



S. R. CROCKETT

***A TATTER
OF SCARLET:
ADVENTUROUS
EPISODES
OF THE COMMUNE
IN THE MIDI
1871***

S. R. Crockett

A Tatter of Scarlet: Adventurous Episodes of the Commune in the Midi 1871

EAN 8596547329794

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

[A TATTER OF SCARLET](#)

[CHAPTER I](#)

[CHAPTER II](#)

[CHAPTER III](#)

[CHAPTER IV](#)

[CHAPTER V](#)

[CHAPTER VI](#)

[CHAPTER VII](#)

[CHAPTER VIII](#)

[CHAPTER IX](#)

[CHAPTER X](#)

[CHAPTER XI](#)

[CHAPTER XII](#)

[CHAPTER XIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIV](#)

[CHAPTER XV](#)

[CHAPTER XVI](#)

[CHAPTER XVII](#)

[CHAPTER XVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XIX](#)

[CHAPTER XX](#)

[CHAPTER XXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIV](#)

[CHAPTER XXV](#)

[CHAPTER XXVI](#)

[CHAPTER XXVII](#)

[CHAPTER XXVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXIX](#)

[CHAPTER XXX](#)

[CHAPTER XXXI](#)

[CHAPTER XXXII](#)

[CHAPTER XXXIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXXIV](#)

[CHAPTER XXXV](#)

[CHAPTER XXXVI](#)

[CHAPTER XXXVII](#)

[CHAPTER XXXVIII](#)

[CHAPTER XXXIX](#)

[CHAPTER XL](#)

A TATTER OF SCARLET

[Table of Contents](#)

CHAPTER I

Table of Contents

HOW THE TRICOLOUR CAME DOWN

Deventer and I leaned on the parapet and watched the curious things which were happening in Aramon across the river. We were the biggest boys in the school and kept even the Seniors in awe, being "Les Anglais" to them—and so familiar with the "boxe"—though Deventer was an Irishman, and I, Angus Cawdor, a Scot of the Scots.

We had explained the difference to them many times by arguments which may have temporarily persuaded some, but without in the least affecting the fixed French notion that all English-speaking people are of English race.

Behind us circulated the usual menagerie-promenade of the "Grands," gabbling and whispering tremendous secrets in files of two and three.

Hugh Deventer was a great hulk of a fellow who would take half a dozen French Seniors and rub their heads together if I told him, laughing loudly at their protestations as to loss of honour. He had been challenged several times to fight duels with small swords, but the Frenchmen had given that up now. For Deventer spat on his palms and pursued the seconds who came with the challenge round and round the playground till he caught and smacked them. Whereat he laughed again. His father was chief of the Small Arms Factory, which of late years had been added to the

arsenal works of New Aramon opposite to us on the left bank of the Rhône.

My own father was a clergyman, who for the sake of his health had retired to the dry sunny Rhône valley, and had settled in a green and white villa at Aramon because of the famous *lycée* which was perched up on the heights of Aramon le Vieux.

There was not much to distinguish Aramon the Old from Aramon the New, that is, from a distance. Both glowed out startlingly white and delicately creamy between the burnished river and the flawless sapphire of the Provençal sky. It was still winter time by the calendar, but the sun beat on our bowed shoulders as we bent over the solid masonry of the breastwork, and the stones were hotter than in English dog-days as we plucked away our hands from it.

Deventer and I looked across at the greater New Aramon where his father lived. It was the Aramon of shops and hotels and factories, while Aramon le Vieux, over which our great *lycée* throned it like a glorified barracks, was a place of crumbling walls, ancient arcaded streets, twelfth-century palaces let as tenements, and all the interesting *débris* of a historical city on the verges of Languedoc.

Our French *lycéens* were too used to all this beauty and antiquity to care anything about it, but we English did. We were left pretty much to ourselves on our rare days of liberty, and as the professors, and especially the *proviseur*, knew that we were to be trusted, we were allowed to poke about the old Languedocian outpost much as we pleased.

It was the month of January, 1871. France was invaded, beaten, but not conquered; but here in the far South,

though tongues wagged fiercely, in his heart the good bourgeois was glad to be out of it all.

