II

He succeeded in this object no better than the rest of the garrison and the whole of society. The two young officers, of no especial consequence till then, became distinguished by the universal curiosity as to the origin of their quarrel. Madame de Lionne's salon was the centre of ingenious surmises; that lady herself was for a time assailed with inquiries as the last person known to have spoken to these unhappy and reckless young men before they went out together from her house to a savage encounter with swords, at dusk, in a private garden. She protested she had noticed nothing unusual in their demeanour. Lieutenant Feraud had been visibly annoyed at being called away. That was natural enough; no man likes to be disturbed in a conversation with a lady famed for her elegance and sensibility» But, in truth, the subject bored Madame de Lionne since her personality could by no stretch of imagination be connected with this affair. And it irritated her to hear it advanced that there might have been some woman in the case. This irritation arose, not from her elegance or sensibility, but from a more instinctive side of her nature. It became so great at last that she peremptorily forbade the subject to be mentioned under her roof. Near her couch the prohibition was obeyed, but farther off in the salon the pall of the imposed silence continued to be lifted more or less. A diplomatic personage with a long pale face resembling the countenance of a sheep, opined, shaking his head, that it was a quarrel of long standing envenomed by time. It was objected to him that the men themselves were too young for such a theory to fit their proceedings. They belonged also to different and distant parts of France. A subcommissary of the Intendence, an agreeable and cultivated bachelor in keysermere breeches, Hessian boots and a blue coat embroidered with silver lace, who affected to believe in the transmigration of souls, suggested that the two had met perhaps in some previous existence. The feud was in the forgotten past. It might have been something quite inconceivable in the present state of their being; but their souls remembered the animosity and manifested an instinctive antagonism. He developed his theme jocularly. Yet the affair was so absurd from the worldly, the military, the honourable, or the prudential point of view, that this weird explanation seemed rather more reasonable than any other.

The two officers had confided nothing definite to any one. Resentment, humiliation at having been worsted arms in hand, and an uneasy feeling of having been involved into a scrape by the injustice of fate, kept Lieutenant Feraud savagely dumb. He mistrusted the sympathy of mankind. That would of course go to that dandified staff officer. Lying in bed he raved to himself in his mind or aloud to the pretty maid who ministered to his needs with devotion and listened to his horrible imprecations with alarm. That Lieutenant D'Hubert

should be made to "pay for it," whatever it was, seemed to her just and natural. Her principal concern was that Lieutenant Feraud should not excite himself. He appeared so wholly admirable and fascinating to the humility of her heart that her only concern was to see him get well quickly even if it were only to resume his visits to Madame de Lionne's salon.

Lieutenant D'Hubert kept silent for the immediate reason that there was no one except a stupid young soldier servant to speak to. But he was not anxious for the opportunities of which his severe arrest deprived him. He would have been uncommunicative from dread of ridicule. He was aware that the episode, so grave professionally, had its comic side. When reflecting upon it he still felt that he would like to wring Lieutenant Feraud's neck for him. But this formula was figurative rather than precise, and expressed more a state of mind than an actual physical impulse. At the same time there was in that young man a feeling of comradeship and kindness which made him unwilling to make the position of Lieutenant Feraud worse than it was.

He did not want to talk at large about this wretched affair. At the inquiry he would have, of course, to speak the truth in self-defence. This prospect vexed him.

But no inquiry took place. The army took the field instead. Lieutenant D'Hubert, liberated without remark, returned to his regimental duties, and Lieutenant Feraud, his arm still in a sling, rode unquestioned with his squadron to complete his convalescence in the smoke of battlefields and the fresh air of night bivouacs. This bracing treatment suited his case so well that at the first rumour of an armistice being signed he could turn without misgivings to the prosecution of his private warfare.

