

#### CHAPTER IV—ST. IVES GETS A BUNDLE OF BANK NOTES

I was surprised one morning, shortly after, to find myself the object of marked consideration by a civilian and a stranger. This was a man of the middle age; he had a face of a mulberry colour, round black eyes, comical tufted eyebrows, and a protuberant forehead; and was dressed in clothes of a Quakerish cut. In spite of his plainness, he had that inscrutable air of a man well-to-do in his affairs. I conceived he had been some while observing me from a distance, for a sparrow sat betwixt us quite unalarmed on the breech of a piece of cannon. So soon as our eyes met, he drew near and addressed me in the French language, which he spoke with a good fluency but an abominable accent.

‘I have the pleasure of addressing Monsieur le Vicomte Anne de K roual de Saint-Yves?’ said he.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘I do not call myself all that; but I have a right to, if I chose. In the meanwhile I call myself plain Champdivers, at your disposal. It was my mother’s name, and good to go soldiering with.’

'I think not quite,' said he; 'for if I remember rightly, your mother also had the particle. Her name was Florimonde de Champdivers.'

'Right again!' said I, 'and I am extremely pleased to meet a gentleman so well informed in my quarterings. Is monsieur Born himself?' This I said with a great air of assumption, partly to conceal the degree of curiosity with which my visitor had inspired me, and in part because it struck me as highly incongruous and comical in my prison garb and on the lips of a private soldier.

He seemed to think so too, for he laughed.

'No, sir,' he returned, speaking this time in English; 'I am not "born," as you call it, and must content myself with dying, of which I am equally susceptible with the best of you. My name is Mr. Romaine—Daniel Romaine—a solicitor of London City, at your service; and, what will perhaps interest you more, I am here at the request of your great-uncle, the Count.'

'What!' I cried, 'does M. de Kéroual de St.-Yves remember the existence of such a person as myself, and will he deign to count kinship with a soldier of Napoleon?'

'You speak English well,' observed my visitor.

'It has been a second language to me from a child,' said I. 'I had an

English nurse; my father spoke English with me; and I was finished by a countryman of yours and a dear friend of mine, a Mr. Vicary.'

A strong expression of interest came into the lawyer's face.

'What!' he cried, 'you knew poor Vicary?'

'For more than a year,' said I; 'and shared his hiding-place for many months.'

'And I was his clerk, and have succeeded him in business,' said he.

'Excellent man! It was on the affairs of M. de Kéroual that he went to that accursed country, from which he was never destined to return. Do you chance to know his end, sir?'

'I am sorry,' said I, 'I do. He perished miserably at the hands of a gang of banditti, such as we call chauffeurs. In a word, he was tortured, and died of it. See,' I added, kicking off one shoe, for I had no stockings; 'I was no more than a child, and see how they had begun to treat myself.'

He looked at the mark of my old burn with a certain shrinking. 'Beastly people!' I heard him mutter to himself.

'The English may say so with a good grace,' I observed politely.

Such speeches were the coin in which I paid my way among this credulous race. Ninety per cent. of our visitors would have accepted the remark as natural in itself and creditable to my powers of judgment, but it appeared my lawyer was more acute.

‘You are not entirely a fool, I perceive,’ said he.

‘No,’ said I; ‘not wholly.’

‘And yet it is well to beware of the ironical mood,’ he continued. ‘It is a dangerous instrument. Your great-uncle has, I believe, practised it very much, until it is now become a problem what he means.’

‘And that brings me back to what you will admit is a most natural inquiry,’ said I. ‘To what do I owe the pleasure of this visit? how did you recognise me? and how did you know I was here?’

Carefully separating his coat skirts, the lawyer took a seat beside me on the edge of the flags.

‘It is rather an odd story,’ says he, ‘and, with your leave, I’ll answer the second question first. It was from a certain resemblance you bear to your cousin, M. le Vicomte.’

‘I trust, sir, that I resemble him advantageously?’ said I.