At any rate, the *lycée* was carried on just as usual. Punishments were dealt out and tasks exacted. *Pions* watched constantly over our unstable morals, and occasionally reported misdemeanours of a milder kind, not daring to make their position worse by revealing anything that really mattered.

But, generally speaking, Aramon le Vieux dreamed away the hours, blinking in the sunshine. The war did not touch it save in the fierce clatter of *café* dispute. Only in the forts that rose about the arsenal of the newer city opposite to us a feeble guard of artillery and linesmen lingered as a protection for the Small Arms Factory.

For the new Paris Government was still far from stable, and some feared a renewal of the White Terror of 1815, and others the Red of the Commune of 1848. The workmen of the arsenal, hastily gathered from all quarters, were mostly sealed to the "Internationale," but it was supposed that the field-pieces in Fort St. André could easily account for any number of these hot-heads.

Besides Hugh Deventer and I there were several other English boys, but they were still screeching like seagulls somewhere in the Lower School and so did not count, except when an anxious mamma besought us with tears in her voice to look after her darling, abandoned all day to his fate among these horrid French.

To "look after" them Deventer and I could not do, but we gathered them into a sort of fives team, and organised a poor feckless game in the windowless angle of the refectory.

We also got hockey sticks and bastinadoed their legs for their souls' good to the great marvel of the natives. Deventer had even been responsible for a trial of lacrosse, but good missionaries though we were, we made no French converts.

The Juniors squealed like driven piglings when the ball came their way, while the Seniors preferred walking up and down their paved cattle-pen, interminably talking with linked arms and lips close to the ear of a chosen friend.

Always one or two read as they walked alone, memorising fiercely against next Saturday's examination.

The pariah *pion* or outcast usher, a most unhappy out-at-elbows youth, was expected to keep us all under his eye, but we saw to it early that that eye passed leniently over Deventer and myself. Otherwise he counted for nothing.

The War—the War—nothing but talk of the War came to our ears from the murmuring throng behind us. How "France has been betrayed." "How the new armies of the Third Republic would liberate Paris and sweep the Prussians back to Berlin. From every side brave patriots were even now closing in upon the beleaguered city. Ha, then the spiked helmets would see!"

Still, a few facts grew more clear to us. At Lyons and Grenoble, Bourbaki was organising the army of the South-East. There came a sound from nowhere in particular that this army was to be joined and led by Garibaldi himself with thirty thousand of his red jackets from Italy.

Deventer and I were immensely excited. We made plans for immediate invasion. We would fight for France and wear a red cardigan in the Foreign Legion. But the *Lycée St. André*

was well guarded, and so far no one had succeeded in escaping. I do not know that they tried very hard. They were French lads and brave—as many of them showed afterwards—but they were of the Midi, and even then the Midi was proverbially hard to budge. Not as in the North and East had the iron of the invasion entered the soul.

The parapet upon which we leaned was of very ancient masonry, solid blocks laid clean and Cyclopean with very little visible cement. It had formed part of the defences of an ancient castle, long since overwhelmed by the college buildings, the materials of which had mostly been quarried from its imposing mass.

Beneath us ran the Rhône in a fine, broad, half-mile-wide sweep, five or six miles an hour, yet save for the heaped hillocks of water about the bridge piers, and the swirl where the far bank curved over, as smooth as a mirror.

Hugh Deventer and I had been talking of the great '61 campaign of Garibaldi in Sicily and through Naples—a thousand red-shirts and a kingdom in the dust! Ah, the glory of that time!

But as we leaned and looked we fell silent. We saw Aramon the New opposite to us, as it were at our feet, across only that span of water. The factories were curiously silent, and from one fort after another darted the white spurt of smoke which meant artillery practice.

We listened, knowing that in a little we should hear the report.

Boom! Boom! Rattle-rattle-chirr!

Fighting—they were fighting in Aramon! Deventer's father would be in the thick of it. We looked and longed, but

the way was closed. What could it be?

Deventer knew that there were continually troubles between the operatives and the "masters," or rather the representatives of the masters of whom his father was the chief.

