## XXIII. MILITARY PREPARATIONS ON AN EXTENDED SCALE

Christmas had passed. Dreary winter with dark evenings had given place to more dreary winter with light evenings. Rapid thaws had ended in rain, rain in wind, wind in dust. Showery days had come--the season of pink dawns and white sunsets; and people hoped that the March weather was over.

The chief incident that concerned the household at the mill was that the miller, following the example of all his neighbours, had become a volunteer, and duly appeared twice a week in a red, long-tailed military coat, pipe-clayed breeches, black cloth gaiters, a heel-balled helmet-hat, with a tuft of green wool, and epaulettes of the same colour and material. Bob still remained neutral. Not being able to decide whether to enrol himself as a sea-fencible, a local militia-man, or a volunteer, he simply went on dancing attendance upon Anne. Mrs. Loveday had become awake to the fact that the pair of young people stood in a curious attitude towards each other; but as they were never seen with their heads together, and scarcely ever sat even in the same room, she could not be sure what their movements meant.

Strangely enough (or perhaps naturally enough), since entering the Loveday family herself, she had gradually grown to think less favourably of Anne doing the same thing, and reverted to her original idea of

encouraging Festus; this more particularly because he had of late shown such perseverance in haunting the precincts of the mill, presumably with the intention of lighting upon the young girl. But the weather had kept her mostly indoors.

One afternoon it was raining in torrents. Such leaves as there were on trees at this time of year--those of the laurel and other evergreens--staggered beneath the hard blows of the drops which fell upon them, and afterwards could be seen trickling down the stems beneath and silently entering the ground. The surface of the mill-pond leapt up in a thousand spirts under the same downfall, and clucked like a hen in the rat-holes along the banks as it undulated under the wind. The only dry spot visible from the front windows of the mill-house was the inside of a small shed, on the opposite side of the courtyard. While Mrs. Loveday was noticing the threads of rain descending across its interior shade, Festus Derriman walked up and entered it for shelter, which, owing to the lumber within, it but scantily afforded to a man who would have been a match for one of Frederick William's Patagonians.

It was an excellent opportunity for helping on her scheme. Anne was in the back room, and by asking him in till the rain was over she would bring him face to face with her daughter, whom, as the days went on, she increasingly wished to marry other than a Loveday, now that the romance of her own alliance with the millet had in some respects worn off. She was better provided for than before; she was not unhappy; but the plain fact was that she had married beneath her. She beckoned to Festus

through the window-pane; he instantly complied with her signal, having in fact placed himself there on purpose to be noticed; for he knew that Miss Garland would not be out-of-doors on such a day.

'Good afternoon, Mrs. Loveday,' said Festus on entering. 'There now--if I didn't think that's how it would be!' His voice had suddenly warmed to anger, for he had seen a door close in the back part of the room, a lithe figure having previously slipped through.

Mrs. Loveday turned, observed that Anne was gone, and said, 'What is it?' as if she did not know.

'O, nothing, nothing!' said Festus crossly. 'You know well enough what it is, ma'am; only you make pretence otherwise. But I'll bring her to book yet. You shall drop your haughty airs, my charmer! She little thinks I have kept an account of 'em all.'

'But you must treat her politely, sir,' said Mrs. Loveday, secretly pleased at these signs of uncontrollable affection.

'Don't tell me of politeness or generosity, ma'am! She is more than a match for me. She regularly gets over me. I have passed by this house five-and-fifty times since last Martinmas, and this is all my reward for't!'

'But you will stay till the rain is over, sir?'

'No.  I don't mind rain.  I'm off again.  She's got somebody else in her eye!'  And the yeoman went out, slamming the door.

Meanwhile the slippery object of his hopes had gone along the dark passage, passed the trap which opened on the wheel, and through the door into the mill, where she was met by Bob, who looked up from the flour-shoot inquiringly and said, 'You want me, Miss Garland?'

'O no,' said she.  'I only want to be allowed to stand here a few minutes.'

He looked at her to know if she meant it, and finding that she did, returned to his post.  When the mill had rumbled on a little longer he came back.

'Bob,' she said, when she saw him move, 'remember that you are at work, and have no time to stand close to me.'

He bowed and went to his original post again, Anne watching from the window till Festus should leave.  The mill rumbled on as before, and at last Bob came to her for the third time.  'Now, Bob--' she began.