This time it was to be regular warfare. He dispatched two friends to Lieutenant D'Hubert, whose regiment was stationed only a few miles away. Those friends had asked no questions of their principal. "I must pay him off, that pretty staff officer," he had said grimly, and they went away quite contentedly on their mission. Lieutenant D'Hubert had no difficulty in finding two friends equally discreet and devoted to their principal. "There's a sort of crazy fellow to whom I must give another lesson," he had curtly declared, and they asked for no better reasons.

On these grounds an encounter with duelling swords was arranged one early morning in a convenient field. At the third set-to, Lieutenant D'Hubert found himself lying on his back on the dewy grass, with a hole in his side. A serene sun, rising over a German landscape of meadows and wooded hills, hung on his left. A surgeon--not the flute-player but another--was bending over him, feeling around

the wound.

"Narrow squeak. But it will be nothing," he pronounced.

Lieutenant D'Hubert heard these words with pleasure. One of his seconds--the one who, sitting on the wet grass, was sustaining his head on his lap-said:

"The fortune of war, mon pauvre vieux. What will you have? You had better make it up, like two good fellows. Do!"

"You don't know what you ask," murmured Lieutenant D'Hubert in a feeble voice. "However, if he..."

In another part of the meadow the seconds of Lieutenant Feraud were urging him to go over and shake hands with his adversary.

"You have paid him off now--que diable. It's the proper thing to do. This D'Hubert is a decent fellow."

"I know the decency of these generals' pets," muttered Lieutenant Feraud through his teeth for all answer. The sombre expression of his face discouraged further efforts at reconciliation. The seconds, bowing from a distance, took their men off the field. In the afternoon, Lieutenant D'Hubert, very popular as a good comrade uniting great bravery with a frank and equable temper, had many visitors. It was remarked that Lieutenant Feraud did not, as customary, show himself much abroad to receive the felicitations of his friends. They would not have failed him, because he, too, was liked for the exuberance of his southern nature and the simplicity of his character. In all the places where officers were in the habit of assembling at the end of the day the duel of the morning was talked over from every point of view. Though Lieutenant D'Hubert had got worsted this time, his sword-play was commended. No one could deny that it was very close, very scientific. If he got touched, some said, it was because he wished to spare his adversary. But by many the vigour and dash of Lieutenant Feraud's attack were pronounced irresistible.

The merits of the two officers as combatants were frankly discussed; but their attitude to each other after the duel was criticised lightly and with caution. It was irreconcilable, and that was to be regretted. After all, they knew best what the care of their honour dictated. It was not a matter for their comrades to pry into overmuch. As to the origin of the quarrel, the general impression was that it dated from the time they were holding garrison in Strasburg. Only the musical surgeon shook his head at that. It went much farther back, he hinted discreetly.

"Why! You must know the whole story," cried several voices, eager with curiosity. "You were there! What was it?"

He raised his eyes from his glass deliberately and said:

"Even if I knew ever so well, you can't expect me to tell you, since both the principals choose to say nothing."

He got up and went out, leaving the sense of mystery behind him. He could not stay longer because the witching hour of flute-playing was drawing near. After he had gone a very young officer observed solemnly:

"Obviously! His lips are sealed."

Nobody questioned the high propriety of that remark. Somehow it added to the impressiveness of the affair. Several older officers of both regiments, prompted by nothing but sheer kindness and love of harmony, proposed to form a Court of Honour to which the two officers would leave the task of their reconciliation. Unfortunately, they began by approaching Lieutenant Feraud. The assumption was, that having just scored heavily, he would be found placable and disposed to moderation.

The reasoning was sound enough; nevertheless, the move turned out unfortunate. In that relaxation of moral fibre which is brought about by the ease of soothed vanity, Lieutenant Feraud had condescended in the secret of his heart to review the case, and even to doubt not the justice of his cause, but the absolute sagacity of his conduct. This being so, he was disinclined to talk about it. The suggestion of the regimental wise men put him in a difficult position. He was disgusted, and this disgust by a sort of paradoxical logic reawakened his animosity against Lieutenant D'Hubert. Was he to be pestered with this fellow for ever--the fellow who had an infernal knack of getting round people somehow? On the other hand, it was difficult to refuse point-blank that sort of mediation sanctioned by the code of honour.

