son of Napoleon, ignorant of his own birth, but knowing that a son had been born to Napoleon at St. Helena, flitted through my imagination; and the story spread out before me all in an hour, like an army with banners.

The next night--for this happened in New York--I went down to Hot

Springs, Virginia, and began a piece of work which enthralled me as I had never before been enthralled, and as I have never been enthralled in the same way since; for it was perilous to health and mental peace.

Fantasy as it is, the book has pictures of French-Canadian life which are as true as though the story itself was all true. Characters are in it like Medallion, the little chemist, the avocat, Lajeunesse the blacksmith, and Madeleinette, his daughter, which were in some of the first sketches I ever wrote of French Canada, and subsequently appearing in the novelette entitled *The Lane That Had No Turning*. Indeed, 'When Valmond Came to Pontiac', historical fantasy as it is, has elements both of romance and realism.

Of all the books which I have written, perhaps because it cost me so much, because it demanded so much of me at the time of its writing, I care for it the most. It was as good work as I could do. This much may at least be said: that no one has done anything quite in the same way or used the same subject, or given it the same treatment. Also it may be said, as the *Saturday Review* remarked, that it contained one whole, new idea, and that was the pathetic--unutterably pathetic--incident of a man driven by the truth in his blood to impersonate himself.

"Oh, withered is the garland of the war,
The Soldier's pole is fallen."

WHEN VALMOND CAME TO PONTIAC

CHAPTER I

On one corner stood the house of Monsieur Garon the avocat; on another, the shop of the Little Chemist; on another, the office of Medallion the auctioneer; and on the last, the Hotel Louis Quinze. The chief characteristics of Monsieur Garon's house were its brass door-knobs, and the verdant vines that climbed its sides; of the Little Chemist's shop, the perfect whiteness of the building, the rolls of sober wall-paper, and the bottles of coloured water in the shop windows; of Medallion's, the stoop that surrounded three sides of the building, and the notices of sales tacked up, pasted up, on the front; of the Hotel Louis Quinze, the deep dormer windows, the solid timbers, and the veranda that gave its front distinction--for this veranda had been the pride of several generations of landlords, and its heavy carving and bulky grace were worth even more admiration than Pontiac gave to it.

The square which the two roads and the four corners made was, on week-days, the rendezvous of Pontiac, and the whole parish; on Sunday mornings the rendezvous was shifted to the large church on the hill, beside which

was the house of the Cure, Monsieur Fabre. Travelling towards the south, out of the silken haze of a mid-summer day, you would come in time to the hills of Maine; north, to the city of Quebec and the river St. Lawrence; east, to the ocean; and west, to the Great Lakes and the land of the English. Over this bright province Britain raised her flag, but only Medallion and a few others loved it for its own sake, or saluted it in the English tongue.

In the drab velvety dust of these four corners, were gathered, one night of July a generation ago, the children of the village and many of their elders. All the events of that epoch were dated from the evening of this particular day. Another day of note the parish cherished, but it was merely a grave fulfilment of the first.

Upon the veranda-stoop of the Louis Quinze stood a man of apparently about twenty-eight years of age. When you came to study him closely, some sense of time and experience in his look told you that he might be thirty-eight, though his few grey hairs seemed but to emphasise a certain youthfulness in him. His eye was full, singularly clear, almost benign, and yet at one moment it gave the impression of resolution, at another it suggested the wayward abstraction of the dreamer. He was well-figured, with a hand of peculiar whiteness, suggesting in its breadth more the man of action than of meditation. But it was a contradiction; for, as you saw it rise and fall, you were struck by its dramatic delicacy; as it rested on the railing of the veranda, by its latent power. You faced incongruity everywhere. His dress was bizarre, his face almost classical, the brow clear and strong, the profile good to the mouth, where there showed a combination of sensuousness and adventure. Yet in the face there was an illusive sadness, strangely out of keeping with the long linen coat, frilled shirt, flowered waistcoat, lavender trousers, boots of enamelled leather, and straw hat with white linen streamers. It was a whimsical picture.

At the moment that the Cure and Medallion the auctioneer came down the street together towards the Louis Quinze, talking amiably, this singular gentleman was throwing out hot pennies, with a large spoon, from a tray in his hand, calling on the children to gather them, in French which was not the French of Pontiac--or Quebec; and this refined accent the Cure was quick to detect, as Monsieur Garon the avocat, standing on the outskirts of the crowd, had done, some moments before. The stranger seemed only conscious of his act of liberality and the children before him. There was a naturalness in his enjoyment which was almost boylike; a naive sort of exultation possessed him.

He laughed softly to see the children toss the pennies from hand to hand, blowing to cool them; the riotous yet half-timorous scramble for them, and burnt fingers thrust into hot, blithe mouths. And when he saw a fat little lad of five crowded out of the way by his elders, he stepped down with a quick word of sympathy, put a half-dozen pennies in the child's pocket, snatched him up and kissed him, and then returned to the stoop, where were gathered the landlord, the miller, and Monsieur De la Riviere, the young Seigneur. But the most intent spectator of the scene was Parpon the dwarf, who was grotesquely crouched upon the wide ledge of a

window.

Tray after tray of pennies was brought out and emptied, till at last the stranger paused, handed the spoon to the landlord, drew out a fine white handkerchief and dusted his fingers, standing silent for a moment and smiling upon the crowd.

It was at this point that some young villager called, in profuse compliment: "Three cheers for the Prince!" The stranger threw an accent of pose into his manner, his eye lighted, his chin came up, he dropped one hand negligently on his hip, and waved the other in acknowledgment. Presently he beckoned, and from the hotel were brought out four great pitchers of wine and a dozen tin cups, and, sending the garcon around with one, the landlord with another, he motioned Parpon the dwarf to bear a hand. Parpon shot out a quick, half-resentful look at him, but meeting a warm, friendly eye, he took the pitcher and went round among the elders, while the stranger himself courteously drank with the young men of the village, who, like many wiser folk, thus yielded to the charm of mystery. To every one he said a hearty thing, and sometimes touched his greeting off with a bit of poetry or a rhetorical phrase. These dramatic extravagances served him well, for he was among a race of story-tellers and crude poets.

Parpon, uncouth and furtive, moved through the crowd, dispensing as much irony as wine:

"Three bucks we come to a pretty inn,
'Hostess,' say we, 'have you red wine?'
 Brave! Brave!
'Hostess,' say we, 'have you red wine?'
 Bravement!
Our feet are sore and our crops are dry,
 Bravement!"

This he hummed to the avocat in a tone all silver, for he had that one gift of Heaven as recompense for his deformity, his long arms, big head, and short stature, a voice which gave you a shiver of delight and pain all at once. It had in it mystery and the incomprehensible. This drinking-song, hummed just above his breath, touched some antique memory in Monsieur Garen the avocat, and he nodded kindly at the dwarf, though he refused the wine.

"Ah, M'sieu' le Cure," said Parpon, ducking his head to avoid the hand that Medallion would have laid on it, "we're going to be somebody now in Pontiac, bless the Lord! We're simple folk, but we're not neglected. He wears a ribbon on his breast, M'sieu' le Cure!"

This was true. Fastened by a gold bar to the stranger's breast was the ribbon of an order.

The Cure smiled at Parpon's words, and looked curiously and gravely at the stranger. Tall Medallion the auctioneer took a glass of the wine, and, lifting it, said: "Who shall I drink to, Parpon, my dear? What is

he?"

"Ten to one, a dauphin or a fool," answered Parpon, with a laugh like the note of an organ. "Drink to both, Long-legs." Then he trotted away to the Little Chemist.

"Hush, my friend!" said he, and he drew the other's ear down to his mouth. "Now there'll be plenty of work for you. We're going to be gay in Pontiac. We'll come to you with our spoiled stomachs." He edged round the circle, and back to where the miller his master and the young Seigneur stood.

"Make more fine flour, old man," said he to the miller; "pates are the thing now." Then, to Monsieur De la Riviere: "There's nothing like hot pennies and wine to make the world love you. But it's too late, too late for my young Seigneur!" he added in mockery, and again he began to hum in a sort of amiable derision:

"My little tender heart,
O gai, vive le roi!
My little tender heart,
O gai, vive le roi!

'Tis for a grand baron,
Vive le roi, la reine!
'Tis for a grand baron,
Vive Napoleon!"

The words of the last two lines swelled out far louder than the dwarf meant, for few save Medallion and Monsieur De la Riviere had ever heard him sing. His concert-house was the Rock of Red Pigeons, his favourite haunt, his other home, where, it was said, he met the Little Good Folk of the Scarlet Hills, and had gay hours with them. And this was a matter of awe to the timid habitants.

At the words, "Vive Napoleon!" a hand touched him on the shoulder. He turned and saw the stranger looking at him intently, his eyes alight.

