

'Alas, sire, it is but too true!' Louis made a gesture of indescribable anger and alarm, and then drew himself up as if this sudden blow had struck him at the same moment in heart and countenance.

'In France!' he cried, 'the usurper in France! Then they did not watch over this man. Who knows? they were, perhaps, in league with him.'

'Oh, sire,' exclaimed the Duc de Blacas, 'M. Dandr  is not a man to be accused of treason! Sire, we have all been blind, and the minister of police has shared the general blindness, that is all.'

'But —' said Villefort, and then suddenly checking himself, he was silent; then he continued, 'Your pardon, sire,' he said, bowing, 'my zeal carried me away. Will your majesty deign to excuse me?'

'Speak, sir, speak boldly,' replied Louis. 'You alone forewarned us of the evil; now try and aid us with the remedy.'

'Sire,' said Villefort, 'the usurper is detested in the south; and it seems to me that if he ventured into the south, it would be easy to raise Languedoc and Provence against him.'

'Yes, assuredly,' replied the minister; 'but he is advancing by Gap and Sisteron.'

'Advancing—he is advancing!' said Louis XVIII. 'Is he then advancing on Paris? The minister of police maintained a silence which was equivalent to a complete avowal.'

'And Dauphin , sir?' inquired the king, of Villefort. 'Do you think it possible to rouse that as well as Provence?'

'Sire, I am sorry to tell your majesty a cruel fact; but the feeling in Dauphin  is quite the reverse of that in Provence or Languedoc. The mountaineers are Bonapartists, sire.'

'Then,' murmured Louis, 'he was well informed. And how many men had he with him?'

'I do not know, sire,' answered the minister of police.

'What, you do not know! Have you neglected to obtain information on that point? Of course it is of no consequence,' he added, with a withering smile.

'Sire, it was impossible to learn; the despatch simply stated the fact of the landing and the route taken by the usurper.'

'And how did this despatch reach you?' inquired the king. The minister bowed his head, and while a deep colour overspread his cheeks, he stammered out:

'By the telegraph, sire,' Louis XVIII. advanced a step, and folded his arms over his chest as Napoleon would have done. 'So then,' he exclaimed, turning pale with anger, 'seven conjoined and allied armies overthrew that man. A miracle of heaven replaced me on the throne of my fathers after five-and-twenty years of exile. I have, during those five-and-twenty years, spared no pains to understand the people of France and the interests which were confided to me; and now, when I see the fruition of my wishes almost within reach, the power I hold in my hands bursts and shatters me to atoms!'

'Sire, it is fatality!' murmured the minister, feeling that the pressure of circumstances, however light a thing to destiny, was too much for any human strength to endure.

'What our enemies say of us is then true. We have learnt nothing, forgotten nothing! If I were betrayed as he was, I would console myself; but to be in the midst of persons elevated by myself to places of honour, who ought to watch over me more carefully than over themselves,—for my fortune is theirs—before me they were nothing—after me they will be nothing, and perish miserably from incapacity—ineptitude! Oh, yes, sir, you are right—it is fatality!'

The minister quailed before this outburst of sarcasm. M. de Blacas wiped the moisture from his brow. Villefort smiled within himself, for he felt his increased importance.

'To fall,' continued King Louis, who at the first glance had sounded the abyss on which the monarchy hung suspended,—'to fall, and learn of that fall by telegraph! Oh, I would rather mount the scaffold of my brother, Louis XVI., than thus descend the staircase at the Tuileries driven away by ridicule. Ridicule, sir—why, you know not its power in France, and yet you ought to know it!'

'Sire, sire,' murmured the minister, 'for pity's—'

'Approach, M. de Villefort,' resumed the king, addressing the young man, who, motionless and breathless, was listening to a conversation on which depended the destiny of a kingdom. 'Approach, and tell monsieur that it is possible to know beforehand all that he has not known.'

‘Sire, it was really impossible to learn secrets which that man concealed from all the world.’

‘Really impossible! Yes—that is a great word, sir. Unfortunately, there are great words, as there are great men; I have measured them. Really impossible for a minister who has an office, agents, spies, and fifteen hundred thousand francs for secret service money, to know what is going on at sixty leagues from the coast of France! Well, then, see, here is a gentleman who had none of these resources at his disposal—a gentleman, only a simple magistrate, who learned more than you with all your police, and who would have saved my crown, if, like you, he had the power of directing a telegraph.’ The look of the minister of police was turned with concentrated spite on Villefort, who bent his head in modest triumph.