The great *Compagnie d'Armes de Guerre Aramoise* was not distinguished for generosity. The men were well lodged but poorly paid. In these war times they had been overdriven. So many hundreds of rifles to turn out daily—field artillery, too, and a new department to be set up for the manufacture of mitrailleuses.

Outside, Dennis Deventer said little about the politics of the works, nothing at all to his son Hugh.

We of the *lycée* knew that France was already fairly evenly divided between true Republicans and those others who looked upon Gambetta's republic as a step to a monarchy or even the restoration of the Napoleons. The sons of functionaries mostly held the latter opinion. The scions of the aristocratic families of the neighbourhood, the old Whites of the Midi, prayed for the Bourbon flag and the coming of Henry V to his own again.

So when we heard the ripple of musketry fire and the sullen boom of the artillery, Deventer and I supposed that a mutiny of sorts had broken out at the works, or that news had come from Paris of some sudden change of government.

We were not far from the mark. There had been news from Paris and a mutiny had broken out. At any rate, they were fighting over in Aramon, and we must find out what it was all about.

For the moment this was impossible for us. The cliff was too sheer on the side of our recreation ground. There were over many eyes upon us. We must wait for the night, and in the meantime Deventer could only sniff the battle from afar, and hold in the desire to set off and help his father.

"The Dad doesn't want me," he said. "Of course, I know that. He would most likely tan me well for breaking bounds, but I can't bear being cooped up here doing silly mathematics when over yonder——But listen to them!"

A patter of what might have been heavy rain on a tin roof came faintly to our ears. A little white cloud hung over the statue in the market square, and presently flung down devilish fingers earthward. We did not then know the signs of the explosion of shrapnel.

By this time the school was crowding about us, as curious as ourselves. The bell clanged for classes to resume, but no one moved. The *pion* screamed impotently in the rear. None took any notice, and the windows above were black with the gowns of the professors.

Some thought that the noise was only the letting off of blasts in the Pierre de Montagne quarries, but it was pointed out that such explosions took place only at eight, one, and four, the hours when the men would be out of the quarries at their meals. Besides, the crackle of small fire was unaccounted for, and each moment it became more lively.

Practice at the Chassepot factories? Very likely—but at human targets.

Finally the college authorities caused discipline to prevail, and Deventer and I watched alone by the parapet. We had

both passed our *bachot*, and were an honour to the college. So the strictness of rule and line was relaxed in our case.

Our hearts beat, and in the instancy of our watch we would not have turned our heads if the *provisieur* himself had been at our side.

Presently we could see soldiers marching, the flash of bayonets, and groups of a dozen, as if pushed beyond their patience, turning and firing with rapid irregularity. All this in flashes of vision, mostly at the bridge-end, or at the intersection of two streets. Through the northern gate a kind of uncertain retreat began to dribble—the red breeches of the linesmen, the canter of the artillery horses attacking the hill, with stragglers here and there looking about for their regiments.

Neither Deventer nor I knew enough to explain these things.

"There are no Germans nearer than Toul or Besançon," he said, with a puzzled anxiety.

The field guns answered him smartly. From all the houses about the northern gate a storm of rifle fire broke out. The soldiers on foot hastened their retreat. The artillerymen, better led or of firmer courage, faced about, and with one volley pitted the façades of the houses from which the attack had come. They withdrew regularly, covering the retreat of the infantry, and spat out their little devils' claws of shrapnel over every group which showed itself outside the wall. Slowly the soldiers passed out of sight. The artillery bucketed over the knolls of the Montagne of Aramon among the evergreen odoriferous plants and the faint traces of the last snow wreaths.

There was nothing left for us to see now except the town of Aramon, its green and white houses sleeping in the sun, the tall chimney of the Small Arms Factory, now smokeless—and the broad Rhône sweeping grave and placid between them and us.

Nevertheless we waited alone on the recreation ground, our heads a little dizzy. The swooning hum of the classrooms awoke behind us, but we heeded not at all.

We saw the tricolour of the Republic come down with a run from the tall flagstaff on Fort St. André, and presently, irregularly tugged, rising a few feet at a time, a red flag fluttered out, probably an improvised table-cover or bedspread. It flapped out bravely in the brisk breeze off the water.