"Sing it," he said softly, yet with an air of command. Parpon hesitated, shrank back.

"Sing it," he insisted, and the request was taken up by others, till Parpon's face flushed with a sort of pleasurable defiance. The stranger stooped and whispered something in his ear. There was a moment's pause, in which the dwarf looked into the other's eyes with an intense curiosity--or incredulity--and then Medallion lifted the little man on to the railing of the veranda, and over the heads and into the hearts of the people there passed, in a divine voice, a song known to many, yet coming as a new revelation to them all:

"My mother promised it,
O gai, rive le roi!
My mother promised it,

O gai, vive le roi!

To a gentleman of the king,
Vive le roi, la reine!
To a gentleman of the king,
Vive Napoleon!"

This was chanted lightly, airily, with a sweetness almost absurd, coming as it did from so uncouth a musician. The last verses had a touch of pathos, droll yet searching:

"Oh, say, where goes your love?
O gai, rive le roi!
Oh, say, where goes your love?
O gai, vive le roi!
He rides on a white horse,
Vive le roi, la reine!
He wears a silver sword,
Vive Napoleon!"

"Oh, grand to the war he goes,
O gai, vive le roi!
Oh, grand to the war he goes,
O gai, vive le roi!
Gold and silver he will bring,
Vive le roi, la reine;
And eke the daughter of a king
Vive Napoleon!"

The crowd--women and men, youths and maidens--enthusiastically repeated again and again the last lines and the refrain, "Vive le roi, la reine! Vive Napoleon!"

Meanwhile the stranger stood, now looking at the singer with eager eyes, now searching the faces of the people, keen to see the effect upon them. His glance found the faces of the Cure, the avocat, and the auctioneer; and his eyes steadied to Medallion's humorous look, to the Cure's puzzled questioning, to the avocat's bird-like curiosity. It was plain they were not antagonistic (why should they be?); and he--was there any reason why he should care whether or no they were for him or against him?

True, he had entered the village in the dead of night, with many packages and much luggage, had roused the people at the Louis Quinze, the driver who had brought him departing before daybreak gaily, because of the gifts of gold given him above his wage. True, this singular gentleman had taken three rooms in the Louis Quinze, had paid the landlord in advance, and had then gone to bed, leaving word that he was not to be waked till three o'clock the next afternoon. True, the landlord could not by any hint or indirection discover from whence his midnight visitor came. But if a gentleman paid his way, and was generous and polite, and minded his own business, wherefore should people busy themselves about him? When he appeared on the veranda of the inn with the hot pennies, not a half-dozen people in the village had known aught of his presence in Pontiac. The children came first, to scorch their fingers and fill their pockets, and

after them the idle young men, and the habitants in general.

The stranger having warmly shaken Parpon by the hand and again whispered in his ear, stepped forward. The last light of the setting sun was reflected from the red roof of the Little Chemist's shop upon the quaint figure and eloquent face, which had in it something of the gentleman, something of the comedian. The alert Medallion himself did not realise the touch of the comedian in him, till the white hand was waved grandiloquently over the heads of the crowd. Then something in the gesture corresponded with something in the face, and the auctioneer had a nut which he could not crack for many a day. The voice was musical,--as fine in speaking almost as the dwarf's in singing,--and the attention of the children was caught by the rich, vibrating tones. He addressed himself to them.

"My children," he said, "my name is--Valmond! We have begun well; let us be better friends. I have come from far off to be one of you, to stay with you for awhile--who knows how long--how long?" He placed a finger meditatively on his lips, sending a sort of mystery into his look and bearing. "You are French, and so am I. You are playing on the shores of life, and so am I. You are beginning to think and dream, and so am I. We are only children till we begin to make our dreams our life. So I am one with you, for only now do I step from dream to action. My children, you shall be my brothers, and together we will sow the seed of action and reap the grain; we will make a happy garden of flowers, and violets shall bloom everywhere out of our dream--everywhere. Violets, my children, pluck the wild violets, and bring them to me, and I will give you silver for them, and I will love you. Never forget," he added, with a swelling voice, "that you owe your first duty to your mothers, and afterwards to your country, and to the spirit of France. I see afar"--he looked towards the setting sun, and stretched out his arm dramatically, yet such was the eloquence of his voice and person that not even the young Seigneur or Medallion smiled--"I see afar," he repeated, "the glory of our dreams fulfilled; after toil and struggle and loss: and I call upon you now to unfurl the white banner of justice and liberty and the restoration."

The women who listened guessed little of what he meant by the fantastic sermon; but they wiped their eyes in sympathy, and gathered their children to them, and said, "Poor gentleman, poor gentleman!" and took him instantly to their hearts. The men were mystified, but wine and rhetoric had fired them, and they cheered him--no one knew why. The Cure, as he turned to leave, with Monsieur Garon, shook his head in bewilderment; but even he did not smile, for the man's eloquence had impressed him; and more than once he looked back at the dispersing crowd and the quaint figure posing on the veranda. The avocat was thinking deeply, and as, in the dusk, he left the Cure at his own door, all that he ventured was: "Singular--a most singular person!"

"We shall see, we shall see," said the Cure abstractedly, and they said good-night.

Medallion joined the Little Chemist in his shop door and watched the

habitants scatter, till only Parpon and the stranger were left, and these two faced each other, and, without a word, passed into the hotel together.

"H'm, h'm!" said Medallion into space, drumming the door-jamb with his fingers; "which is it, my Parpon--a dauphin, or a fool?"

He and the Little Chemist talked long, their eyes upon the window opposite, inside which Monsieur Valmond and Parpon were in conference. Up the dusty street wandered fitfully the refrain:

"To a gentleman of the king,
Vive Napoleon!"

And once they dimly saw Monsieur Valmond come to the open window and stretch out his hand, as if in greeting to the song and the singer.

CHAPTER II

This all happened on a Tuesday, and on Wednesday, and for several days, Valmond went about making friends. His pockets were always full of pennies and silver pieces, and he gave them liberally to the children and to the poor, though, indeed, there were few suffering poor in Pontiac. All had food enough to keep them from misery, though often it got no further than sour milk and bread, with a dash of sugar in it of Sundays, and now and then a little pork and molasses. As for homes, every man and woman had a house of a kind, with its low, projecting roof and dormer windows, according to the ability and prosperity of the owner. These houses were whitewashed, or painted white and red, and had double glass in winter, after the same measure. There was no question of warmth, for in snow-time every house was banked up with earth above the foundations, the cracks and intersections of windows and doors filled with cloth from the village looms; and wood was for the chopping far and near. Within these air-tight cubes these simple folk baked and were happy, content if now and then the housewife opened the one pane of glass which hung on a hinge, or the slit in the sash, to let in the cold air. As a rule, the occasional opening of the outer door to admit some one sufficed, for out rushed the hot blast, and in came the dry, frosty air to brace to their tasks the cheerful story-teller and singer.

In summer the little fields were broken with wooden ploughs, followed by the limb of a tree for harrow, and the sickle, the scythe, and the flail to do their office in due course; and if the man were well-to-do, he swung the cradle in his rye and wheat, rejoicing in the sweep of the knife and the fulness of the swathe. Then, too, there was the driving of the rivers, when the young men ran the logs from the backwoods to the great mills near and far: red-shirted, sashed, knee-booted, with rings in their ears, and wide hats on their heads, and a song in their mouths, breaking a jamb, or steering a crib, or raft, down the rapids. And the voyageur also, who brought furs out of the North down the great lakes,

came home again to Pontiac, singing in his patois:

"Nous avons passe le bois,
Nous somm's a la rive!"

Or, as he went forth:

"Le dieu du jour s'avance;
Amis, les vents sont doux;
Berces par l'esperance,
Partons, embarquons-noun.
A-a-a-a-a-a-a!"

And, as we know, it was summer when Valmond came to Pontiac. The river-drivers were just beginning to return, and by and by the flax swingeing would begin in the little secluded valley by the river; and one would see, near and far, the bright sickle flashing across the gold and green area; and all the pleasant furniture of summer set forth in pride, by the Mother of the House whom we call Nature.

Valmond was alive to it all, almost too alive, for at first the flamboyancy of his spirit touched him off with melodrama. Yet, on the whole, he seemed at first more natural than involved or obscure. His love for children was real, his politeness to women spontaneous. He was seen to carry the load of old Madame Degardy up the hill, and place it at her own door. He also had offered her a pinch of snuff, which she acknowledged by gravely offering a pinch of her own from a dirty twist of brown paper.