'I hasten to reassure you,' was the reply: 'you do. To my eyes, M. Alain de St.-Yves has scarce a pleasing exterior. And yet, when I knew you were here, and was actually looking for you—why, the likeness helped. As for how I came to know your whereabouts, by an odd enough chance, it is again M. Alain we have to thank. I should tell you, he has for some time made it his business to keep M. de Kéroual informed of your career; with what purpose I leave you to judge. When he first brought the news of your—that you were serving Buonaparte, it seemed it might be the death of the old gentleman, so hot was his resentment. But from one thing to another, matters have a little changed. Or I should rather say, not a little. We learned you were under orders for the Peninsula, to fight the English; then that you had been commissioned for a piece of bravery, and were again reduced to the ranks. And from one thing to another (as I say), M. de Kéroual became used to the idea that you were his kinsman and yet served with Buonaparte, and filled instead with wonder that he should have another kinsman who was so remarkably well informed of events in France. And it now became a very disagreeable question, whether the young gentleman was not a spy? In short, sir, in seeking to disserve you, he had accumulated against himself a load of suspicions.'

My visitor now paused, took snuff, and looked at me with an air of benevolence.

'Good God, sir!' says I, 'this is a curious story.'

'You will say so before I have done,' said he. 'For there have two

events followed. The first of these was an encounter of M. de Kéroual and M. de Mauseant.’

‘I know the man to my cost,’ said I: ‘it was through him I lost my commission.’

‘Do you tell me so?’ he cried. ‘Why, here is news!’

‘Oh, I cannot complain!’ said I. ‘I was in the wrong. I did it with my eyes open. If a man gets a prisoner to guard and lets him go, the least he can expect is to be degraded.’

‘You will be paid for it,’ said he. ‘You did well for yourself and better for your king.’

‘If I had thought I was injuring my emperor,’ said I, ‘I would have let M. de Mauseant burn in hell ere I had helped him, and be sure of that! I saw in him only a private person in a difficulty: I let him go in private charity; not even to profit myself will I suffer it to be misunderstood.’

‘Well, well,’ said the lawyer, ‘no matter now. This is a foolish warmth—a very misplaced enthusiasm, believe me! The point of the story is that M. de Mauseant spoke of you with gratitude, and drew your character in such a manner as greatly to affect your uncle’s views. Hard upon the back of which, in came your humble servant, and laid before him the direct proof of what we had been so long suspecting. There was no

dubiety permitted. M. Alain's expensive way of life, his clothes and mistresses, his dicing and racehorses, were all explained: he was in the pay of Buonaparte, a hired spy, and a man that held the strings of what I can only call a convulsion of extremely fishy enterprises. To do M. de Kéroual justice, he took it in the best way imaginable, destroyed the evidences of the one great-nephew's disgrace—and transferred his interest wholly to the other.'

'What am I to understand by that?' said I.

'I will tell you,' says he. 'There is a remarkable inconsistency in human nature which gentlemen of my cloth have a great deal of occasion to observe. Selfish persons can live without chick or child, they can live without all mankind except perhaps the barber and the apothecary; but when it comes to dying, they seem physically unable to die without an heir. You can apply this principle for yourself. Viscount Alain, though he scarce guesses it, is no longer in the field. Remains, Viscount Anne.'

'I see,' said I, 'you give a very unfavourable impression of my uncle, the Count.'

'I had not meant it,' said he. 'He has led a loose life—sadly loose—but he is a man it is impossible to know and not to admire; his courtesy is exquisite.'

‘And so you think there is actually a chance for me?’ I asked.

‘Understand,’ said he: ‘in saying as much as I have done, I travel quite beyond my brief. I have been clothed with no capacity to talk of wills, or heritages, or your cousin. I was sent here to make but the one communication: that M. de K roual desires to meet his great-nephew.’

‘Well,’ said I, looking about me on the battlements by which we sat surrounded, ‘this is a case in which Mahomet must certainly come to the mountain.’

‘Pardon me,’ said Mr. Romaine; ‘you know already your uncle is an aged man; but I have not yet told you that he is quite broken up, and his death shortly looked for. No, no, there is no doubt about it—it is the mountain that must come to Mahomet.’

‘From an Englishman, the remark is certainly significant,’ said I; ‘but you are of course, and by trade, a keeper of men’s secrets, and I see you keep that of Cousin Alain, which is not the mark of a truculent patriotism, to say the least.’