Lieutenant Feraud met the difficulty by an attitude of fierce reserve. He twisted his moustache and used vague words. His case was perfectly clear. He was not ashamed to present it, neither was he afraid to defend it personally. He did not see any reason to jump at the suggestion before ascertaining how his adversary was likely to take it.

Later in the day, his exasperation growing upon him, he was heard in a public place saying sardonically "that it would be the very luckiest thing for Lieutenant D'Hubert, since next time of meeting he need not hope to get off with a mere trifle

of three weeks in bed."

This boastful phrase might have been prompted by the most profound Machiavelism. Southern natures often hide under the outward impulsiveness of action and speech a certain amount of astuteness.

Lieutenant Feraud, mistrusting the justice of men, by no means desired a Court of Honour. And these words, according so well with his temperament, had also the merit of serving his turn. Whether meant for that purpose or not, they found their way in less than four-and-twenty hours into Lieutenant D'Hubert's bedroom. In consequence, Lieutenant D'Hubert, sitting propped up with pillows, received the overtures made to him next day by the statement that the affair was of a nature which could not bear discussion.

The pale face of the wounded officer, his weak voice which he had yet to use cautiously, and the courteous dignity of his tone, had a great effect on his hearers. Reported outside, all this did more for deepening the mystery than the vapourings of Lieutenant Feraud. This last was greatly relieved at the issue. He began to enjoy the state of general wonder, and was pleased to add to it by assuming an attitude of moody reserve.

The colonel of Lieutenant D'Hubert's regiment was a gray-haired, weather-beaten warrior who took a simple view of his responsibilities. "I can't"--he thought to himself--"let the best of my subalterns get damaged like this for nothing. I must get to the bottom of this affair privately. He must speak out, if the devil were in it. The colonel should be more than a father to these youngsters." And, indeed, he loved all his men with as much affection as a father of a large family can feel for every individual member of it. If human beings by an oversight of Providence came into the world in the state of civilians, they were born again into a regiment as infants are born into a family, and it was that military birth alone which really counted.

At the sight of Lieutenant D'Hubert standing before him bleached and hollow-eyed, the heart of the old warrior was touched with genuine compassion. All his affection for the regiment--that body of men which he held in his hand to launch forward and draw back, who had given him his rank, ministered to his pride and commanded his thoughts--seemed centred for a moment on the person of the most promising subaltern. He cleared his throat in a threatening manner and frowned terribly.

"You must understand," he began, "that I don't care a rap for the life of a single man in the regiment. You know that I would send the 748 of you men and horses galloping into the pit of perdition with no more compunction than I would kill a

fly."

"Yes, colonel. You would be riding at our head," said Lieutenant D'Hubert with a wan smile.

The colonel, who felt the need of being very diplomatic, fairly roared at this.

"I want you to know, Lieutenant D'Hubert, that I could stand aside and see you all riding to Hades, if need be. I am a man to do even that, if the good of the service and my duty to my country required it from me. But that's unthinkable, so don't you even hint at such a thing."

He glared awfully, but his voice became gentle. "There's some milk yet about that moustache of yours, my boy. You don't know what a man like me is capable of. I would hide behind a haystack if... Don't grin at me, sir. How dare you? If this were not a private conversation, I would... Look here. I am responsible for the proper expenditure of lives under my command for the glory of our country and the honour of the regiment. Do you understand that? Well, then, what the devil do you mean by letting yourself be spitted like this by that fellow of the Seventh Hussars? It's simply disgraceful!"

Lieutenant D'Hubert, who expected another sort of conclusion, felt vexed beyond measure. His shoulders moved slightly. He made no other answer. He could not ignore his responsibility. The colonel softened his glance and lowered his voice.