'On my honour, 'tis only to ask a question.  Will you walk with me to church next Sunday afternoon?'

'Perhaps I will,' she said. But at this moment the yeoman left the house, and Anne, to escape further parley, returned to the dwelling by the way she had come.

Sunday afternoon arrived, and the family was standing at the door waiting for the church bells to begin. From that side of the house they could see southward across a paddock to the rising ground further ahead, where there grew a large elm-tree, beneath whose boughs footpaths crossed in different directions, like meridians at the pole. The tree was old, and in summer the grass beneath it was quite trodden away by the feet of the many trysters and idlers who haunted the spot. The tree formed a conspicuous object in the surrounding landscape.

While they looked, a foot soldier in red uniform and white breeches came along one of the paths, and stopping beneath the elm, took from his pocket a paper, which he proceeded to nail up by the four corners to the trunk. He drew back, looked at it, and went on his way. Bob got his glass from indoors and levelled it at the placard, but after looking for a long time he could make out nothing but a lion and a unicorn at the top. Anne, who was ready for church, moved away from the door, though it was yet early, and showed her intention of going by way of the elm. The paper had been so impressively nailed up that she was curious to read it even at this theological time. Bob took the opportunity of following, and reminded her of her promise.

'Then walk behind me not at all close,' she said.

'Yes,' he replied, immediately dropping behind.

The ludicrous humility of his manner led her to add playfully over her shoulder, 'It serves you right, you know.'

'I deserve anything, but I must take the liberty to say that I hope my behaviour about Matil--, in forgetting you awhile, will not make ye wish to keep me always behind?'

She replied confidentially, 'Why I am so earnest not to be seen with you is that I may appear to people to be independent of you. Knowing what I do of your weaknesses I can do no otherwise. You must be schooled into--'

'O, Anne,' sighed Bob, 'you hit me hard--too hard! If ever I do win you I am sure I shall have fairly earned you.'

'You are not what you once seemed to be,' she returned softly. 'I don't quite like to let myself love you.' The last words were not very audible, and as Bob was behind he caught nothing of them, nor did he see how sentimental she had become all of a sudden. They walked the rest of the way in silence, and coming to the tree read as follows:--

ADDRESS TO ALL RANKS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF ENGLISHMEN.

FRIENDS AND COUNTRYMEN,--The French are now assembling the largest force that ever was prepared to invade this Kingdom, with the professed purpose of effecting our complete Ruin and Destruction. They do not disguise their intentions, as they have often done to other Countries; but openly boast that they will come over in such Numbers as cannot be resisted.

Wherever the French have lately appeared they have spared neither Rich nor Poor, Old nor Young; but like a Destructive Pestilence have laid waste and destroyed every Thing that before was fair and flourishing.

On this occasion no man's service is compelled, but you are invited voluntarily to come forward in defence of everything that is dear to you, by entering your Names on the Lists which are sent to the Tything-man of every Parish, and engaging to act either as Associated Volunteers bearing Arms, as Pioneers and Labourers, or as Drivers of Waggons.

As Associated Volunteers you will be called out only once a week, unless the actual Landing of the Enemy should render your further Services necessary.

As Pioneers or Labourers you will be employed in Breaking up Roads to hinder the Enemy's advance.

Those who have Pickaxes, Spades, Shovels, Bill-hooks, or other Working Implements, are desired to mention them to the Constable or Tything-man of their Parish, in order that they may be entered on the Lists opposite their Homes, to be used if necessary. . . .

It is thought desirable to give you this Explanation, that you may not be ignorant of the Duties to which you may be called. But if the love of true Liberty and honest Fame has not ceased to animate the Hearts of Englishmen, Pay, though necessary, will be the least Part of your Reward. You will find your best Recompense in having done your Duty to your King and Country by driving back or destroying your old and implacable Enemy, envious of your Freedom and Happiness, and therefore seeking to destroy them; in having protected your Wives and Children from Death, or worse than Death, which will follow the Success of such Inveterate Foes.

ROUSE, therefore, and unite as one man in the best of Causes! United we may defy the World to conquer us; but Victory will never belong to those who are slothful and unprepared. {207}

'I must go and join at once!' said Bob.