We had had our first glimpse of "The Tatter of Scarlet."

CHAPTER II

[Table of Contents](#)

KITH AND KIN

I don't think I troubled much about my father when I resolved to run away from the *Lycée* St. André. He had, as I thought, never troubled much about me.

Afterwards I found that I had been mistaken, but perhaps not more than most. For it is the rarest thing in the world to find a son entering upon life, able to do justice to his father's ideas and motives.

Yet it was for my sake that he had given up the society of his fellow savants and had exiled himself to Aramon le Vieux, with only his books for company. At Nice, Mentone, or

Cap Martin, the author of "The History and Growth of Italian Art" could have lived a great part of the year among kindred spirits, but because of me and St. André, he had shut himself up with his books and collections in the Villa Gobelet on the piney southern slopes of the long convent ridge, the summit of which was crowned by the immense acreage of rambling white masonry which constituted our *lycée*.

My father, Gordon Cawdor, mixed freely enough with the engineers in New Aramon. But I knew very well that he endured rather than enjoyed their society.

They talked of springs and hoppers, of pauls and recoil tampons, and my father sat with his gentle wise head nodding as if taking in each point. But he never spoke to them of his own work, and, excepting Deventer's father, there was not one who knew more about Italian art than a dim memory of a bad lithograph of Da Vinci's "Last Supper" could recall to him.

Dennis Deventer, a tall dark grey man with the most mobile eyebrows I ever saw in my life, lives much in my early memories of my father's house. He seems now to have been always there, though of course he could really have come but seldom—a massive, slow-moving, swiftly scrutinising man, who bent shaggy eyebrows upon his son and myself, and in whose presence it was not good to make the easily forged excuses which served so well for my scholarly father.

Hugh said that it was because he listened all day to excuses and explanations over at the Arms Factory, without believing any one of them.

He had succeeded a manager who had been driven from Aramon because he was afraid of his men. But now the men, though they hated him as the representative of the Company, freely acknowledged his courage and austere justice.

His house was the largest in New Aramon, and he had within it three daughters all verging on, or just overlapping early womanhood, besides a comfortable wife who purred her way contented and motherly through all domestic storms. She alone could tame her husband's furies. They sank before her eye, her husband changing obviously to all men's sight, his factory oaths silenced, his bullying temper visibly crumbling, and the man growing sweet and wholesome as newly ground meal.

These were the two houses best known to me as a boy, and indeed to the edge of manhood. Judge ye which I liked the best?

My father was a beautifully profiled Scottish minister of the old school, whom an unexpected fortune had enabled to follow his impulses in the matter of work. He had long ago retired from his parish, indeed before I could remember, and as I learned from his steadfast retainer, old Saunders McKie, immediately after the death of my mother.

"Irongray Parish was no more for him, oh no," Saunders would say, sententiously pausing in the polishing of my father's silver shoe-buckles. "He laid down his wark as if he had been stricken. He never preached again, and his pulpit was silent for three whole weeks after her death. Assistants and siccan cattle werena sae common to come at then as now—when ye send a telegram in the morning, and the

laddie is down on the six train wi' his baggie. So the elders juist read a portion, and sent down to the Cameronian meeting-house for a man fit to put up a prayer. We were Established, ye see, so the like was no to be expected o' *us!*

"Eh, a broken man was your farther in thae days. He would wander from room to room, tak' down a book here, look at it a while and then put it up again with a muttered 'Tush' as if he could make nothing of it. I doubt if he so much as saw the print line by line, but all troubled-like, as one might through a green whorl of skylight glass. Then he would dawner into the room where you were lying, or maybe being fed, and at sight o' ye, the state that man would be in!

"He could not get out o' the nursery quick enough, yet for all that he would be back within the hour."

Saunders was a great standby. His humour jumped with mine far more nearly than my father's. This, too, in spite of the fact that I rarely saw him without calling down the vials of his wrath. My father seldom reprov'd me, never in anger, but Saunders, with the care of my young soul heavy on his Calvinistic conscience, laboured faithfully with me in season and out of season.

One good he did me. He kept me from forgetting my Scottish tongue, and there was never a day that he did not supply me with some phrase sappy with mother wit and drowned in Scotland.