"It's deplorable," he murmured. And again he changed his tone. "Come," he went on persuasively, but with that note of authority which dwells in the throat of a good leader of men, "this affair must be settled. I desire to be told plainly what it is all about. I demand, as your best friend, to know."

The compelling power of authority, the softening influence of the kindness affected deeply a man just risen from a bed of sickness. Lieutenant D'Hubert's hand, which grasped the knob of a stick, trembled slightly. But his northern temperament, sentimental but cautious and clear-sighted, too, in its idealistic way, predominated over his impulse to make a clean breast of the whole deadly absurdity. According to the precept of transcendental wisdom, he turned his tongue seven times in his mouth before he spoke. He made then only a speech of thanks, nothing more. The colonel listened interested at first, then looked mystified. At last he frowned.

"You hesitate--mille tonerres! Haven't I told you that I will condescend to argue with you--as a friend?"

"Yes, colonel," answered Lieutenant D'Hubert softly, "but I am afraid that after you have heard me out as a friend, you will take action as my superior officer."

The attentive colonel snapped his jaws.

"Well, what of that?" he said frankly. "Is it so damnably disgraceful?"

"It is not," negatived Lieutenant D'Hubert in a faint but resolute voice.

"Of course I shall act for the good of the service--nothing can prevent me doing that. What do you think I want to be told for?"

"I know it is not from idle curiosity," tested Lieutenant D'Hubert. "I know you will act wisely. But what about the good fame of the regiment?"

"It cannot be affected by any youthful folly of a lieutenant," the colonel said severely.

"No, it cannot be; but it can be by evil tongues. It will be said that a lieutenant of the Fourth Hussars, afraid of meeting his adversary, is hiding behind his colonel. And that would be worse than hiding behind a haystack--for the good of the service. I cannot afford to do that, colonel."

"Nobody would dare to say anything of the kind," the colonel, beginning very fiercely, ended on an uncertain note. The bravery of Lieutenant D'Hubert was well known; but the colonel was well aware that the duelling courage, the single combat courage, is, rightly or wrongly, supposed to be courage of a special sort; and it was eminently necessary that an officer of his regiment should possess every kind of courage--and prove it, too. The colonel stuck out his lower lip and looked far away with a peculiar glazed stare. This was the expression of his perplexity, an expression practically unknown to his regiment, for perplexity is a sentiment which is incompatible with the rank of colonel of cavalry. The colonel himself was overcome by the unpleasant novelty of the sensation. As he was not accustomed to think except on professional matters connected with the welfare of men and horses and the proper use thereof on the field of glory, his intellectual efforts degenerated into mere mental repetitions of profane language. "Mille tonerres!... Sacré nom de nom..." he thought.

Lieutenant D'Hubert coughed painfully and went on, in a weary voice:

"There will be plenty of evil tongues to say that I've been cowed. And I am sure you will not expect me to pass that sort of thing over. I may find myself suddenly with a dozen duels on my hands instead of this one affair."

The direct simplicity of this argument came home to the colonel's understanding. He looked at his subordinate fixedly.

"Sit down, lieutenant," he said gruffly. "This is the very devil of a... sit down."

"Mon colonel" D'Hubert began again. "I am not afraid of evil tongues. There's a way of silencing them. But there's my peace of mind too. I wouldn't be able to shake off the notion that I've ruined a brother officer. Whatever action you take it is bound to go further. The inquiry has been dropped--let it rest now. It would have been the end of Feraud."

"Hey? What? Did he behave so badly?"

"Yes, it was pretty bad," muttered Lieutenant D'Hubert. Being still very weak, he felt a disposition to cry.

As the other man did not belong to his own regiment the colonel had no difficulty in believing this. He began to pace up and down the room. He was a good chief and a man capable of discreet sympathy. But he was human in other ways, too, and they were apparent because he was not capable of artifice.

"The very devil, lieutenant!" he blurted out in the innocence of his heart, "is that I have declared my intention to get to the bottom of this affair. And when a colonel says something... you see..."