Anne turned to him, all the playfulness gone from her face. 'I wish we lived in the north of England, Bob, so as to be further away from where he'll land!' she murmured uneasily.

'Where we are would be Paradise to me, if you would only make it so.'

'It is not right to talk so lightly at such a serious time,' she thoughtfully returned, going on towards the church.

On drawing near, they saw through the boughs of a clump of intervening trees, still leafless, but bursting into buds of amber hue, a glittering which seemed to be reflected from points of steel. In a few moments they heard above the tender chiming of the church bells the loud voice of a man giving words of command, at which all the metallic points suddenly shifted like the bristles of a porcupine, and glistened anew.

''Tis the drilling,' said Loveday. 'They drill now between the services, you know, because they can't get the men together so readily in the week. It makes me feel that I ought to be doing more than I am!'

When they had passed round the belt of trees, the company of recruits became visible, consisting of the able-bodied inhabitants of the hamlets thereabout, more or less known to Bob and Anne. They were assembled on the green plot outside the churchyard-gate, dressed in their common clothes, and the sergeant who had been putting them through their drill was the man who nailed up the proclamation. He was now engaged in untying a canvas money-bag, from which he drew forth a handful of shillings, giving one to each man in payment for his attendance.

'Men, I dismissed ye too soon--parade, parade again, I say,' he cried.

'My watch is fast, I find. There's another twenty minutes afore the worship of God commences. Now all of you that ha'n't got firelocks, fall in at the lower end. Eyes right and dress!'

As every man was anxious to see how the rest stood, those at the end of the line pressed forward for that purpose, till the line assumed the form of a bow.

'Look at ye now! Why, you are all a crooking in! Dress, dress!'

They dressed forthwith; but impelled by the same motive they soon resumed their former figure, and so they were despairingly permitted to remain.

'Now, I hope you'll have a little patience,' said the sergeant, as he stood in the centre of the arc, 'and pay strict attention to the word of command, just exactly as I give it out to ye; and if I should go wrong, I shall be much obliged to any friend who'll put me right again, for I have only been in the army three weeks myself, and we are all liable to mistakes.'

'So we be, so we be,' said the line heartily.

''Tention, the whole, then. Poise fawlocks! Very well done!'

'Please, what must we do that haven't got no firelocks!' said the lower end of the line in a helpless voice.

'Now, was ever such a question! Why, you must do nothing at all, but think how you'd poise 'em if you had 'em. You middle men, that are armed with hurdle-sticks and cabbage-stumps just to make-believe, must of course use 'em as if they were the real thing. Now then, cock fawlocks! Present! Fire! (Pretend to, I mean, and the same time throw yer imagination into the field o' battle.) Very good--very good indeed; except that some of you were a little too soon, and the rest a little too late.'

'Please, sergeant, can I fall out, as I am master-player in the choir, and my bass-viol strings won't stand at this time o' year, unless they be screwed up a little before the passon comes in?'

'How can you think of such trifles as churchgoing at such a time as this, when your own native country is on the point of invasion?' said the sergeant sternly. 'And, as you know, the drill ends three minutes afore church begins, and that's the law, and it wants a quarter of an hour yet. Now, at the word Prime, shake the powder (supposing you've got it) into the priming-pan, three last fingers behind the rammer; then shut your pans, drawing your right arm nimble-like towards your body. I ought to have told ye before this, that at Hand your katridge, seize it and bring it with a quick motion to your mouth, bite the top well off, and don't swaller so much of the powder as to make ye hawk and spet instead of attending to your drill. What's that man a-saying of in the rear rank?'

'Please, sir, 'tis Anthony Cripplestraw, wanting to know how he's to bite off his katridge, when he haven't a tooth left in 's head?'

'Man! Why, what's your genius for war? Hold it up to your right-hand man's mouth, to be sure, and let him nip it off for ye. Well, what have you to say, Private Tremlett? Don't ye understand English?'

'Ask yer pardon, sergeant; but what must we infantry of the awkward squad do if Boney comes afore we get our firelocks?'

'Take a pike, like the rest of the incapables. You'll find a store of them ready in the corner of the church tower. Now then--Shoulder--r--r--r--'

'There, they be tinging in the passon!' exclaimed David, Miller Loveday's man, who also formed one of the company, as the bells changed from chiming all three together to a quick beating of one. The whole line drew a breath of relief, threw down their arms, and began running off.