‘I am first of all the lawyer of your family!’ says he.

‘That being so,’ said I, ‘I can perhaps stretch a point myself. This rock is very high, and it is very steep; a man might come by a devil of a fall from almost any part of it, and yet I believe I have a pair of wings



that might carry me just so far as to the bottom. Once at the bottom I am helpless.'

'And perhaps it is just then that I could step in,' returned the lawyer.

'Suppose by some contingency, at which I make no guess, and on which I offer no opinion—'

But here I interrupted him. 'One word ere you go further. I am under no parole,' said I.

'I understood so much,' he replied, 'although some of you French gentry find their word sit lightly on them.'

'Sir, I am not one of those,' said I.

'To do you plain justice, I do not think you one,' said he. 'Suppose yourself, then, set free and at the bottom of the rock,' he continued, 'although I may not be able to do much, I believe I can do something to help you on your road. In the first place I would carry this, whether in an inside pocket or my shoe.' And he passed me a bundle of bank notes.

'No harm in that,' said I, at once concealing them.

'In the second place,' he resumed, 'it is a great way from here to where your uncle lives—Amersham Place, not far from Dunstable; you have a great part of Britain to get through; and for the first stages, I must leave

you to your own luck and ingenuity. I have no acquaintance here in Scotland, or at least' (with a grimace) 'no dishonest ones. But further to the south, about Wakefield, I am told there is a gentleman called Burchell Fenn, who is not so particular as some others, and might be willing to give you a cast forward. In fact, sir, I believe it's the man's trade: a piece of knowledge that burns my mouth. But that is what you get by meddling with rogues; and perhaps the biggest rogue now extant, M. de Saint-Yves, is your cousin, M. Alain.'

'If this be a man of my cousin's,' I observed, 'I am perhaps better to keep clear of him?'

'It was through some paper of your cousin's that we came across his trail,' replied the lawyer. 'But I am inclined to think, so far as anything is safe in such a nasty business, you might apply to the man Fenn. You might even, I think, use the Viscount's name; and the little trick of family resemblance might come in. How, for instance, if you were to call yourself his brother?'

'It might be done,' said I. 'But look here a moment? You propose to me a very difficult game: I have apparently a devil of an opponent in my cousin; and, being a prisoner of war, I can scarcely be said to hold good cards. For what stakes, then, am I playing?'

'They are very large,' said he. 'Your great-uncle is immensely rich—immensely rich. He was wise in time; he smelt the revolution long

before; sold all that he could, and had all that was movable transported to England through my firm. There are considerable estates in England; Amersham Place itself is very fine; and he has much money, wisely invested. He lives, indeed, like a prince. And of what use is it to him? He has lost all that was worth living for—his family, his country; he has seen his king and queen murdered; he has seen all these miseries and infamies,’ pursued the lawyer, with a rising inflection and a heightening colour; and then broke suddenly off,—‘In short, sir, he has seen all the advantages of that government for which his nephew carries arms, and he has the misfortune not to like them.’

‘You speak with a bitterness that I suppose I must excuse,’ said I; ‘yet which of us has the more reason to be bitter? This man, my uncle, M. de Kéroual, fled. My parents, who were less wise perhaps, remained. In the beginning, they were even republicans; to the end they could not be persuaded to despair of the people. It was a glorious folly, for which, as a son, I reverence them. First one and then the other perished. If I have any mark of a gentleman, all who taught me died upon the scaffold, and my last school of manners was the prison of the Abbaye. Do you think you can teach bitterness to a man with a history like mine?’

‘I have no wish to try,’ said he. ‘And yet there is one point I cannot understand: I cannot understand that one of your blood and experience should serve the Corsican. I cannot understand it: it seems as though everything generous in you must rise against that—domination.’

‘And perhaps,’ I retorted, ‘had your childhood passed among wolves, you would have been overjoyed yourself to see the Corsican Shepherd.’

‘Well, well,’ replied Mr. Romaine, ‘it may be. There are things that do not bear discussion.’

And with a wave of his hand he disappeared abruptly down a flight of steps and under the shadow of a ponderous arch.