"Aängus," he would say, "I kenna wha it is ye favour—nane o' your faither's folk at any rate—all chestnut-brown and quick as an eel. No wonder ye can tie knots in yoursel' at the parallel bars that were siccan a trouble to set up for

ye to caper on, and your e'en like sloes after the first frosts. It's a gipsy ye are and no real Cawdor of all. Though they do say that the Cawdors have gipsy blood on the distaff side. At ony rate ye will never be the 'sponsible sober man your faither is."

In spite of all this I stood high in the good graces of Saunders, and he would sometimes ask my father for the additional pocket-money which I dared not hint at myself. Saunders often wandered back into reminiscence of the time when he had been a jobbing stonemason on the Cromarty Firth, a companion of Hugh Miller's, and "the very deevil for raking the country."

He had tramped scores of miles with Hugh Miller only for the sake of hearing him talk, yet I gathered that he had not believed a single word he had been told about the great fishes and curious monsters that once swam in the lakes of the Old Red Sandstone.

"But I never telled him sae," he would conclude; "oh, no, Saunders kenned better. Hugh Miller was no doubt a wonderful genius, but at that time he was a man easily angered, and when roused, violent of his hands."

So now I have sketched the school, and the several domestic surroundings which we proposed to leave behind us. I do not think that we thought much about these. I know that I did not, and I don't believe that Deventer did either—not, that is, till we saw the soldiers retreating from the barracks and forts of Aramon, and that little oblong blot of red in the sky which meant insurrection, and God only knew what of terror and destruction, fluttering in the brisk mistral

wind from the tower on which we had so long seen the tricolour.

At that time we had only the vaguest idea of what the Commune was, and none whatsoever of the new ideas of justice and equality which underlay that cumbrously ill-managed business.

CHAPTER III

[Table of Contents](#)

THE LAUNDRY DOOR

After a while Deventer and I went back to our joint study, where we essayed to do some work. But mostly we spoke apart, with lips that hardly moved, of our plans and all that lay in liberty-land beyond the walls. Deventer would go nowhere but to his father's house, and though I meant to end up with the red blouse of Garibaldi on my chest, I did not see how I could fail him at such a time.

We had to wait till night, and the time was almost unendurably long. The lines in our text-books which our eyes followed did not bite upon our minds. We were thinking so hard of other things that philosophies slid aside impotent and discomfited.

We began immediately to plan our escape, or at least I planned and Deventer, his great shaggy head on his hands and his eyes tight shut to concentrate thought, gave himself to the task of spotting the weak points.

At the bottom of the junior promenade was a door which opened upon the river, and on the opposite side dwelt a

man who owned a skiff. The elders of the upper school used to employ this man, Jules Rameau by name, to ferry them across as often as they had enough money for a secret supper at a cabaret in some shy street. But some ill-paid *pion* must be bribed to allow the key to be "lifted" from the inside of his door. He must also take care to be in the deepest of sleep when it was returned. But this would not do for us. We were not coming back at all, and we could not allow any wretched usher to be sent about his business on our account.

In our leisure time we had studied the whole of the ground plan of St. André. The school buildings occupied an enormous amount of space, far more than was needed for educational purposes. By sticking to it we made some astonishing discoveries. For instance, after passing through the kitchen, by descending a flight of steps which led to an unoccupied wing, where all sorts of educational rubbish had been accumulated—globes, wall-maps, ancient copy-books with headlines set by hand, and a good bust of the first Napoleon—we reached a clean-smelling, brightly lighted range of offices all set out with tubs, soap, boiling vats, and blue stains which ran over smooth boards.

We had come upon the laundry of the college. On pegs, which ran all round, overalls were hung. There was even a shawl here and there, or a bonnet or two, as it were, flaunting their sex in this temple of the masculine virtues.

Not Crusoe on his island was more astonished when he came on the footprint. For it was not known to any of us, not even to the *pions*, that a single feminine foot profaned any part of the *lycée*.

But, whatever our surprise, it did not prevent us from locking the door and extracting the key of one of the range of exits which led out from the fixed washtubs upon the narrow drying ground, a terrace wholly invisible and unsuspected from our quarters on the opposite waterfront of the building.

