

Chapter 50

CADOUDAL AT THE TUILERIES

The day but one after the events which we have just related took place, two men were walking side by side up and down the grand salon of the Tuileries. They were talking eagerly, accompanying their words with hasty and animated gestures. These men were the First Consul, Bonaparte, and Cadoudal.

Cadoudal, impelled by the misery that might be entailed by a prolonged struggle in Brittany, had just signed a peace with Brune. It was after this signing of the peace that he had released the Companions of Jehu from their obligations. Unhappily, this release had reached them, as we have seen, twenty-four hours too late.

When treating with Brune, Cadoudal had asked nothing for himself save the liberty to go immediately to England. But Brune had been so insistent, that he had consented to an interview with the First Consul. He had, in consequence, come to Paris. The very morning of his arrival he went to the Tuileries, sent in his name, and had been received. It was Rapp who, in Roland's absence, introduced him. As the aide-de-camp withdrew, he left both doors open, so as to see everything from Bourrienne's room, and to be able to go to the assistance of the First Consul if necessary.

But Bonaparte, who perfectly understood Rapp's motive, closed the door. Then, returning hastily to Cadoudal's side, he said: "Ah! so it is you at last! One of your enemies, my aide-de-camp, Roland de Montrevel, has told me fine things of you."

"That does not surprise me," replied Cadoudal. "During the short time I saw M. de Montrevel, I recognized in him a most chivalrous nature."

"Yes; and that touched you?" asked the First Consul, fixing his falcon eye on the royalist chief. "Listen, Georges. I need energetic men like you to

accomplish the work I have undertaken. Will you be one of them? I have already offered you the rank of colonel, but you are worth more than that. I now offer you the rank of general of division."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart, citizen First Consul," replied Cadoudal; "but you would despise me if I accepted."

"Why so?" queried Bonaparte, hastily.

"Because I have pledged myself to the House of Bourbon; and I shall remain faithful to it under all circumstances."

"Let us discuss the matter," resumed the First Consul. "Is there no way to bind you?"

"General," replied the royalist leader, "may I be permitted to repeat to you what has been said to me?"

"Why not?"

"Because it touches upon the deepest political interests."

"Pooh! some nonsense," said the First Consul, smiling uneasily.

Cadoudal stopped short and looked fixedly at his companion.

"It is said that an agreement was made between you and Commodore Sidney Smith at Alexandria, the purport of which was to allow you to return to

France on the condition, accepted by you, of restoring the throne to our former kings."

Bonaparte burst out laughing.

"How astonishing you are, you plebeians!" he said, "with your love for your former kings! Suppose that I did re-establish the throne (a thing, I assure you, I have not the smallest desire to do), what return will you get, you who have shed your blood for the cause? Not even the confirmation of the rank you have won in it, colonel. Have you ever known in the royalist ranks a colonel who was not a noble? Did you ever hear of any man rising by his merits into that class of people? Whereas with me, Georges, you can attain to what you will. The higher I raise myself, the higher I shall raise those who surround me. As for seeing me play the part of Monk, dismiss that from your mind. Monk lived in an age in which the prejudices we fought and overthrew in 1789 were in full force. Had Monk wished to make himself king, he could not have done so. Dictator? No! It needed a Cromwell for that! Richard could not have maintained himself. It is true that he was the true son of a great man--in other words a fool. If I had wished to make myself king, there was nothing to hinder me; and if ever the wish takes me there will be nothing to hinder. Now, if you have an answer to that, give it."

"You tell me, citizen First Consul, that the situation in France in 1800 is not the same as England in 1660. Charles I. was beheaded in 1649, Louis XVI. in 1793. Eleven years elapsed in England between the death of the king and the restoration of his son. Seven years have already elapsed in France since the death of Louis XVI. Will you tell me that the English revolution was a religious one, whereas the French revolution was a political one? To that I reply that a charter is as easy to make as an abjuration."

Bonaparte smiled.

"No," he said, "I should not tell you that. I should say to you simply this: that Cromwell was fifty years old when Charles I. died. I was twenty-four at the death of Louis XVI. Cromwell died at the age of fifty-nine. In ten years' time he was able to undertake much, but to accomplish little. Besides, his

reform was a total one--a vast political reform by the substitution of a republican government for a monarchical one. Well, grant that I live to be Cromwell's age, fifty-nine; that is not too much to expect; I shall still have twenty years, just the double of Cromwell. And remark, I change nothing, I progress; I do not overthrow, I build up. Suppose that Cæsar, at thirty years of age, instead of being merely the first roué of Rome, had been its greatest citizen; suppose his campaign in Gaul had been made; that his campaign in Egypt was over, his campaign in Spain happily concluded; suppose that he was thirty years old instead of fifty--don't you think he would have been both Cæsar and Augustus?"

"Yes, unless he found Brutus, Cassius, and Casca on his path."

"So," said Bonaparte, sadly, "my enemies are reckoning on assassination, are they? In that case the thing is easy, and you, my enemy, have the first chance. What hinders you at this moment, if you feel like Brutus, from striking me as he struck Cæsar? I am alone with you, the doors are shut; and you would have the time to finish me before any one could reach you."

Cadoudal made a step backward.