'Well, then, I must dismiss ye,' said the sergeant. 'Come back--come back! Next drill is Tuesday afternoon at four. And, mind, if your masters won't let ye leave work soon enough, tell me, and I'll write a line to Gover'ment! 'Tention! To the right--left wheel, I mean--no, no--right wheel. Mar--r--r--rch!'

Some wheeled to the right and some to the left, and some obliging men,

including Cripplestraw, tried to wheel both ways.

'Stop, stop; try again! 'Cruits and comrades, unfortunately when I'm in a hurry I can never remember my right hand from my left, and never could as a boy. You must excuse me, please. Practice makes perfect, as the saying is; and, much as I've learnt since I 'listed, we always find something new. Now then, right wheel! march! halt! Stand at ease! dismiss! I think that's the order o't, but I'll look in the Gover'ment book afore Tuesday.' {211}

Many of the company who had been drilled preferred to go off and spend their shillings instead of entering the church; but Anne and Captain Bob passed in. Even the interior of the sacred edifice was affected by the agitation of the times. The religion of the country had, in fact, changed from love of God to hatred of Napoleon Buonaparte; and, as if to remind the devout of this alteration, the pikes for the pikemen (all those accepted men who were not otherwise armed) were kept in the church of each parish. There, against the wall, they always stood--a whole sheaf of them, formed of new ash stems, with a spike driven in at one end, the stick being preserved from splitting by a ferule. And there they remained, year after year, in the corner of the aisle, till they were removed and placed under the gallery stairs, and thence ultimately to the belfry, where they grew black, rusty, and worm-eaten, and were gradually stolen and carried off by sextons, parish clerks, whitewashers, window-menders, and other church servants for use at home as rake-stems, benefit-club staves, and pick-handles, in which degraded situations they

may still occasionally be found.

But in their new and shining state they had a terror for Anne, whose eyes were involuntarily drawn towards them as she sat at Bob's side during the service, filling her with bloody visions of their possible use not far from the very spot on which they were now assembled. The sermon, too, was on the subject of patriotism; so that when they came out she began to harp uneasily upon the probability of their all being driven from their homes.

Bob assured her that with the sixty thousand regulars, the militia reserve of a hundred and twenty thousand, and the three hundred thousand volunteers, there was not much to fear.

'But I sometimes have a fear that poor John will be killed,' he continued after a pause. 'He is sure to be among the first that will have to face the invaders, and the trumpeters get picked off.'

'There is the same chance for him as for the others,' said Anne.

'Yes--yes--the same chance, such as it is. You have never liked John since that affair of Matilda Johnson, have you?'

'Why?' she quickly asked.

'Well,' said Bob timidly, 'as it is a ticklish time for him, would it not

be worth while to make up any differences before the crash comes?'

'I have nothing to make up,' said Anne, with some distress. She still fully believed the trumpet-major to have smuggled away Miss Johnson because of his own interest in that lady, which must have made his professions to herself a mere pastime; but that very conduct had in it the curious advantage to herself of setting Bob free.

'Since John has been gone,' continued her companion, 'I have found out more of his meaning, and of what he really had to do with that woman's flight. Did you know that he had anything to do with it?'

'Yes.'

'That he got her to go away?'

She looked at Bob with surprise. He was not exasperated with John, and yet he knew so much as this.

'Yes,' she said; 'what did it mean?'

He did not explain to her then; but the possibility of John's death, which had been newly brought home to him by the military events of the day, determined him to get poor John's character cleared. Reproaching himself for letting her remain so long with a mistaken idea of him, Bob went to his father as soon as they got home, and begged him to get Mrs.

Loveday to tell Anne the true reason of John's objection to Miss Johnson as a sister-in-law.

'She thinks it is because they were old lovers new met, and that he wants to marry her,' he exclaimed to his father in conclusion.

'Then that's the meaning of the split between Miss Nancy and Jack,' said the miller.

'What, were they any more than common friends?' asked Bob uneasily.

'Not on her side, perhaps.'

'Well, we must do it,' replied Bob, painfully conscious that common justice to John might bring them into hazardous rivalry, yet determined to be fair.  'Tell it all to Mrs. Loveday, and get her to tell Anne.'