Of course, Deventer and I said nothing about our discovery. We did not want the whole upper school playing leap-frog through the kitchens, or telling lies as to their conquests among the laundry maids.

It was possible that the lock of the door might be changed immediately, but we considered it more likely that the forewoman or caretaker in charge would say nothing at all about the loss, and trust to the key turning up.

We thought the whole matter well over, and considered it probable that a gate in the wall would be left permanently open to facilitate the comings and goings of the workwomen in the early morning. Such an opening in the wall must lead immediately out upon the main road that wound circuitously up the hill, and by which all stores and provisions were brought to the porter's lodge.

Then we made ready for the trip, laying out our most comfortable and inconspicuous town-going suits to take the place of the brass-buttoned *lycée* uniform.

With our door carefully locked, we raised a piece of the skirting board of our study and examined our store of arms, a couple of revolvers procured by Deventer in some vague inexplicable way at the works, three packets of ammunition apiece, and a couple of "surins," or long Apache knives—the use of which we had learned from the sous-préfet's son, a

youth precondemned to the gallows, who before expulsion had sojourned an eventful and long-remembered three months at St. André.

We profited by his instructions as to guards and undercuts by practising with models whittled in wood. This we were enabled to do in open playground by the simple expedient of calling the exercise *legerdemain*.

Except what we could carry in our pockets, and the warlike accoutrement mentioned above, we left the whole of our property at the college. At the last minute Deventer packed away a Globe Shakespeare, and I found room for a limp Bagster Bible of small size, which my father had given me.

The clatter of the bedward-driven flocks began to tramp past our study door. The hum of lesson preparation in the schoolrooms ceased. We carefully set our house in order, for it was time for our evening visit from Professor Renard. But he was called "Renard by Name and Renard by Nature" among the Juniors whose small deceits he had the knack of seeing through, even before the explanation was well under way. He was a Jesuit of the newer school, of an educated candour, which seemed natural to our young eyes, and a ready sympathy for our misdemeanours, which made him the most popular professor in the *lycée* of St. André.

He always tapped at our door before entering. He never listened nor made use of the information of the common school spy. These things counted for much.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, as he came in and sat down in our one arm-chair, "you were too long on the terrace to-day to have a good report of your studies!"

We convinced him to the contrary. For we had always gone on the principle that who does his work early and well has his way made plain for him, and in him a thousand things are overlooked for which a "slacker" would get himself jumped upon.

After he had examined our exercises and approved of them, he looked up at us suddenly from under his overhanging brows.

"You understood what the disturbance was about over there?" he demanded.

"I knew," said Deventer, before I could stop him, "that if my father was left behind with his factories to look after, he would find himself mightily short-handed. He would have only the English staff to support him."

"Ah," said Professor Renard, "you look at it from a personal point of view, as is natural. Your father——"

"I have also a mother and sisters over there——"

"I think I can promise that they will be safe whatever happens to your father. And you can trust to my judgment. By custom and training my class, the clergy of France, parochial and regular, are royalists. The fight over yonder was only tiger eating leopard. The reds of Gambetta's hue were chased out by the deeper scarlet of the Commune. Did you see that flag of theirs to-night, just before sunset? It glowed with the true hell-fire light."

I had been in the habit of arguing in favour of the working men who were to constitute the brain and brawn of the Commune, but to-night I said nothing. Renard did not notice my silence, however, but continued his diatribe.

"We have had Napoleons of victory and Napoleons of disaster—republics of guillotine and republics of veiled Cæsarism. And now we have a third which is a house divided against itself. Listen well, young men—the Bible speaks the truth—it cannot stand. Even now the time for its fall is almost come. The little financier Thiers will pay off the Germans from the chimney-corner hoards of the peasants. Oh, make no mistake, lads, we are beaten as a nation, because we have not obeyed God and His anointed king. The atheist Garibaldi, spoiler of churches and enemy of the Pope, will do nothing for France, except to widen the area over which the German flood will spread. Their armies of Rouen, of the Loire, and of the South-East are condemned in advance. It is as if the Lord of Hosts had said, 'I am against thee, O France! Thou wast once the eldest daughter of the Church. Now thou hast defiled thyself with the unbeliever, with the captains of Assyria, and art become a castaway.'"

