

## Chapter 31

### THE SON OF THE MILLER OF LEGUERNO

We have said that at the very moment when Morgan and his three companions stopped the Geneva diligence between Bar-sur-Seine and Châtillon, Roland was entering Nantes.

If we are to know the result of his mission we must not grope our way, step by step, through the darkness in which the Abbé Bernier wrapped his ambitious projects, but we must join him later at the village of Muzillac, between Ambon and Guernic, six miles above the little bay into which the Vilaine River falls.

There we find ourselves in the heart of the Morbihan; that is to say, in the region that gave birth to the Chouannerie. It was close to Laval, on the little farm of the Poiriers, that the four Chouan brothers were born to Pierre Cottereau and Jeanne Moyné. One of their ancestors, a misanthropical woodcutter, a morose peasant, kept himself aloof from the other peasants as the *\_chat-huant\_* (screech-owl) keeps aloof from the other birds; hence the name Chouan, a corruption of *\_chat-huant\_*.

The name became that of a party. On the right bank of the Loire they said Chouans when they meant Bretons, just as on the left bank they said brigands when they meant Vendéans.

It is not for us to relate the death and destruction of that heroic family, nor follow to the scaffold the two sisters and a brother, nor tell of battlefields where Jean and René, martyrs to their faith, lay dying or dead. Many years have elapsed since the executions of Perrine, René and Pierre, and the death of Jean; and the martyrdom of the sisters, the exploits of the brothers have passed into legends. We have now to do with their successors.

It is true that these gars (lads) are faithful to their traditions. As they fought beside la Rouërie, Bois-Hardy and Bernard de Villeneuve, so did they fight

beside Bourmont, Frotté, and Georges Cadoudal. Theirs was always the same courage, the same devotion--that of the Christian soldier, the faithful royalist. Their aspect is always the same, rough and savage; their weapons, the same gun or cudgel, called in those parts a "ferte." Their garments are the same; a brown woollen cap, or a broad-brimmed hat scarcely covering the long straight hair that fell in tangles on their shoulders, the old *Aulerici Cenomani*, as in Cæsar's day, *promisso capillo*; they are the same Bretons with wide breeches of whom Martial said:

*Tam laxa est... Quam veteres braccoe Britonis pauperis.*

To protect themselves from rain and cold they wore goatskin garments, made with the long hair turned outside; on the breasts of which, as countersign, some wore a scapulary and chaplet, others a heart, the heart of Jesus; this latter was the distinctive sign of a fraternity which withdrew apart each day for common prayer.

Such were the men, who, at the time we are crossing the borderland between the Loire-Inférieure and Morbihan, were scattered from La Roche-Bernard to Vannes, and from Quertemberg to Billiers, surrounding consequently the village of Muzillac.

But it needed the eye of the eagle soaring in the clouds, or that of the screech-owl piercing the darkness, to distinguish these men among the gorse and heather and underbrush where they were crouching.

Let us pass through this network of invisible sentinels, and after fording two streams, the affluents of a nameless river which flows into the sea near Billiers, between Arzal and Dangau, let us boldly enter the village of Muzillac.

All is still and sombre; a single light shines through the blinds of a house, or rather a cottage, which nothing distinguishes from its fellows. It is the fourth to the right on entering the village.

Let us put our eye to one of these chinks and look in.

We see a man dressed like the rich peasants of Morbihan, except that gold lace about a finger wide stripes the collar and buttonholes of his coat and also the edges of his hat. The rest of his dress consists of leathern trousers and high-topped boots. His sword is thrown upon a chair. A brace of pistols lies within reach of his hand. Within the fireplace the barrels of two or three muskets reflect the light of a blazing fire.

The man is seated before a table; a lamp lights some papers which he is reading with great attention, and illuminates his face at the same time.

The face is that of a man of thirty. When the cares of a partisan warfare do not darken it, its expression must surely be frank and joyous. Beautiful blond hair frames it; great blue eyes enliven it; the head, of a shape peculiarly Breton, seems to show, if we believe in Gall's system, an exaggerated development of the organs of self-will. And the man has two names. That by which he is known to his soldiers, his familiar name, is Round-head; and his real name, received from brave and worthy parents, Georges Cadudal, or rather Cadoudal, tradition having changed the orthography of a name that is now historic.