One day he sprang over a fence, took from the hands of coquettish Elise Malboir an axe, and split the knot which she in vain had tried to break. Not satisfied with this, he piled full of wood the stone oven outside the house, and carried water for her from the spring. This came from natural kindness, for he did not see the tempting look she gave him, nor the invitation in her eye, as he turned to leave her. He merely asked her name. But after he had gone, as though he had forgotten, or remembered, something, he leaped the fence again, came up to her with an air of half-abstraction, half-courtesy, took both her hands in his, and, before she could recover herself, kissed her on the cheeks in a paternal sort of way, saying, "Adieu, adieu, my child!" and left her.

The act had condescension in it; yet, too, something unconsciously simple and primitive. Parpon the dwarf, who that moment perched himself on the fence, could not decide which Valmond was just then--dauphin or fool. Valmond did not see the little man, but swung away down the dusty road, reciting to himself couplets from 'Le Vieux Drapeau':

"Oh, come, my flag, come, hope of mine,
And thou shalt dry these fruitless tears;"

and apparently, without any connection, he passed complacently to an entirely different song:

"She loved to laugh, she loved to drink,
I bought her jewels fine."

Then he added, with a suddenness which seemed to astound himself,--for afterwards he looked round quickly, as if to see if he had been heard,--
"Elise Malboir--h'm! a pretty name, Elise; but Malboir--tush! it should be Malbarre; the difference between Lombardy cider and wine of the Empire."

Parpon, left behind, sat on the fence with his legs drawn up to his chin, looking at Elise, till she turned and caught the provoking light of his eye. She flushed, then was cool again, for she was put upon her mettle by the suggestion of his glance.

"Come, lazy-bones," she said; "come fetch me currants from the garden."

"Come, mocking-bird," answered he; "come peck me on the cheek."

She tossed her head and struck straight home. "It isn't a game of pass it on from gentleman to beetle."

"You think he's a gentleman?" he asked.

"As sure as I think you're a beetle."

He laughed, took off his cap, and patted himself on the head. "Parpon, Parpon!" said he, "if Jean Malboir could see you now, he'd put his foot on you and crush you--dirty beetle!"

At the mention of her father's name a change passed over Elise; for this same Parpon, when all men else were afraid, had saved Jean Malboir's life at a log chute in the hills. When he died, Parpon was nearer to him than the priest, and he loved to hear the dwarf chant his wild rhythms of the Little Good Folk of the Scarlet Hills, more than to listen to holy prayers. Elise, who had a warm, impulsive nature, in keeping with her black eyes and tossing hair, who was all fire and sun and heart and temper, ran over and caught the dwarf round the neck, and kissed him on the cheek, dashing the tears out of her eyes, as she said:

"I'm a cat, I'm a bad-tempered thing, Parpon; I hate myself."

He laughed, shook his shaggy head, and pushed her away the length of his long, strong arms. "Bosh!" said he; "you're a puss and no cat, and I like you better for the claws. If you hate yourself, you'll get a big penance. Hate the ugly like Parpon, not the pretty like you. The one's no sin, the other is."

She was beside the open door of the oven; and it would be hard to tell whether her face was suffering from heat or from blushes. However that might chance, her mouth was soft and sweet, and her eyes were still wet.

"Who is he, Parpon?" she asked, not looking at him.

"Is he like Duclosse the mealman, or Lajeunesse the blacksmith, or Garotte the lime-burner-and the rest?"

"Of course not," she answered.

"Is he like the Cure, or Monsieur De la Riviere, or Monsieur Garon, or Monsieur Medallion?"

"He's different," she said hesitatingly.

"Better or worse?"

"More--more"--she did not know what to say--"more interesting."

"Is he like the Judge Honourable that comes from Montreal, or the grand Governor, or the General that travels with the Governor?"

"Yes, but different--more--more like us in some things, like them in others, and more--splendid. He speaks such fine things! You mind the other night at the Louis Quinze. He is like--"

She paused. "What is he like?" Parpon asked slyly, enjoying her difficulty.

"Ah, I know," she answered; "he is a little like Madame the American who came two years ago. There is something--something!"

Parpon laughed again. "Like Madame Chalice from New York--fudge!" Yet he eyed her as if he admired her penetration. "How?" he urged.

"I don't know--quite," she answered, a little pettishly. "But I used to see Madame go off in the woods, and she would sit hour by hour, and listen to the waterfall, and talk to the birds, and at herself too; and more than once I saw her shut her hands--like that! You remember what tiny hands she had?" (She glanced at her own brown ones unconsciously.) "And she spoke out, her eyes running with tears--and she all in pretty silks, and a colour like a rose. She spoke out like this: 'Oh, if I could only do something, something, some big thing! What is all this silly coming and going to me, when I know, I know I might do it, if I had the chance! O Harry, Harry, can't you see!'"

"Harry was her husband. Ah, what a fisherman was he!" said Parpon, nodding. "What did she mean by doing 'big things'?" he added.

"How do I know?" she asked fretfully. "But Monsieur Valmond seems to me like her, just the same."

"Monsieur Valmond is a great man," said Parpon slowly.

"You know!" she cried; "you know! Oh, tell me, what is he? Who is he? Where does he come from? Why is he here? How long will he stay? Tell me, how long will he stay?" She caught flutteringly at Parpon's shoulder. "You remember what I sang the other night?" he asked.

"Yes, yes," she answered quickly. "Oh, how beautiful it was! Ah, Parpon, why don't you sing for us oftener, and all the world would love you, and--"

"I don't love the world," he retorted gruffly; "and I'll sing for the devil" (she crossed herself) "as soon as for silly gossips in Pontiac."

"Well, well!" she asked; "what had your song to do with him, with Monsieur Valmond?"

"Think hard, my dear," he said, with mystery in his look. Then, breaking off: "Madame Chalice is coming back to-day; the Manor House is open, and you should see how they fly round up there." He nodded towards the hill beyond.

"Pontiac'll be a fine place by and by," she said, for she had village patriotism deep in her veins. Had not her people lived there long before the conquest by the English?

"But tell me, tell me what your song had to do with Monsieur," she urged again. "It's a pretty song, but--"

"Think about it," he answered provokingly. "Adieu, my child!" he went on mockingly, using Valmond's words, and catching both her hands as he had done; then, springing upon a bench by the oven, he kissed her on both cheeks. "Adieu, my child!" he said again, and, jumping down, trotted away out into the road. Back to her, from the dust he made as he shuffled away, there came the words:

"Gold and silver he will bring,
Vive le roi, la reine!
And eke the daughter of a king
Vive Napoleon!"

She went about her work, the song in her ears, and the words of the refrain beat in and out, out and in:

"Vive Napoleon." Her brow was troubled, and she perched her head on this side and on that, as she tried to guess what the dwarf had meant. At last she sat down on a bench at the door of her home, and the summer afternoon spent its glories on her; for the sunflowers and the hollyhocks were round her, and the warmth gave her face a shining health and joyousness. There she brooded till she heard the voice of her mother calling across the meadow; then she got up with a sigh, and softly repeated Parpon's words: "He is a great man!"

In the middle of that night she started up from a sound sleep, and, with a little cry, whispered into the silence: "Napoleon--Napoleon!"

She was thinking of Valmond. A revelation had come to her out of her dreams. But she laughed at it, and buried her face in her pillow and went to sleep, hoping to dream again.

CHAPTER III

In less than one week Valmond was as outstanding from Pontiac as Dalgrothe Mountain, just beyond it in the south. His liberality, his jocundity, his occasional abstraction, his meditative pose, were all his own; his humour that of the people. He was too quick in repartee and drollery for a bourgeois, too "near to the bone" in point for an aristocrat, with his touch of the comedian and the peasant also. Besides, he was mysterious and picturesque, and this is alluring to women and to the humble, if not to all the world. It might be his was the comedian's fascination, but the flashes of grotesqueness rather pleased the eye than hurt the taste of Pontiac.

Only in one quarter was there hesitation, added to an anxiety almost painful; for to doubt Monsieur Valmond would have shocked the sense of courtesy so dear to Monsieur the Cure, Monsieur Garon, the Little Chemist, and even Medallion the auctioneer, who had taken into his bluff, odd nature something of the spirit of those old-fashioned gentlemen. Monsieur De la Riviere, the young Seigneur, had to be reckoned with independently.

It was their custom to meet once a week, at the house of one or another, for a "causerie," as the avocat called it. On the Friday evening of this particular week, all were seated in the front garden of the Cure's house, as Valmond came over the hill, going towards the Louis Quinze. His step was light, his head laid slightly to one side, as if in pleased and inquiring reverie, and there was a lifting of one corner of the mouth, suggesting an amused disdain. Was it that disdain which comes from conquest not important enough to satisfy ambition? The social conquest of a village--to be conspicuous and attract the groundlings in this tiny theatre of life, that seemed little!