He seemed to recall himself. He was speaking as he did in the pulpit. The glow faded from his features. He smiled a little contemptuously at himself.

"I am gabbling like a novice of the first year, and withal to a couple of Protestants," he said, getting up and extending his hands, one to each, as was his habit. "Forgive me!"

Cramming our special themes into his pocket for after-consideration, he went downstairs with a heavy regular tread, and the noisy dormitories hushed at the sound. The Renard could not be taken in with the usual explanation that they had been reciting their prayers. Not till he was safe in his own room did the hum and clatter begin all over again.

It was past midnight before we judged it prudent to begin our descent. Safe of course it was not, nor could ever be. In a school directed by clerical influences, supervision is personal and unceasing. The two of us owed our comparative immunity to our having passed our recent *baccalauréat*, and to having done honour to the college in the national examinations, but still more to the fact that we were English heretics, whose eternal damnation was assured beforehand, and whose lesser transgressions, therefore, mattered little, so long as they did not flaunt themselves before the pupils, devout, Catholic, and Roman.

There was a faint sufficient light from the southern windows, for the moon was nearly full. The empty classrooms smelt heavy and sour, and their doors stood open like the portholes of a battery, setting our hearts fluttering. We did not mean to let anything stand in the way of our purpose, but as we had been on good terms with the heads of the *lycée* of St. André, we did not want any trouble now at the eleventh hour, or rather when for us the time was close on the stroke of twelve.

We passed through the schoolrooms unchallenged. The dormitories were hushed and silent. We could see the dim light of the *pions'* watch-candles under the doors. We considered that we had passed the zone of danger, and were hurrying forward with less precaution, when a light in the open door of the kitchen pulled us up all standing.

I was lighter than Deventer, so I slipped my shoes and went forward on my stocking-soles to spy out the land.

A "mitron," or cook-boy, was writing a letter to his sweetheart with incredible pains. He wrote with his hands,

with his body, with the wrinkles on his brow, and the tongue which stuck out of his mouth, responsively vibrant as a compass-needle to the spirit of his composition.

Here was a pretty pass. We must wait on this white-capped, dirty-aproned rascal who seemed in no hurry to finish his task. He had a file of feuilletons bound in brown paper before him, and he turned over the leaves of these in search of expressions which had pleased him, and which he now desired to appropriate. There seemed no end to his literary zeal, and if he was not hurried morning might come before we could get clear.

Then I remembered that among Deventer's accomplishments was that of being able to imitate the wheezy asthmatic breathing and hollow cough of the *proviseur*. So I sent him back with instructions to carry out his imitation at the foot of the kitchen stairs.

At the first wheeze and accompanying shuffle of a hand on the smooth wooden stair-rail, out went the "mitron's" candle. I could hear him gathering up his home-bound books of feuilletons, and whisking away his letter paper. I drew back as close to the wall as possible, for I suspected he would pass my way in order to reach his bedroom. I was no more than in time, for he stumbled over my foot, which had been carelessly thrust forward into the passage way. He did not stop to inquire into this, probably thinking that someone had put out their shoes to be cleaned in the morning. It was a narrow escape, for if it had chanced to be the boot-boy instead of an amorous 'prentice-cook we might not have escaped so easily.

Deventer and I crossed the kitchen quickly. The wick of the "mitron's" candle was still smoking red, as we stole down the corkscrew stair which led to the laundry. Everything here smelt strongly of damp clothes and lye, but somewhere a window was open, for the current of air was pronounced, and suggested possible alternative if the lock of our door had been changed.

But in this we were fortunate. The key which I had carried so long in the inner pocket of my jacket turned easily. The door swung noiselessly inwards, and the clean breath of the salt breeze from the Camargue marshes made our faces pleasantly chill and our lips sticky. We locked the door on the outside, and in another minute stood in the roadway, looking back at the great ghostly pile of the Palace of the Monks—as Louis the XIV had called it, when he cut down the plans so that it should not rival in dimensions that "abyss of expenditure" which was Versailles.