"No," said he, "we do not count upon assassination, and I think our extremity must be great indeed before any of us would become a murderer; but there are the chances of war. A single reverse would destroy your prestige. One defeat would bring the enemy to the heart of France. The camp-fires of the Austrians can already be seen from the frontiers of Provence. A cannon-ball may take off your head, as it did that of Marshal Berwick, and then what becomes of France? You have no children, and your brothers--"

"Oh!" cried Bonaparte, "from that point of view you are right enough; but, if you don't believe in Providence, I do. I believe that nothing happens by chance. I believe that when, on the 15th of August, 1769 (one year, day for day, after Louis XV. issued the decree reuniting Corsica to France), a child was born in Ajaccio, destined to bring about the 13th Vendémiaire and the 18th Brumaire, and that Providence had great designs, mighty projects, in

view for that child. I am that child. If I have a mission, I have nothing to fear. My mission is a buckler. If I have no mission, if I am mistaken, if, instead of living the twenty-five or thirty years I need to accomplish my work, I am stabbed to the heart like Cæsar, or knocked over by a cannonball like Berwick, Providence will have had its reasons for acting so, and on Providence will devolve the duty of providing for France. We spoke just now of Cæsar. When Rome followed his body, mourning, and burned the houses of his murderers, when the Eternal City turned its eyes to the four quarters of the globe, asking whence would come the genius to stay her civil wars, when she trembled at the sight of drunken Antony and treacherous Lepidus, she never thought of the pupil of Apollonius, the nephew of Cæsar, the young Octavius. Who then remembered that son of the Velletri banker, whitened with the flour of his ancestors? No one; not even the far-sighted Cicero. '_Orandum et tollendum_,' he said. Well, that lad fooled all the graybeards in the Senate, and reigned almost as long as Louis XIV. Georges, Georges! don't struggle against the Providence which created me, or that Providence will destroy you."

"Then I shall be destroyed while following the path and the religion of my fathers," replied Cadoudal, bowing; "and I hope that God will pardon my error, which will be that of a fervent Christian and a faithful son."

Bonaparte laid his hands on the shoulders of the young leader.

"So be it," said he; "but at least remain neuter. Leave events to complete themselves. Watch the thrones as they topple, the crowns as they fall. Usually spectators pay for a show; I will pay you to look on."

"And what will you pay me for that, citizen First Consul?" asked Cadoudal, laughing.

"One hundred thousand francs a year," replied Bonaparte.

"If you would give a hundred thousand francs to one poor rebel leader," said Cadoudal, "what would you give to the prince for whom he fought?"

"Nothing, sir. I pay you for your courage, not for the principle for which you fought. I prove to you that I, man of my own works, judge men solely by theirs. Accept, Georges, I beg of you."

"And suppose I refuse?"

"You will do wrong."

"Will I still be free to depart when I please?"

Bonaparte went to the door and opened it.

"The aide-de-camp on duty," he said.

He waited, expecting to see Rapp. Roland appeared.

"Ah, is it you!" he cried. Then, turning to Cadoudal, he said: "Colonel, I do not need to present to you my aide-de-camp, M. Roland de Montrevel. He is already one of your acquaintances. Roland, tell the colonel that he is as free in Paris as you were in his camp at Muzillac, and that if he wishes a passport for any country in the world, Fouché has orders to give it to him."

"Your word suffices, citizen First Consul," replied Cadoudal, bowing. "I leave to-night."

"May I ask where you are going?"

"To London, general."

"So much the better."

"Why so much the better?"

"Because there you will be near the men for whom you have fought."

"And then?"

"Then, when you have seen them--"

"What?"

"You will compare them with those against whom you have fought. But, once out of France, colonel--"

Bonaparte paused.

"I am waiting," said Cadoudal.

"Do not return without warning me, or, if you do, do not be surprised if I treat you as an enemy."

"That would be an honor, general. By treating me so you will show that you consider me a man to be feared."

So saying, Georges bowed to the First Consul, and retired.

"Well, general," asked Roland, after the door had closed on the Breton leader, "is he the man I represented him to be?"

"Yes," responded Bonaparte, thoughtfully; "only he sees things awry. But the exaggeration of his ideas arises from noble sentiments, which must give him great influence over his own people." Then he added, in a low voice, "But we must make an end of him. And now what have you been doing, Roland?"

"Making an end of my work," replied Roland.

"Ah, ha! Then the Companions of Jehu--"

"No longer exist, general. Three-fourths are dead, the rest prisoners."

"And you are safe and sound?"

"Don't speak of it, general. I do verily believe I have a compact with the devil."

That same evening Cadoudal, as he said, left Paris for England. On receiving the news that the Breton leader was in London, Louis XVIII. wrote him the following letter:

I have learned with the greatest satisfaction, general, that you have at last _escaped_ from the bands of the tyrant who misconceived you so far as to offer you service under him. I

deplore the unhappy circumstances which obliged you to treat with him; but I did not feel the slightest uneasiness; the heart of my faithful Bretons, and yours in particular, are too well known to me. To-day you are free, you are near my brother, all my hopes revive. I need not say more to such a Frenchman as you. LOUIS.

To this letter were added a lieutenant-general's commission and the grand cordon of Saint-Louis.