Georges was the son of a farmer of the parish of Kerléano in the commune of Brech. The story goes that this farmer was once a miller. Georges had just received at the college of Vannes--distant only a few leagues from Brech--a good and solid education when the first appeals for a royalist insurrection were made in Vendée. Cadoudal listened to them, gathered together a number of his companions, and offered his services to Stofflet. But Stofflet insisted on seeing him at work before he accepted him. Georges asked nothing better. Such occasions were not long to seek in the Vendéan army. On the next day there was a battle; Georges went into it with such determination and made so desperate a rush that M. de Maulevrier's former huntsman, on seeing him charge the Blues, could not refrain from saying aloud to Bonchamp, who was near him:

"If a cannon ball doesn't take off that Big Round Head, it will roll far, I warrant you."

The name clung to Cadoudal--a name by which, five centuries earlier, the lords of Malestroit, Penhoël, Beaumanoir and Rochefort designated the great Constable, whose ransom was spun by the women of Brittany.

"There's the Big Round Head," said they; "now we'll exchange some good sword-play with the English."

Unfortunately, at this time it was not Breton sword-thrusts against English, but Frenchmen against Frenchmen.

Georges remained in Vendée until after the defeat of Savenay. The whole Vendéan army was either left upon the battlefield or vanished in smoke. For three years, Georges had performed prodigies of valor, strength and dexterity; he now crossed the Loire and re-entered Morbihan with only one man left of all who had followed him.

That man became his aide-de-camp, or rather his brother-in-arms. He never left him, and in memory of the hard campaign they had made together he changed his name from Lemercier to Tiffauges. We have seen him at the ball of the Victims charged with a message to Morgan.

As soon as Cadoudal returned to his own part of the country, he fomented insurrection on his own responsibility. Bullets respected that big round head, and the big round head justified Stofflet's prediction. He succeeded La Rochejacquelin, d'Elbée, Bonchamp, Lescure, even Stofflet himself, and became their rival for fame, their superior in power; for it happened (and this will give an idea of his strength) that Cadoudal, almost single-handed, had been able to resist the government of Bonaparte, who had been First Consul for the last three months. The two leaders who continued with him, faithful to the Bourbon dynasty, were Frotté and Bourmont.

At the time of which we are now speaking, that is to say, the 26th of January, 1800, Cadoudal commanded three or four thousand men with whom he was preparing to blockade General Hatry in Vannes.

During the time that he awaited the First Consul's answer to the letter of Louis XVIII. he had suspended hostilities; but Tiffauges had arrived a couple of days before with it.

That letter was already on the way to England, whence it would be sent to Mittau; and since the First Consul would not accept peace on the terms dictated by Louis XVIII., Cadoudal, commander-in-chief of Louis XVIII. in the West, renewed his warfare against Bonaparte, intending to carry it on alone, if necessary, with his friend Tiffauges. For the rest, the latter was at Pouancé, where conferences were being held between Châtillon, d'Autichamp, the Abbé Bernier, and General Hédouville.

He was reflecting--this last survivor of the great warriors of the civil war--and the news he had just received was indeed a matter for deep reflection.

General Brune, the conqueror of Alkmaar and Castricum, the savior of Holland, had just been appointed to the command of the Republican forces in the West. He had reached Nantes three days previous, intending, at any cost, to annihilate Cadoudal and his Chouans.

At any cost, therefore, Cadoudal and his Chouans must prove to the commander-in-chief that they knew no fear, and had nothing to expect from intimidation.

Just then the gallop of a horse was heard; the rider no doubt had the countersign, for he passed without difficulty the various patrols stationed along the road to La Roche-Bernard, and entered the village of Muzillac, also without difficulty.

He stopped before the door of the cottage in which Georges was sitting. The latter raised his head, listened, and, by way of precaution, laid his hands on his pistols, though it was probable that the new-comer was a friend.

The rider dismounted, strode up the path, and opened the door of the room where Georges was waiting.

"Ah! it's you, Coeur-de-Roi," said Cadoudal. "Where do you come from?"

"From Pouancé, general."

"What news?"

"A letter from Tiffauges."

"Give it to me."

Georges snatched the letter hastily from Coeur-de-Roi's hand and read it.