Valmond appeared not to see the little coterie, but presently turned, when just opposite the gate, and, raising his hat, half paused. Then, without more ado, he opened the gate and advanced to the outstretched hand of the Cure, who greeted him with a courtly affability. He shook hands with, and nodded good-humouredly at, Medallion and the Little Chemist, bowed to the avocat, and touched off his greeting to Monsieur De la Riviere with deliberation, not offering his hand--this very reserve a sign of equality not lost on the young Seigneur. He had not this stranger at any particular advantage, as he had wished, he knew scarcely why. Valmond took the seat offered him beside the Cure, who remarked presently:

"My dear friend, Monsieur Garon, was saying just now that the spirit of France has ever been the Captain of Freedom among the nations."

Valmond glanced quickly from the Cure to the others, a swift, inquisitive look, then settled back in his chair, and turned, bowing, towards

Monsieur Garon. The avocat's pale face flushed, his long, thin fingers twined round each other and untwined, and presently he said, in his little chirping voice, so quaint as to be almost unreal:

"I was saying that the spirit of France lived always ahead of the time, was ever first to conceive the feeling of the coming century, and by its own struggles and sufferings--sometimes too abrupt and perilous--made easy the way for the rest of the world."

During these words a change passed over Valmond. His restless body became still, his mobile face steady and almost set--all the life of him seemed to have burnt into his eyes; but he answered nothing, and the Cure, in the pause, was constrained to say:

"Our dear Monsieur Garon knows perfectly the history of France, and is devoted to the study of the Napoleonic times and of the Great Revolution --alas for our people and the saints of Holy Church who perished then!"

The avocat lifted a hand in mute disacknowledgment. Again there was a silence, and out of the pause Monsieur De la Riviere's voice was heard.

"Monsieur Valmond, how fares this spirit of France now--you come from France?"

There was a shadow of condescension and ulterior meaning in De la Riviere's voice, for he had caught the tricks of the poseur in this singular gentleman.

Valmond did not stir, but looked steadily at De la Riviere, and said slowly, dramatically, yet with a strange genuineness also:

"The spirit of France, monsieur, the spirit of France looks not forward only, but backward, for her inspiration. It is as ready for action now as when the old order was dragged from Versailles to Paris, and in Paris to the guillotine, when France got a principle and waited, waited--"

He did not finish his sentence, but threw back his head with a sort of reflective laugh.

"Waited for what?" asked the young Seigneur, trying to conquer his dislike.

"For the Man!" came the quick reply.

The avocat rubbed his hands in pleasure. He instantly divined one who knew his subject, though he talked this melodramatically: a thing not uncommon among the habitants and the professional story-tellers, but scarcely the way of the coterie.

"Ah, yes, yes," he said, "for--? monsieur, for--?" He paused, as if to give himself the delight of hearing their visitor speak.

"For Napoleon," was the abrupt reply.

"Ah, yes, dear Lord, yes--a Napoleon--of--of the Empire. France can only cherish an idea when a man is behind it, when a man lives it, embodies it. She must have heroes. She is a poet, a poet--and an actress."

"So said the Man, Napoleon," cried Valmond, getting to his feet. "He said that to Barras, to Remusat, to Josephine, to Lucien, to--to another, when France had for the moment lost her idea--and her man."

The avocat trembled to his feet to meet Valmond, who stood up as he spoke, his face shining with enthusiasm, a hand raised in broad dramatic gesture, a dignity come upon him, in contrast to the figure which had disported itself through the village during the past week. The avocat had found a man after his own heart. He knew that Valmond understood whereof he spoke. It was as if an artist saw a young genius use a brush on canvas for a moment; a swordsman watch an unknown master of the sword. It was not so much the immediate act, as the divination, the rapport, the spirit behind the act, which could only come from the soul of the real thing.

"I thank you, monsieur; I thank you with all my heart," the avocat said. "It is the true word you have spoken."

Here a lad came running to fetch the Little Chemist, and Medallion and he departed, but not without the auctioneer having pressed Valmond's hand warmly, for he was quick of emotion, and, like the avocat, he recognised, as he thought, the true word behind the dramatic trappings.

Monsieur Garon and Valmond talked on, eager, responsive, Valmond lost in the discussion of Napoleon, Garon in the man before him. By pregnant allusions, by a map drawn hastily on the ground here, and an explosion of secret history there, did Valmond win to a sort of worship this fine little Napoleonic scholar, who had devoured every book on his hero which had come in his way since boyhood. Student as he was, he had met a man whose knowledge of the Napoleonic life was vastly more intricate, searching and vital than his own. He, Monsieur Garon, spoke as from a book or out of a library, but this man as from the Invalides, or, since that is anachronistic, from the lonely rock of St. Helena. A private saying of Napoleon's, a word from his letters and biography, a phrase out of his speeches to his soldiers, sent tears to the avocat's eyes, and for a moment transformed Valmond.

While they talked, the Cure and the young Seigneur listened, and there passed into their minds the same wonder that had perplexed Elise Malboir; so that they were troubled, as was she, each after his own manner and temperament. Their reasoning, their feelings were different, but they were coming to the point the girl had reached when she cried into the darkness of the night, "Napoleon--Napoleon!"

They sat forgetful of the passing of time, the Cure preening with pleasure because of Valmond's remarks upon the Church when quoting the First Napoleon's praise of religion.

Suddenly a carriage came dashing up the hill, with four horses and a postilion. The avocat was in the house searching for a book. De la Riviere, seeing the carriage first, got to his feet with instant excitement, and the others turned to look. As it neared the house, the Cure took off his baretta, and smiled expectantly, a little red spot burning on both cheeks. These deepened as the carriage stopped, and a lady, a little lady like a golden flower, with sunny eyes and face--how did she keep so fresh in their dusty roads?--stood up impulsively, and before any one could reach the gate was entering herself, her blue eyes swimming with the warmth of a kind heart--or a warm temperament, which may exist without a kind heart.

Was it the heart, or the temperament, or both, that sent her forward with hands outstretched, saying: "Ah, my dear, dear Cure, how glad I am to see you once again! It is two years too long, dear Cure."

She held his hand in both of hers, and looked up into his eyes with a smile at once child-like and naive--and masterful; for behind the simplicity and the girlish manner there was a power, a mind, with which this sweet golden hair and cheeks like a rose-garden had nothing to do. The Cure, beaming, touched by her warmth, and by her tiny caressing fingers, stooped and kissed them both like an old courtier. He had come of a good family in France long ago, very long ago,--and even in this French-Canadian village; where he had taught and served and lingered forty years, he had kept the graces of his youth, and this beautiful woman drew them all out. Since his arrival in Pontiac, he had never kissed a woman's hand--women had kissed his; and this woman was a Protestant, like Medallion!

Turning from the Cure, she held out a hand to the young Seigneur with a little casual air, as if she had but seen him yesterday, and said: "Monsieur De la Riviere--what, still buried?--and the world waiting for the great touch! But we in Pontiac gain what the world loses."

She turned to the Cure again, and said, placing a hand upon his arm:

"I could not pass without stepping in upon my dear old friend, even though soiled and unrepresentable. But you forgive that, don't you?"

"Madame is always welcome, and always unspotted of the dusty world," he answered gallantly.

She caught his fingers in hers as might a child, turned full upon Valmond, and waited. The Cure instantly presented Valmond to her. She looked at him brightly, alluringly, apparently so simply; yet her first act showed the perception behind that rosy and golden face, and the demure eyes whose lids languished now and then--to the unknowing with an air of coquetry, to the knowing--did any know her?--as one would shade one's eyes to see a landscape clearly, or make out a distant figure. As Valmond bowed, a thought seemed to fetch down the pink eyelids, and she stretched out her hand, which he took and kissed, while she said in English, though they had been talking in French:

"A traveller too, like myself, Monsieur Valmond? But Pontiac--why Pontiac?"

A furtive, inquiring look shot from the eyes of the young Seigneur, a puzzled glance from the Cure's, as they watched Valmond; for they did not know that he had knowledge of English; he had not spoken it to Medallion, who had sent into his talk several English words. How did this woman divine it?

A strange suspicion flashed into Valmond's face, but it was gone on the instant, and he replied quickly:

"Yes, madame, a traveller; and for Pontiac--there is as much earth and sky about Pontiac as about Paris or London or New York."

"But people count, Monsieur-Valmond."

She hesitated before the name, as if trying to remember, though she recalled perfectly. It was her tiny fashion to pique, to appear unknowing.

"Truly, Madame Chalice," he answered instantly, for he did not yield to the temptation to pause before her name; "but sometimes the few are as important to us as the many--eh?"

She almost started at the eh, for it broke in grimly upon the gentlemanly flavour of his speech.

"If my reasons for coming were only as good as madame's--" he added.

"Who knows!" she said, with her eyes resting idly on his flowered waistcoat, and dropping to the incongruous enamelled knee-boots with their red tassels. She turned to the Cure again, but not till Valmond had added:

"Or the same--who knows?"