Lieutenant D'Hubert broke in earnestly.

"Let me entreat you, colonel, to be satisfied with taking my word of honour that I was put into a damnable position where I had no option. I had no choice whatever consistent with my dignity as a man and an officer.... After all, colonel, this fact is the very bottom of this affair. Here you've got it. The rest is a mere detail...."

The colonel stopped short. The reputation of Lieutenant D'Hubert for good sense and good temper weighed in the balance. A cool head, a warm heart, open as the day. Always correct in his behaviour. One had to trust him. The colonel repressed manfully an immense curiosity.

"H'm! You affirm that as a man and an officer.... No option? Eh?"

"As an officer, an officer of the Fourth Hussars, too," repeated Lieutenant D'Hubert, "I had not. And that is the bottom of the affair, colonel."

"Yes. But still I don't see why to one's colonel... A colonel is a father--que diable."

Lieutenant D'Hubert ought not to have been allowed out as yet. He was becoming aware of his physical insufficiency with humiliation and despair--but the morbid obstinacy of an invalid possessed him--and at the same time he felt, with dismay, his eyes filling with water. This trouble seemed too big to handle. A tear fell down the thin, pale cheek of Lieutenant D'Hubert. The colonel turned his back on him hastily. You could have heard a pin drop.

"This is some silly woman story--is it not?"

The chief spun round to seize the truth, which is not a beautiful shape living in a well but a shy bird best caught by stratagem. This was the last move of the colonel's diplomacy, and he saw the truth shining unmistakably in the gesture of Lieutenant D'Hubert, raising his weak arms and his eyes to heaven in supreme protest.

"Not a woman affair--eh?" growled the colonel, staring hard. "I don't ask you who or where. All I want to know is whether there is a woman in it?"

Lieutenant D'Hubert's arms dropped and his weak voice was pathetically broken.

"Nothing of the kind, mon colonel."

"On your honour?" insisted the old warrior.

"On my honour."

"Very well," said the colonel thoughtfully, and bit his lip. The arguments of Lieutenant D'Hubert, helped by his liking for the person, had convinced him. Yet it was highly improper that his intervention, of which he had made no secret, should produce no visible effect. He kept Lieutenant D'Hubert a little longer and dismissed him kindly.

"Take a few days more in bed, lieutenant. What the devil does the surgeon mean by reporting you fit for duty?"

On coming out of the colonel's quarters, Lieutenant D'Hubert said nothing to the friend who was waiting outside to take him home. He said nothing to anybody. Lieutenant D'Hubert made no confidences. But in the evening of that day the colonel, strolling under the elms growing near his quarters in the company of his second in command opened his lips.

"I've got to the bottom of this affair," he remarked.

The lieutenant-colonel, a dry brown chip of a man with short side-whiskers, pricked up his ears without letting a sound of curiosity escape him.

"It's no trifle," added the colonel oracularly. The other waited for a long while before he murmured:

"Indeed, sir!"

"No trifle," repeated the colonel, looking straight before him. "I've, however, forbidden D'Hubert either to send to or receive a challenge from Feraud for the next twelve months."

He had imagined this prohibition to save the prestige a colonel should have. The result of it was to give an official seal to the mystery surrounding this deadly quarrel. Lieutenant D'Hubert repelled by an impassive silence all attempts to worm the truth out of him. Lieutenant Feraud, secretly uneasy at first, regained his assurance as time went on. He disguised his ignorance of the meaning of the imposed truce by little sardonic laughs as though he were amused by what he intended to keep to himself. "But what will you do?" his chums used to ask him. He contented himself by replying, "Qui vivra verra," with a truculent air. And everybody admired his discretion.