But it was no time to stand sentimentalising upon architecture. We turned and went down the vacant white road as fast as our legs would serve us.

CHAPTER IV

[Table of Contents](#)

THROUGH THE ENEMY'S LINES

"Halt there!" cried Deventer suddenly to me. We were passing a pleasant white and green villa with a light in one ground-floor window.

I stopped, and Deventer took me by the arm, with forceful compulsion.

"I am going to help *my* father," he whispered. "Don't you run off without telling yours what you mean to do. He can't prevent you, if you have made your mind up."

"He won't try—he will only be glad to get back to his books."

"Perhaps, but at any rate tell him yourself. He will like it better than when the hue and cry gets up to-morrow over yonder. You take my word for it, Angus Cawdor."

I did not want to go, for at that time I did not understand nor much like my father. But Deventer said that if I would not walk he would carry me, a threat which at any other time would have made me smile. However, to please him I walked carefully to the window. With his habitual thoughtlessness about external things, the sash swung a little open and the light air blew the curtains back. My father was sitting like a student, with a shawl over his knees, a quite necessary fire of olive roots smouldering on the andirons, and his head, shining and silvery, bent over a book in which he was making notes.

I did not wish to startle him, so I spoke in English, and in as commonplace a tone as I could muster.

"Father," I said, as if my calling hours were the most ordinary in the world, "will you come across to the window for a moment?"

He rose instantly and came over to the open window, one half of which I had pushed wide. The note-book was still in his hand, and the breeze ruffled its leaves so that he shut and clasped it.

"Why, Angus, where do you come from?" he said. "Is it late? Won't you come in? Are you on your way back to

college?"

"No, father," I said; "I ought to be, but I have made up my mind to go to the war. I have had enough of learning, and examinations disgust me even when I come out first."

He looked at me long and quietly, and then nodded his head.

"I know—I know," he said, "it is the riot in the blood. I do not say that you do wrong to go, but you will need some money. I have a few hundred francs by me for which I have no use. They will not come amiss. Let me see—six, seven, eight hundred and fifty. Does Deventer go with you?"

"He is waiting on the road below."

"I thought as much—well, bid him good luck from me, and now good night, and God be with you, boy! Get your wild-oat sowing done as soon as possible and come back. You will find me waiting for you. You and I will do something yet."

My father coughed a little in the draught through the open window, whereupon I made haste to be gone. The movement was purely unconscious, yet it was just such slight things that kept me such a long while from understanding my father. He seemed to be so careful for himself in little matters of health, that he had no care to spare for me, his only son, and this thought, I am ashamed to say, I carried away with me, even while my fingers caressed the eight hundred and fifty francs nestling safely in my breeches pocket.

On the road I found Deventer waiting for me.

"Well," he said, "I see you are glad you went?"

"Yes," I answered, "eight hundred and fifty francs glad, but the old man hurried up my going, because the open window made a draught that irritated his cough."

Deventer did not answer directly.

"My governor thinks a lot of yours!" he said, and left the reproach to sink in. The which it did, all the more because / thought a lot of Deventer's father, and was presently to think more and better.

We took our road between the rows of sleeping houses, alternately black in shadow and mildly radiant under the moon. Not a light showed anywhere, not even in the *auberge*, with the huge branch stuck over the door in token of the excellence of the wine served out within.

A vagrant cat or two, a baying dog spasmodically darting in and out of an alley-way, alone took note of our bygoing.

The crowning buildings of the *lycée* on the Convent Ridge showed up massive and almost martial among the dark pines. Then, after a sprinkle of villas, we struck the close-packed town with the clean water from the Gardon river prattling in the sewers at either side of every street. Aramon was one of the towns of the Midi (now rare) where they had not forgotten ancient Roman lessons as to the value of running water.

As we descended the flat plain the river-meadow came up to meet us. We crossed the market-place among the splotched trunks of the plane trees, and turned along the quay of the great canal of the Little Rhône. Barges in long lines and solid tiers occupied it from end to end, and on each of these was a dog. So that we passed through a chorus of yelping curs, till the massive pillars of the great