Again she looked at him with drooping eyelids and a slight smile so full of acid possibilities that De la Riviere drew in a sibilant breath of delight. Her movement had been as towards an impertinence; but as she caught Valmond's eye, something in it, so really boylike, earnest, and free from insolence, met hers, that, with a little way she had, she laid back her head slowly, her lips parted in a sweet, ambiguous smile, her eyes dwelt on him with a humorous interest, or flash of purpose, and she said softly:

"Nobody knows--eh?"

She could not resist the delicate malice of the exclamation, she imitated the gaucherie so delightfully.

Valmond did not fail to see her meaning, but he was too wise to show it.

He hardly knew how it was he had answered her unhesitatingly in English, for it had been his purpose to avoid speaking English in Pontiac.

Presently Madame Chalice caught sight of Monsieur Garon coming from the house. When he saw her, he stopped short in delighted surprise.

Gathering up her skirts, she ran to him, put both hands on his shoulders, kissed him on the cheek, and said:

"Monsieur Garon, Monsieur Garon, my good avocat, my Solon! are the coffee, and the history, and the blest madeira still chez-toi?"

There was no jealousy in the Cure; he smiled at the scene with great benevolence, for he was as a brother to Monsieur Garon. If he had any good thing, it was his first wish to share it with him; even to taking him miles away to some simple home where a happy thing had come to poor folk--the return of a prodigal son, a daughter's fortunate marriage, or the birth of a child to childless people; and there together they exchanged pinches of snuff over the event, and made compliments from the same mould, nor desired difference of pattern. To the pretty lady's words, Monsieur Garon blushed, and his thin hand fluttered to his lips. As if in sympathy, the Cure's fingers trembled to his cassock cord. "Madame, dear madame,"--the Cure approved by a caressing nod," we are all the same here in our hearts and in our homes, and if anything seem good in them to us, it is because you are pleased. You bring sunshine and relish to our lives, dear madame."

The Cure beamed. This was after his own heart and he had ever said that his dear avocat would have been a brilliant orator, were it not for his retiring spirit.

For himself, he was no speaker at all; he could only do his duty and love his people. So he had declared over and over again, and the look in his eyes said the same now.

Madame's eyes were shining with tears. This admiration of her was too real to be doubted.

"And yet--and yet"--she said, with a hand in the Cure's and the avocat's, drawing them near her--"a heretic, a heretic, my dear friends! How should I stand in your hearts if I were only of your faith? Or is it so that you yearn over the lost sheep, more than over the ninety and nine of the fold?"

There was a real moisture in her eyes, and in her own heart she wondered, this fresh and venturing spirit, if she cared for them as they seemed to care for her--for she felt she had an inherent strain of the actress temperament, while these honest provincials were wholly real.

But if she made them happy by her gaiety, what matter! The tears dried, and she flashed a malicious look at the young Seigneur, as though to say: "You had your chance, and you made nothing of it, and these simple gentlemen have done the gracious thing."

Perhaps it was a liberal interpretation of his creed which prompted the Cure to add with a quaint smile:

"Thou art not far from the Kingdom,' my daughter."

The avocat, who had no vanity, hastened to add to his former remarks, as if he had been guilty of an oversight:

"Dear madame, you have flattered my poor gleanings in history; I am happy to tell you that there is here another and a better pilot in that sea. It is Monsieur Valmond," he added, his voice chirruping in his pleasure. "For Napoleon--"

"Ah, Napoleon--yes, Napoleon?" she said, turning to Valmond, with a look half of interest, half of incredulity.

"--For Napoleon is, through him, a revelation," the avocat went on. "He fills in the vague spaces, clears up mysteries of incident, and gives, instead, mystery of character."

"Indeed," she added, still incredulous, but interested in this bizarre figure who had so worked upon her old friend, interested because she had a keen scent for mystery, and instinctively felt it here before her. Like De la Riviere, she perceived a strange combination of the gentleman and--something else; but, unlike him, she saw also a light in the face and eyes that might be genius, poetry, adventure. For the incongruities, what did they matter to her? She wished to probe life, to live it, to race the whole gamut of inquiry, experiences, follies, loves, and sacrifices, to squeeze the orange dry, and then to die while yet young, having gone the full compass, the needle pointing home. She was as broad as sumptuous in her nature; so what did a gaucherie matter? or a dash of the Oriental in a citizen of the Occident?

"Then we must set the centuries right, and so on--if you will come to see me when I am settled at the Manor," she added, with soft raillery, to Valmond. He bowed, expressed his pleasure a little oracularly, and was about to say something else, but she turned deftly to De la Riviere, with a sweetness which made up for her previous irony to him, and said:

"You, my kind Seigneur, will come to breakfast with me one day? My husband will be here soon. When you see our flag flying, you will find the table always laid for four."

Then to the Cure and the avocat: "You shall visit me whenever you will, and you are to wait for nothing, or I shall come to fetch you. Voila! I am so glad to see you. And now, dear Cure, will you take me to my carriage?"

Soon there was a surf of dust rising behind the carriage, hiding her; but four men, left behind in the little garden, stood watching, as if they expected to see a vision in rose and gold rise from it; and each was smiling unconsciously.

CHAPTER IV

Since Friday night the good Cure, in his calm, philosophical way, had brooded much over the talk in the garden upon France, the Revolution, and Napoleon. As a rule, his sermons were commonplace almost to a classical simplicity, but there were times when, moved by some new theme, he talked to the villagers as if they, like himself, were learned and wise. He thought of his old life in France, of two Napoleons that he had seen, and of the time when, at Neuilly, a famous general burst into his father's house, and, with streaming tears, cried:

"He is dead--he is dead--at St. Helena--Napoleon! Oh, Napoleon!"

A chapter from Isaiah came to the Cure's mind. He brought out his Bible from the house, and, walking up and down, read aloud certain passages. They kept singing in his ears all day

He will surely violently turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country: there shalt thou die, and there the chariots of thy glory shall be the shame of thy lord's house. . . .

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah

And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle, and I will commit thy government into his hand. . . .
And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house.

And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue. . . .

He looked very benign as he quoted these verses in the pulpit on Sunday morning, with a half smile, as of pleased meditation. He was lost to the people before him, and when he began to speak, it was as in soliloquy. He was talking to a vague audience, into that space where a man's eyes look when he is searching his own mind, discovering it to himself. The instability of earthly power, the putting down of the great, their exile and chastening, and their restoration in their own persons, or in the persons of their descendants--this was his subject. He brought the application down to their own rude, simple life, then returned with it to a higher plane.

At last, as if the memories of France, "beloved and incomparable," overcame him, he dwelt upon the bitter glory of the Revolution. Then, with a sudden flush, he spoke of Napoleon. At that name the church became still, and the dullest habitant listened intently. Napoleon was in the air--a curious sequence to the song that was sung on the night of Valmond's arrival, when a phrase was put in the mouths of the parish, which gave birth to a personal reality. "Vive Napoleon!" had been on

every lip this week, and it was an easy step from a phrase to a man.

The Cure spoke with pensive dignity of Napoleon's past career, his work for France, his too proud ambition, behind which was his great love of country; and how, for chastening, God turned upon him violently and tossed him like a ball into the wide land of exile, from which he came out no more.

"But," continued the calm voice, "his spirit, stripped of the rubbish of this quarrelsome world, and freed from the spite of foes, comes out from exile and lives in our France to-day--for she is still ours, though we find peace and bread to eat, under another flag. And in these troubled times, when France needs a man, even as a barren woman a child to be the token of her womanhood, it may be that one sprung from the loins of the Great Napoleon may again give life to the principle which some have sought to make into a legend. Even as the deliverer came out of obscure Corsica, so from some outpost of France, where the old watchwords still are called, may rise another Napoleon, whose mission will be civic glory and peace alone, the champion of the spirit of France, defending it against the unjust. He shall be fastened as a nail in a sure place, as a glorious throne to his father's house."

He leaned over the pulpit, and, pausing, looked down at his congregation. Then, all at once, he was aware that he had created a profound impression. Just in front of him, his eyes burning with a strange fire, sat Monsieur Valmond. Parpon, beside him, hung over the back of a seat, his long arms stretched out, his hands applauding in a soundless way. Beneath the sword of Louis the Martyr, the great treasure of the parish, presented to this church by Marie Antoinette, sat Monsieur Garon, his thin fingers pressed to his mouth as if to stop a sound. Presently, out of pure spontaneity, there ran through the church like a soft chorus:

"O, say, where goes your love?
O gai, vive le roi!
He wears a silver sword,
Vive Napoleon!"