Before the end of the truce, Lieutenant D'Hubert got his promotion. It was well earned, but somehow no one seemed to expect the event. When Lieutenant Feraud heard of it at a gathering of officers, he muttered through his teeth, "Is that so?" Unhooking his sword from a peg near the door, he buckled it on carefully and left the company without another word. He walked home with measured steps, struck a light with his flint and steel, and lit his tallow candle. Then, snatching an unlucky glass tumbler off the mantelpiece, he dashed it violently on the floor.

Now that D'Hubert was an officer of a rank superior to his own, there could be no question of a duel. Neither could send nor receive a challenge without rendering himself amenable to a court-martial. It was not to be thought of. Lieutenant Feraud, who for many days now had experienced no real desire to meet Lieutenant D'Hubert arms in hand, chafed at the systematic injustice of fate. "Does he think he will escape me in that way?" he thought indignantly. He saw in it an intrigue, a conspiracy, a cowardly manoeuvre. That colonel knew what he was doing. He had hastened to recommend his pet for promotion. It was outrageous that a man should be able to avoid the consequences of his acts in

such a dark and tortuous manner.

Of a happy-go-lucky disposition, of a temperament more pugnacious than military, Lieutenant Feraud had been content to give and receive blows for sheer love of armed strife and without much thought of advancement. But after this disgusting experience an urgent desire of promotion sprang up in his breast. This fighter by vocation resolved in his mind to seize showy occasions and to court the favourable opinion of his chiefs like a mere worldling. He knew he was as brave as any one and never doubted his personal charm. It would be easy, he thought. Nevertheless, neither the bravery nor the charm seemed to work very swiftly. Lieutenant Feraud's engaging, careless truculence of a "beau sabreur" underwent a change. He began to make bitter allusions to "clever fellows who stick at nothing to get on." The army was full of them, he would say, you had only to look round. And all the time he had in view one person only, his adversary D'Hubert. Once he confided to an appreciative friend: "You see I don't know how to fawn on the right sort of people. It isn't in me."

He did not get his step till a week after Austerlitz. The light cavalry of the Grande Armée had its hands very full of interesting work for a little while. But directly the pressure of professional occupation had been eased by the armistice, Captain Feraud took measures to arrange a meeting without loss of time. "I know his tricks," he observed grimly. "If I don't look sharp he will take care to get himself promoted over the heads of a dozen better men than himself. He's got the knack of that sort of thing." This duel was fought in Silesia. If not fought out to a finish, it was at any rate fought to a standstill. The weapon was the cavalry sabre, and the skill, the science, the vigour, and the determination displayed by the adversaries compelled the outspoken admiration of the beholders. It became the subject of talk on both shores of the Danube, and as far south as the garrisons of Gratz and Laybach. They crossed blades seven times. Both had many slight cuts--mere scratches which bled profusely. Both refused to have the combat stopped, time after time, with what appeared the most deadly animosity. This appearance was caused on the part of Captain D'Hubert by a rational desire to be done once for all with this worry; on the part of Feraud by a tremendous exaltation of his pugnacious instincts and the rage of wounded vanity. At last, dishevelled, their shirts in rags, covered with gore and hardly able to stand, they were carried forcibly off the field by their marvelling and horrified seconds. Later on, besieged by comrades avid of details, these gentlemen declared that they could not have allowed that sort of hacking to go on. Asked whether the quarrel was settled this time, they gave it out as their conviction that it was a difference which could only be settled by one of the parties remaining lifeless on the ground. The sensation spread from army to army corps, and penetrated at last to the smallest detachments of the troops cantoned between the Rhine and the Save. In the cafés in Vienna where the masters of Europe took their ease it was generally estimated

from details to hand that the adversaries would be able to meet again in three weeks' time, on the outside. Something really transcendental in the way of duelling was expected.

These expectations were brought to naught by the necessities of the service which separated the two officers. No official notice had been taken of their quarrel. It was now the property of the army, and not to be meddled with lightly. But the story of the duel, or rather their duelling propensities, must have stood somewhat in the way of their advancement, because they were still captains when they came together again during the war with Prussia. Detached north after Jena with the army commanded by Marshal Bernadotte, Prince of Ponte-Corvo, they entered Lubeck together. It was only after the occupation of that town that Captain Feraud had leisure to consider his future conduct in view of the fact that Captain D'Hubert had been given the position of third aide-de-camp to the marshal. He considered it a great part of a night, and in the morning summoned two sympathetic friends.