"Ah!" he exclaimed.

Then he read it a second time,

"Have you seen the man whose coming he speaks of?" inquired Cadoudal.

"Yes, general," replied the courier.

"What sort of a man is he?"

"A handsome young fellow of twenty-six or seven."

"What manner?"

"Determined."

"That's it. When does he arrive?"

"Probably to-night."

"Did you safe-guard him along the road?"

"Yes; he'll come safely."

"Do it again. Nothing must happen to him; he is protected by Morgan."

"That's understood, general."

"Anything more to say?"

"The advanced guard of the Republicans has reached La Roche-Bernard."

"How many men?"

"About a thousand. They have a guillotine with them, and the commissioner of the executive power, Millière."

"Are you sure?"

"I met them on the road. The commissioner was riding near the colonel, and I recognized him perfectly. He executed my brother, and I have sworn he shall die by my own hand."

"And you'll risk your life to keep your oath?"

"At the first opportunity."

"Perhaps it won't be long coming."

The gallop of a horse echoed through the street.

"Ah!" said Coeur-de-Roi, "that is probably the man you expect."

"No," replied Cadoudal, "this rider comes from the direction of Vannes."

The sound became more distinct, and it proved that Cadoudal was right.

The second horseman, like the first, halted at the gate, dismounted, and came into the room. The royalist leader recognized him at once, in spite of the large cloak in which he was wrapped.

"Is it you, Bénédicté?" he asked.



"Yes, general."

"Where do you come from?"

"From Vannes, where you sent me to watch the Blues."

"Well, what are the Blues doing?"

"Scaring themselves about dying of hunger if you blockade the town. In order to procure provisions General Hatry intends to carry off the supplies at Grandchamp. The general is to command the raid in person; and, to act more quickly, only a hundred men are to go."

"Are you tired, Bénédicité?"

"Never, general."

"And your horse?"

"He came fast, but he can do twelve or fifteen miles more without killing himself."

"Give him two hours' rest, a double feed of oats, and make him do thirty."

"On those conditions he can do them."

"Start in two hours. Be at Grandchamp by daybreak. Give the order in my name to evacuate the village. I'll take care of General Hatry and his column. Is that all you have to say?"

"No, I heard other news."

"What is it?"

"That Vannes has a new bishop."

"Ha! so they are giving us back our bishops?"

"So it seems; but if they are all like this one, they can keep them."

"Who is he?"

"Audrein!"

"The regicide?"

"Audrein the renegade."

"When is he coming?"

"To-night or to-morrow."

"I shall not go to meet him; but let him beware of falling into my men's hands."

Bénédicté and Coeur-de-Roi burst into a laugh which completed Cadoudal's thought.

"Hush!" cried Cadoudal.

The three men listened.

"This time it is probably he," observed Georges.

The gallop of a horse could be heard coming from the direction of La Roche-Bernard.

"It is certainly he," repeated Coeur-de-Roi.

"Then, my friends, leave me alone. You, Bénédicté, get to Grandchamp as soon as possible. You, Coeur-de-Roi, post thirty men in the courtyard; I want messengers to send in different directions. By the way, tell some one to bring the best that can be got for supper in the village."

"For how many, general?"

"Oh! two."

"Are you going out?"

"No, only to meet the man who is coming."

Two or three men had already taken the horses of the messengers into the courtyard. The messengers themselves disappeared.

Georges reached the gate on the street just as a horseman, pulling up his horse, looked about him and seemed to hesitate.

"He is here, sir," said Georges.

"Who is here?"

"He whom you seek."

"How do you know whom I am seeking?"

"I presume it is Georges Cadoudal, otherwise called Round-head."

"Exactly."

"Then I bid you welcome, Monsieur Roland de Montrevel, for I am the person you seek."

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed the young man, amazed.

Then, dismounting, he looked about as if for some one to take his mount.

"Throw the bridle over your horse's neck, and don't be uneasy about him. You will find him when you want him. Nothing is ever lost in Brittany; you are in the land of honesty."

The young man made no remark, threw the bridle over his horse's neck as he had been told, and followed Cadoudal, who walked before him.

"Only to show you the way, colonel," said the leader of the Chouans.

They both entered the cottage, where an invisible hand had just made up the fire.