The thing was unprecedented. Who had started it? Afterwards some said it was Parpon, the now chosen comrade--or servant--of Valmond, who, people said, had given himself up to the stranger, body and soul; but no one could swear to that. Shocked, and taken out of his dream, the Cure raised his hand against the song. "Hush, hush, my children!" he said. "Hush, I command you!"

It was the sight of the upraised hands, more than the Cure's voice, which stilled the outburst. Those same hands had sprinkled the holy water in the sacrament of baptism, had blessed man and maid at the altar, had quieted the angry arm lifted to strike, had anointed the brow of the dying, and laid a crucifix on breasts which had ceased to harbour breath and care and love, and all things else.

Silence fell. In another moment the Cure finished his sermon, but not till his eyes had again met those of Valmond, and there had passed into

his mind a sudden, startling thought.

Unconsciously the Cure had declared himself the patron of all that made Pontiac for ever a notable spot in the eyes of three nations: and if he repented of it, no man ever knew.

During mass and the sermon Valmond had sat very still, once or twice smiling curiously at thought of how, inactive himself, the gate of destiny was being opened up for him. Yet he had not been all inactive. He had paid much attention to his toilet, selecting, with purpose, the white waistcoat, the long, blue-grey coat cut in a fashion anterior to this time by thirty years or more, and particularly to the arrangement of his hair. He resembled Napoleon--not the later Napoleon, but the Bonaparte, lean, shy, laconic, who fought at Marengo; and this had startled the Cure in his pulpit, and the rest of the little coterie.

But Madame Chalice, sitting not far from Elise Malboir, had seen the resemblance in the Cure's garden on Friday evening; and though she had laughed at it, for, indeed, the matter seemed ludicrous enough at first, --the impression had remained. She was no Catholic, she did not as a rule care for religious services; but there was interest in the air, she was restless, the morning was inviting, she was reverent of all true expression of life and feeling, though a sad mocker in much; and so she had come to the little church.

Following Elise's intent look, she read with amusement the girl's budding romance, and was then suddenly arrested by the head of Valmond, now half turned towards her. It had, indeed, a look of the First Napoleon. Was it the hair? Yes, it must be; but the head was not so square, so firm set; and what a world of difference in the grand effect! The one had been distant, splendid, brooding (so she glorified him); the other was an impressionist imitation, with dash, form, poetry, and colour. But where was the great strength? It was lacking. The close association of Parpon and Valmond--that was droll; yet, too, it had a sort of fitness, she knew scarcely why. However, Monsieur was not a fool, in the vulgar sense, for he had made a friend of a little creature who could be a wasp or a humming-bird, as he pleased. Then, too, this stranger had conquered her dear avocat; had won the hearts of the mothers and daughters--her own servants talked of no one else; had captured this pretty Elise Malboir; had caused the young men to imitate his walk and retail his sayings; had won from herself an invitation to visit her; and now had made an unconscious herald and champion of an innocent old Cure, and set a whole congregation singing "Vive Napoleon" after mass.

Napoleon? She threw back her pretty head, laughed softly, and fanned herself. Napoleon? Why, of course there could be no real connection; the man was an impostor, a base impostor, playing upon the credulities of a secluded village. Absurd--and interesting! So interesting, she did not resent the attention given to Valmond, to the exclusion of herself; though to speak truly, her vanity desired not admiration more than is inherent in the race of women.

Yet she was very dainty this morning, good to look at, and refreshing,

with everything in flower-like accord; simple in general effect, yet with touches of the dramatic here and there--in the little black patch on the delicate health of her cheek, in the seductive arrangements of her laces. She loved dress, all the vanities, but she had something above it all--an imaginative mind, certain of whose faculties had been sharpened to a fine edge of cleverness and wit. For she was but twenty-three; with the logic of a woman of fifty, without its setness and lack of elasticity. She went straight for the hearts of things, while yet she glittered upon the surface. This was why Valmond interested her--not as a man, a physical personality, but as a mystery to be probed, discovered. Sentiment? Coquetry? Not with him. That for less interesting men, she said to herself. Why should a point or two of dress and manners affect her unpleasantly? She ought to be just, to remember that there was a touch of the fantastic, of the barbaric, in all genius.

Was he a genius? For an instant she almost thought he was, when she saw the people make way for him to pass out of the church, as though he were a great personage, Parpon trotting behind him. He carried himself with true appreciation of the incident, acknowledging more by look than by sign this courtesy.

"Upon my word," she said, "he has them in his pocket." Then, unconsciously plagiarising Parpon: "Prince or barber--a toss-up!"

Outside, many had gathered round Medallion. The auctioneer, who liked the unique thing and was not without tact, having the gift of humour, took on himself the office of inquisitor, even as there rose again little snatches of "Vive Napoleon" from the crowd. He approached Valmond, who was moving on towards the Louis Quinze, with appreciation of a time for disappearing.

"We know you, sir," said Medallion, "as Monsieur Valmond; but there are those who think you would let us address you by a name better known--indeed, the name dear to all Frenchmen. If it be so, will you not let us call you Napoleon" (he took off his hat, and Valmond did the same), "and will you tell us what we may do for you?"

Madame Chalice, a little way off, watched Valmond closely. He stood a moment in a quandary, yet he was not outwardly nervous, and he answered presently, with an air of emprosement:

"Monsieur, my friends, I am in the hands of fate. I am dumb. Fate speaks for me. But we shall know each other better; and I trust you, who, as Frenchmen, descended from a better day in France, will not betray me. Let us be patient till Destiny strikes the hour." Now for the first time to-day Valmond saw Madame Chalice.

She could have done no better thing to serve him than to hold out her hand, and say in her clear tones, which had, too, a fascinating sort of monotony:

"Monsieur, if you are idle Friday afternoon, perhaps you will bestow on me a half-hour at the Manor; and I will try to make half mine no bad

one."

He was keen enough to feel the delicacy of the point through the deftness of the phrase; and what he said and what he did now had no pose, but sheer gratitude. With a few gracious words to Medallion, she bowed and drove away, leaving Valmond in the midst of an admiring crowd.

He was launched on an adventure as whimsical as tragical, if he was an impostor; and if he was not, as pathetic as droll. He was scarcely conscious that Parpon walked beside him, till the dwarf said:

"Hold on, my dauphin, you walk too fast for your poor fool."

CHAPTER V

From this hour Valmond was carried on by a wave of fortune. Before vespers on that Sunday night, it was common talk that he was a true son of the Great Napoleon, born at St. Helena.

Why did he come to Pontiac? He wished to be in retirement till his friends, acting for him in France, gave him the signal, and then with a small army of French-Canadians he would land in France. Thousands would gather round his standard, and so marching on to Paris, the Napoleonic faith would be revived, and he would come into his own. It is possible that these stories might have been traced to Parpon, but he had covered up his trail so well that no one followed him.

On that Sunday night, young men and old flocked into Valmond's chambers at the Louis Quinze, shook hands with him, addressing him as "Your Excellency" or "Your Highness." He maintained towards them a mysterious yet kindly reserve, singularly effective. They inspected the martial furnishing of the room: the drum, the pair of rifles, the pistols, in the corner, the sabres crossed on the wall, the gold-handled sword that lay upon the table, and the picture of Napoleon on a white horse against the wall. Tobacco and wine were set upon a side table, and every man as he passed out took a glass of wine and enough tobacco for his pipe, and said: "Of grace, your health, monseigneur!"

There were those who scoffed, who from natural habit disbelieved, and nodded knowingly, and whispered in each other's ears; but these were in the minority; and all the women and children declared for this new "Man of Destiny." And when some foolish body asked him for a lock of his hair, and old Madame Degardy (crazy Joan, as she was called) followed, offering him a pinch of snuff, and a lad appeared with a bunch of violets from Madame Chalice, the dissentients were cast in shadow, and had no longer courage to doubt.

Madame Chalice had been merely whimsical in sending these violets, which her gardener had brought her that very morning.

"It will help along the pretty farce," she had said to herself; and then she sat her down to read Napoleon's letters to Josephine, and to wonder that a woman could have been faithless and vile with such a man. Her blood raced indignantly in her veins as she thought of it. She admired intellect, supremacy, the gifts of temperament, deeds of war and adventure beyond all. As yet her brain was stronger than her feelings; there had been no breakers of emotion in her life. A wife, she had no child; the mother in her was spent upon her husband, whose devotion, honour, name, and goodness were dear to her. Yet--yet she had a world of her own; and reading Napoleon's impassioned letters to his wife, written with how great homage! in the flow of the tide washing to famous battle-fields, an exultation of ambition inspired her, and the genius of her distinguished ancestors set her heart beating hard. Presently, her face alive with feeling, a furnace in her eyes, she repeated a paragraph from Napoleon's letters to Josephine:

The enemy have lost, my dearest, eighteen thousand men, prisoners, killed, and wounded. Wurmzer has nothing left but to throw himself into Mantua. I hope soon to be in your arms. I love you to distraction. All is well. Nothing is wanting to your husband's happiness, save the love of Josephine.