"I've been thinking it over calmly," he said, gazing at them with bloodshot, tired eyes. "I see that I must get rid of that intriguing personage. Here he's managed to sneak onto the personal staff of the marshal. It's a direct provocation to me. I can't tolerate a situation in which I am exposed any day to receive an order through him, and God knows what order, too! That sort of thing has happened once before--and that's once too often. He understands this perfectly, never fear. I can't tell you more than this. Now go. You know what it is you have to do."

This encounter took place outside the town of Lubeck, on very open ground selected with special care in deference to the general sense of the cavalry division belonging to the army corps, that this time the two officers should meet on horseback. After all, this duel was a cavalry affair, and to persist in fighting on foot would look like a slight on one's own arm of the service. The seconds, startled by the unusual nature of the suggestion, hastened to refer to their principals. Captain Feraud jumped at it with savage alacrity. For some obscure reason, depending, no doubt, on his psychology, he imagined himself invincible on horseback. All alone within the four walls of his room he rubbed his hands exultingly. "Aha! my staff officer, I've got you now!"

Captain D'Hubert, on his side, after staring hard for a considerable time at his bothered seconds, shrugged his shoulders slightly. This affair had hopelessly and unreasonably complicated his existence for him. One absurdity more or less in the development did not matter. All absurdity was distasteful to him; but, urbane as ever, he produced a faintly ironic smile and said in his calm voice:

"It certainly will do away to some extent with the monotony of the thing."

But, left to himself, he sat down at a table and took his head into his hands. He had not spared himself of late, and the marshal had been working his aides-de-camp particularly hard. The last three weeks of campaigning in horrible weather had affected his health. When overtired he suffered from a stitch in his wounded side, and that uncomfortable sensation always depressed him. "It's that brute's doing," he thought bitterly.

The day before he had received a letter from home, announcing that his only sister was going to be married. He reflected that from the time she was sixteen, when he went away to garrison life in Strasburg, he had had but two short glimpses of her. They had been great friends and confidants; and now they were going to give her away to a man whom he did not know--a very worthy fellow, no doubt, but not half good enough for her. He would never see his old Léonie again. She had a capable little head and plenty of tact; she would know how to manage the fellow, to be sure. He was easy about her happiness, but he felt ousted from the first place in her affection which had been his ever since the girl could speak. And a melancholy regret of the days of his childhood settled upon Captain D'Hubert, third aide-de-camp to the Prince of Ponte-Corvo.

He pushed aside the letter of congratulation he had begun to write, as in duty bound but without pleasure. He took a fresh sheet of paper and wrote: "This is my last will and testament." And, looking at these words, he gave himself up to unpleasant reflection; a presentiment that he would never see the scenes of his childhood overcame Captain D'Hubert. He jumped up, pushing his chair back, yawned leisurely, which demonstrated to himself that he didn't care anything for presentiments, and, throwing himself on the bed, went to sleep. During the night he shivered from time to time without waking up. In the morning he rode out of town between his two seconds, talking of indifferent things and looking right and left with apparent detachment into the heavy morning mists, shrouding the flat green fields bordered by hedges. He leaped a ditch, and saw the forms of many mounted men moving in the low fog. "We are to fight before a gallery," he muttered bitterly.

His seconds were rather concerned at the state of the atmosphere, but presently a pale and sympathetic sun struggled above the vapours. Captain D'Hubert made out in the distance three horsemen riding a little apart; it was his adversary and his seconds. He drew his sabre and assured himself that it was properly fastened to his wrist. And now the seconds, who had been standing in a close group with the heads of their horses together, separated at an easy canter, leaving a large, clear field between him and his adversary. Captain D'Hubert looked at the pale sun, at the dismal landscape, and the imbecility of the impending fight filled him with desolation. From a distant part of the field a stentorian voice shouted

commands at proper intervals: Au pas--Au trot--Chargez! Presentiments of death don't come to a man for nothing he thought at the moment he put spurs to his horse.