She sprang to her feet. "And she, wife of a hero, was in common intrigue with Hippolyte Charles at the time! She had a conqueror, a splendid adventurer, and coming emperor, for a husband, and she loved him not. I--I could have knelt to him--worshipped him. I"--With a little hysterical, disdainful laugh, as of the soul at itself, she leaned upon the window, looking into the village below, alternately smiling and frowning at the thought of this adventurer down at the Louis Quinze. "Yet, who can tell? Disraeli was half mountebank at the start," she said. "Napoleon dressed infamously, too, before he was successful." But again she laughed, as at an absurdity.

During the next few days Valmond was everywhere--kind, liberal, quaint, tireless, at times melancholy; "in the distant perspective of the stage," as Monsieur De la Riviere remarked mockingly. But a passing member of the legislature met and was conquered by Valmond, and carried on to neighbouring parishes the wondrous tale.

He carried it through Ville Bambord, fifty miles away; and the story of how a Napoleon had come to Pontiac reached the ears of old Sergeant Eustache Lagroin of the Old Guard, who had fought with the Great Emperor at Waterloo, and in his army on twenty other battle-fields. He had been at Fontainebleau when Napoleon bade farewell to the Old Guard, saying: "For twenty years I have ever found you in the path of honour and glory. Adieu, my children! I would I were able to press you all to my heart--but I will at least press your eagle. I go to record the great deeds we have done together."

When the gossip came to Lagroin, as he sat in his doorway, babbling of Grouchy and Lannes and Davoust, the Little Corporal outflanking them all in his praise, his dim blue eyes flared out from the distant sky of youth and memory, his lips pursed in anger, and he got to his feet, his stick

fiercely pounding the ground.

"Tut! tut!" said he. "A lie! a pretty lie! I knew all the Napoleons-- Joseph, Lucien, Louis, Jerome, Caroline, Eliza, Pauline--all! I have seen them every one. And their children--pah! Who can deceive me? I will go to Pontiac, I will see to this tomfoolery. I'll bring the rascal to the drumhead. Does he think there is no one? Pish! I will spit him at the first stroke. Here, here, Manette," he cried to his granddaughter; "fetch out my uniform, give it an airing, and see to the buttons. I will show this brag how one of the Old Guard looked at Saint Jean. Quick, Manette, my sabre polish; I'll clean my musket, and to-morrow I will go to Pontiac. I'll put the scamp through his facings--but yes! I am eighty, but I have an arm of thirty." True to his word, the next morning at daybreak he started to walk to Pontiac, accompanied for a mile or so by Manette and a few of the villagers.

"See you, my child," he said, "I will stay with my niece, Desire Malboir, and her daughter Elise, there in Pontiac. You shall hear how I fetch that vagabond to his potage!"

Valmond had purchased a tolerable white horse through Medallion. After a day's grooming the beast showed off very well; and he was now seen riding about the parish, dressed after the manner of the First Napoleon, with a cocked hat and a short sword at his side. He rode well, and the silver and pennies he scattered were most fruitful of effect from the martial elevation. He happened to be riding into the village at one end as Sergeant Lagroin entered it at the other, each going towards the Louis Quinze. Valmond knew nothing of Sergeant Lagroin, so that what followed was of the inspiration of the moment. It sprang from his wit, and from his knowledge of Napoleon and the Napoleonic history, a knowledge which had sent Monsieur Garon into tears of joy in his own home, and afterwards off to the Manor House and also to the Seigneury, full of praise of him.

Catching sight of the sergeant, the significance of the thing flashed to his brain, and his course was mapped out on the instant. Sitting very straight, Valmond rode steadily down towards the old soldier. The sergeant had drawn notice as he came up the street, and people came to their doors, and children followed the grey, dust-covered veteran, in his last-century uniform. He came as far as the Louis Quinze, and then, looking on up the road, he saw the white horse, the cocked hat, the white waistcoat, and the long grey coat. He brought his stick down smartly on the ground, drew himself up, squared his shoulders, and said: "Courage, Eustache Lagroin. It is not forty Prussians, but one rogue! Crush him! Down with the pretender!"

So, with a defiant light in his eye, he came on, the old uniform sagging loosely on the shrunken body, which yet was soldier-like from head to foot. Years of camp and discipline and battle and endurance were in the whole bearing of the man. He was no more of Pontiac and this simple life than was Valmond himself.

So they neared each other, the challenger and the challenged, the champion and the invader, and quickly the village emptied itself out to

see.

When Valmond came so close that he could observe every detail of the old man's uniform, he suddenly reined in his horse, drew him back on his haunches with his left hand, and with his right saluted--not the old sergeant, but the coat of the Old Guard, to which his eyes were directed. Mechanically the hand of the sergeant went to his cap, then, starting forward with an angry movement, he seemed as though he would attack Valmond.

Valmond sat very still, his right hand thrust in his bosom, his forehead bent, his eyes calmly, resolutely, yet distantly, looking at the sergeant, who grew suddenly still also, while the people watched and wondered.

As Valmond looked, a soft light passed across his face, relieving its theatrical firmness, the half-contemptuous curl of his lip. He knew well enough that this event would make or unmake him in Pontiac. He became also aware that a carriage had driven up among the villagers, and had stopped; and though he did not look directly, he felt that it was Madame Chalice. This soft look on his face was not all assumed; for the ancient uniform of the sergeant touched something in him, the true comedian, or the true Napoleon, and it seemed as if he might dismount and take the old soldier in his arms.

He set his horse on a little, and paused again, with not more than fifteen feet between them. The sergeant's brain was going round like a top. It was not he that challenged after all.

"Soldier of the Old Guard," cried Valmond, in a clear, ringing voice, "how far is it to Friedland?"

Like a machine the veteran's hand again went up to his cap, and he answered:

"To Friedland--the width of a ditch!"

His voice shook as he said it, and the world to him was all a muddle then; for Napoleon the Great had asked a private this question after that battle on the Alle, when Berningsen, the Russian, threw away an army to the master strategist.

The private had answered the question in the words of Sergeant Lagroin. It was a saying long afterwards among the Old Guard, though it may not be found in the usual histories of that time, where every battalion, almost every company, had a watchword, which passed to make room for others, as victory followed victory.

"Soldier of the Old Guard," said Valmond again, "how came you by those scars upon your forehead?"

"I was a drummer at Auerstadt, a corporal at Austerlitz, a sergeant at Waterloo," rolled back the reply, in a high, quavering voice, as memories

of great events blew in upon the ancient fires of his spirit.

"Ah!" answered Valmond, nodding eagerly; "with Davoust at Auerstadt-- thirty against sixty thousand men. At eight o'clock, all fog and mist, as you marched up the defile towards the Sonnenberg hills, the brave Gudin and his division feeling their way to Blucher. Comrade, how still you stepped, your bayonet thrust out before you, clearing the mists, your eyes straining, your teeth set, ready to thrust. All at once a quick-moving mass sprang out of the haze, and upon you, with hardly a sound of warning; and an army of hussars launched themselves at your bayonets! You bent that wall back like a piece of steel, and broke it. Comrade, that was the beginning, in the mist of morning. Tell me how you fared in the light of evening, at the end of that bloody day."

The old soldier was trembling. There was no sign, no movement, from the crowd. Across the fields came the sharpening of a scythe, the cry of the grasshoppers, and the sound of a mill-wheel arose near by. In the mill itself, far up in a deep dormer window, sat Parpon with his black cat, looking down upon the scene with a grim smiling.

The sergeant saw that mist fronting Sonnenberg rise up, and show ten thousand splendid cavalry and fifty thousand infantry, with a king and a prince to lead them down upon those malleable but unmoving squares of French infantry. He saw himself drumming the Prussians back and his Frenchmen on.

"Beautiful God!" he cried proudly, "that was a day! And every man of the Third Corps that time lift up the lid of hell and drop a Prussian in. I stand beside Davoust once, and ping! come a bullet, and take off his chapeau. It fell upon my drum. I stoop and pick it up and hand it to him, but I keep drumming with one hand all the time. 'Comrade,' say I, 'the army thanks you for your courtesy.' 'Brother,' he say, 'twas to your drum,' and his eye flash out where Gudin carved his way through those pigs of Prussians. 'I'd take my head off to keep your saddle filled, comrade,' say I. Ping! come a bullet and catch me in the calf. 'You hold your head too high, brother,' the general say, and he smile. 'I'll hold it higher,' answer I, and I snatch at a soldier. 'Up with me on your shoulder, big comrade,' I say, and he lift me up. I make my sticks sing on the leather. 'You shall take off your hat to the Little Corporal to-morrow, if you've still your head, brother'--speak Davoust like that, and then he ride away like the devil to Morand's guns. Ha, ha, ha!" The sergeant's face was blazing with a white glare, for he was very pale, and seemed unconscious of all save the scene in his mind's eye. "Ha, ha, ha!" he laughed again. "Beautiful God, how did Davoust bring us on up to Sonnenberg! And next day I saw the Little Corporal. 'Drummer,' say he, 'no head's too high for my Guard. Come you, comrade, your general gives you to me. Come, Corporal Lagroin,' he call; and I come. 'But, first,' he say, 'up on the shoulder of your big soldier again, and play.' 'What shall I play, sire?' I ask. 'Play ten thousand heroes to Walhalla,' he answer. I play, and I think of my brother Jacques, who went fighting to heaven the day before. Beautiful God! that was a day at Auerstadt."

"Soldier," said Valmond, waving his hand, "step on. There is a drum at Louis Quinze. Let us go together, comrade."

The old sergeant was in a dream. He wheeled, the crowd made way for him, and at the neck of the white horse he came on with Valmond. As they passed the carriage of Madame Chalice, Valmond made no sign. They stopped in front of the hotel, and Valmond, motioning to the garcon, gave him an order. The old sergeant stood silent, his eyes full fixed upon Valmond. In a moment the boy came out with the drum. Valmond took it, and, holding it in his hands, said softly: "Soldier of the Old Guard, here is a drum of France." Without a word the old man took the drum, his fingers trembling as he fastened it to his belt. When the sticks were in his hand, all trembling ceased, and his hands became steady. He was living in the past entirely.

"Soldier," said Valmond in a loud voice, "remember Austerlitz. The Heights of Pratzen are before you. Play up the feet of the army."

For an instant the old man did not move, and then a sullen sort of look came over his face. He was not a drummer at Austerlitz, and for the instant he did not remember the tune the drummers played.

"Soldier," said Valmond softly, "with 'the Little Sword that Danced' play up the feet of the army."

A light broke over the old man's face. The swift look he cast on Valmond had no distrust now. Instantly his hand went to his cap.

"My General!" he said, and stepped in front of the white horse. There was a moment's pause, and then the sergeant's arms were raised, and down came the sticks with a rolling rattle on the leather. They sent a shiver of feeling through the village, and turned the meek white horse into a charger of war. No man laughed at the drama performed in Pontiac that day, not even the little coterie who were present, not even Monsieur De la Riviere, whose brow was black with hatred, for he had watched 'the eyes of Madame Chalice fill with tears at the old sergeant's tale of Auerstadt, had noticed her admiring glance, "at this damned comedian," as he now called Valmond. When he came to her carriage, she said, with oblique suggestion:

"What do you think of it?"

"Impostor! fakir!" was his sulky reply. "Nothing more."

"If fakirs and impostors are so convincing, dear monsieur, why be yourself longer? Listen!" she added. Valmond had spoken down at the aged drummer, whose arms were young again, as once more he marched on Pratzen. Suddenly from the sergeant's lips there broke, in a high, shaking voice, to the rattle of the drum:

"Conscrits, au pas;
Ne pleurez pas;
Ne pleurez pas;

Marchez au pas,
Au pas, au pas, au pas, au pas!"

They had not gone twenty yards before fifty men and boys, caught in the inflammable moment, sprang out from the crowd, fell involuntarily into rough marching order, and joined in the inspiring refrain:

"Marchez au pas,
Au pas, au pas, au pas, au pas!"

The old man in front was charged anew. All at once, at a word from Valmond, he broke into the Marseillaise, with his voice and with his drum. To these Frenchmen of an age before the Revolution, the Marseillaise had only been a song. Now in their ignorant breasts there waked the spirit of France, and from their throats there burst out, with a half-delirious ecstasy:

"Allons, enfants de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrive."

As they neared the Louis Quinze, a dozen men, just arrived in the village, returned from river-driving, carried away by the chant, tumultuously joined in the procession, and so came on in a fever of vague patriotism. A false note in the proceedings, a misplay on the part of Valmond, would easily have made the thing ridiculous; but even to Madame Chalice, with her keen artistic sense, it had a pathetic sort of dignity, by virtue of its rude earnestness, its raw sincerity. She involuntarily thought of the great Napoleon and his toy kingdom of Elba, of Garibaldi and his handful of patriots. There were depths here, and she knew it.

"Even the pantaloons may have a soul," she said; "or a king may have a heart."

In front of the Louis Quinze, Valmond waved his hand for a halt, and the ancient drummer wheeled and faced him, fronting the crowd. Valmond was pale, and his eyes burned like restless ghosts. Surely the Cupid bow of the thin Napoleonic lips was there, the distant yet piercing look. He waved his hand again, and the crowd were silent.

"My children," said he, "we have begun well. Once more among you the antique spirit lives. From you may come the quickening of our beloved country; for she is yours, though here under the flag of our ancient and amiable enemy you wait the hour of your return to her. In you there is nothing mean or dull; you are true Frenchmen. My love is with you. And you and I, true to each other, may come into our own again--over there!"

He pointed to the East.

"Through you and me may France be born again; and in the villages and fields and houses of Normandy and Brittany you may, as did your ancestors, live in peace, and bring your bones to rest in that blessed and honourable ground. My children, my heart is full. Let us move on together. Napoleon from St. Helena calls to you, Napoleon in Pontiac

calls to you! Will you come?"

Reckless cheering followed; many were carried away into foolish tears, and Valmond sat still and let them kiss his hand, while pitchers of wine went round.

"Where is our fakir now, dear monsieur?" said Madame Chalice to De la Riviere once again.

Valmond got silence with a gesture. He opened his waistcoat, took from his bosom an order fastened to a little bar of gold, and held it in his hand.

"Drummer," he said, in a clear, full tone, "call the army to attention."

The old man set their blood tingling with the impish sticks.

"I advance Sergeant Lagroin, of the Old Guard of glorious memory, to the rank of Captain in my Household Troops, and I command you to obey him as such."

His look bent upon the crowd, as Napoleon's might have done on the Third Corps.

"Drummer, call the army to attention," fell the words.

And again like a small whirlwind of hailstones the sticks shook on the drum.

"I advance Captain Lagroin to the rank of Colonel in my Household Troops, and I command you to obey him as such."

And once more: "Drummer, call the army to attention."

The sticks swung down, but somehow they faltered, for the drummer was shaking now.

"I advance Colonel Lagroin to the rank of General in my Household Troops, and I command you to obey him as such."

Then he beckoned, and the old man drew near. Stooping, he pinned the order upon his breast. When the sergeant saw what it was, he turned pale, trembled, and the drumsticks fell from his hand. His eyes shone like sun on wet glass, then tears sprang from them upon his face. He caught Valmond's hand and kissed it, and cried, oblivious of them all:

"Ah, sire, sire! It is true. It is true. I know that ribbon, and I know you are a Napoleon. Sire, I love you, and I will die for you!"

For the first time that day a touch of the fantastic came into Valmond's manner.

"General," he said, "the centuries look down on us as they looked down on

him, your sire--and mine!"

He doffed his hat, and the hats of all likewise came off in a strange quiet. A cheer followed, and Valmond motioned for wine to go round freely. Then he got off his horse, and, taking the weeping old man by the arm, himself loosening the drum from his belt, they passed into the hotel.

"A cheerful bit of foolery and treason," said Monsieur De la Riviere to Madame Chalice.

"My dear Seigneur, if you only had more humour and less patriotism!" she answered. "Treason may have its virtues. It certainly is interesting, which, in your present gloomy state, you are not."

"I wonder, madame, that you can countenance this imposture," he broke out.

"Excellent and superior monsieur, I wonder sometimes that I can countenance you. Breakfast with me on Sunday, and perhaps I will tell you why--at twelve o'clock."

She drove on, but, meeting the Cure, stopped her carriage.

"Why so grave, my dear Cure?" she asked, holding out her hand.

He fingered the gold cross upon his breast--she had given it to him two years before.

"I am going to counsel him--Monsieur Valmond," he said. Then, with a sigh: "He sent me two hundred dollars for the altar to-day, and fifty dollars to buy new cassocks for myself."

"Come in the morning and tell me what he says," she answered; "and bring our dear avocat."

As she looked from her window an hour later, she saw bonfires burning, and up from the village came the old song, that had prefaced a drama in Pontiac.

But Elise Malboir had a keener interest that night, for Valmond and Parpon brought her uncle "General Lagroin," in honour to her mother's cottage; and she sat and listened dreamily, as Valmond and the old man talked of great things to be done.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

Conquest not important enough to satisfy ambition
Face flushed with a sort of pleasurable defiance
Touch of the fantastic, of the barbaric, in all genius

We are only children till we begin to make our dreams our life

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