And therefore nobody was more surprised than himself when, at the very first set-to, Captain Feraud laid himself open to a cut extending over the forehead, blinding him with blood, and ending the combat almost before it had fairly begun. The surprise of Captain Feraud might have been even greater. Captain D'Hubert, leaving him swearing horribly and reeling in the saddle between his two appalled friends, leaped the ditch again and trotted home with his two seconds, who seemed rather awestruck at the speedy issue of that encounter. In the evening, Captain D'Hubert finished the congratulatory letter on his sister's marriage.

He finished it late. It was a long letter. Captain D'Hubert gave reins to his fancy. He told his sister he would feel rather lonely after this great change in her life. But, he continued, "the day will come for me, too, to get married. In fact, I am thinking already of the time when there will be no one left to fight in Europe, and the epoch of wars will be over. I shall expect then to be within measurable distance of a marshal's baton and you will be an experienced married woman. You shall look out a nice wife for me. I will be moderately bald by then, and a little blasé; I will require a young girl--pretty, of course, and with a large fortune, you know, to help me close my glorious career with the splendour befitting my exalted rank." He ended with the information that he had just given a lesson to a worrying, quarrelsome fellow, who imagined he had a grievance against him. "But if you, in the depth of your province," he continued, "ever hear it said that your brother is of a quarrelsome disposition, don't you believe it on any account. There is no saying what gossip from the army may reach your innocent ears; whatever you hear, you may assure our father that your ever loving brother is not a duellist." Then Captain D'Hubert crumpled up the sheet of paper with the words, "This is my last will and testament," and threw it in the fire with a great laugh at himself. He didn't care a snap for what that lunatic fellow could do. He had suddenly acquired the conviction that this man was utterly powerless to affect his life in any sort of way, except, perhaps, in the way of putting a certain special excitement into the delightful gay intervals between the campaigns.

From this on there were, however, to be no peaceful intervals in the career of Captain D'Hubert. He saw the fields of Eylau and Friedland, marched and countermarched in the snow, the mud, and the dust of Polish plains, picking up distinction and advancement on all the roads of northeastern Europe. Meantime, Captain Feraud, despatched southward with his regiment, made unsatisfactory war in Spain. It was only when the preparations for the Russian campaign began that he was ordered north again. He left the country of mantillas and oranges without regret.

The first signs of a not unbecoming baldness added to the lofty aspect of Colonel D'Hubert's forehead. This feature was no longer white and smooth as in the days of his youth, and the kindly open glance of his blue eyes had grown a little hard, as if from much peering through the smoke of battles. The ebony crop on Colonel Feraud's head, coarse and crinkly like a cap of horsehair, showed many silver threads about the temples. A detestable warfare of ambushes and inglorious surprises had not improved his temper. The beaklike curve of his nose was unpleasantly set off by deep folds on each side of his mouth. The round orbits of his eyes radiated fine wrinkles. More than ever he recalled an irritable and staring fowl--something like a cross between a parrot and an owl. He still manifested an outspoken dislike for "intriguing fellows." He seized every opportunity to state that he did not pick up his rank in the anterooms of marshals.

The unlucky persons, civil or military, who, with an intention of being pleasant, begged Colonel Feraud to tell them how he came by that very apparent scar on the forehead, were astonished to find themselves snubbed in various ways, some of which were simply rude and others mysteriously sardonic. Young officers were warned kindly by their more experienced comrades not to stare openly at the colonel's scar. But, indeed, an officer need have been very young in his profession not to have heard the legendary tale of that duel originating in some mysterious, unforgivable offence.