‘I do not mean that for you, Blacas,’ continued Louis XVIII.; ‘for if you have discovered nothing, at least you have had the good sense to persevere in your suspicions. Any other than yourself would have considered the disclosure of M. de Villefort insignificant, or else dictated by venal ambition.’ These words were an allusion to the sentiments which the minister of police had uttered with so much confidence an hour before.

Villefort understood the king’s intent. Any other person would, perhaps, have been overcome by such an intoxicating draught of praise; but he feared to make for himself a mortal enemy of the police minister, although he saw that Dandré was irrevocably lost. In fact, the minister, who, in the plenitude of his power, had been unable to unearth Napoleon’s secret, might in despair at his own downfall interrogate Dantès and so lay bare the motives of Villefort’s plot. Realizing this, Villefort came to the rescue of the crest-fallen minister, instead of aiding to crush him.

‘Sire,’ said Villefort, ‘the suddenness of this event must prove to your majesty that the issue is in the hands of Providence; what your majesty is pleased to attribute to me as profound perspicacity is simply owing to chance, and I have profited by that chance, like a good and devoted servant—that’s all. Do not attribute to me more than I deserve, sire, that your majesty may never have occasion to recall the first opinion you have been pleased to form of me.’ The minister of police thanked the young man by an eloquent look, and Villefort understood that he had succeeded in his design; that is to say, that without

Chapter XI

The Corsican Ogre

T the sight of this agitation Louis XVIII. pushed from him violently the table at which he was sitting.

‘What ails you, baron?’ he exclaimed. ‘You appear quite agitated. Has your uneasiness anything to do with what M. de Blacas has told me, and M. de Villefort has just confirmed?’ M. de Blacas moved suddenly towards the baron, but the fright of the courtier pleaded for the forbearance of the statesman; and besides, as matters were, it was much more to his advantage that the prefect of police should triumph over him than that he should humiliate the prefect.

‘Sire,—’ stammered the baron.

‘Well, what is it?’ asked Louis XVIII. The minister of police, giving way to an impulse of despair, was about to throw himself at the feet of Louis XVIII., who retreated a step and frowned.

‘Will you speak?’ he said.

‘Oh, sire, what a dreadful misfortune! I am, indeed, to be pitied. I can never forgive myself!’

‘Monsieur,’ said Louis XVIII., ‘I command you to speak.’

‘Well, sire, the usurper left Elba on the 26th February, and landed on the 1st of March.’

‘And where? In Italy?’ asked the king eagerly.

‘In France, sire,—at a small port, near Antibes, in the Gulf of Juan.’

‘The usurper landed in France, near Antibes, in the Gulf of Juan, two hundred and fifty leagues from Paris, on the 1st of March, and you only acquired this information today, the 3rd of March! Well, sir, what you tell me is impossible. You must have received a false report, or you have gone mad.’

‘And the matter seems serious to you?’

‘So serious, sire, that when the circumstance surprised me in the midst of a family festival, on the very day of my betrothal, I left my bride and friends, postponing everything, that I might hasten to lay at your majesty’s feet the fears which impressed me, and the assurance of my devotion.’

‘True,’ said Louis XVIII., ‘was there not a marriage engagement between you and Mademoiselle de Saint-Méran?’

‘Daughter of one of your majesty’s most faithful servants.’

‘Yes, yes, but let us talk of this plot, M. de Villefort.’

‘Sire, I fear it is more than a plot; I fear it is a conspiracy.’

‘A conspiracy in these times,’ said Louis XVIII., smiling, ‘is a thing very easy to meditate, but more difficult to conduct to an end, inasmuch as, re-established so recently on the throne of our ancestors, we have our eyes open at once upon the past, the present, and the future. For the last ten months my ministers have redoubled their vigilance, in order to watch the shore of the Mediterranean. If Bonaparte landed at Naples, the whole coalition would be on foot before he could even reach Piombino; if he land in Tuscany, he will be in an unfriendly territory; if he land in France, it must be with a handful of men, and the result of that is easily foretold, execrated as he is by the population. Take courage, sir; but at the same time rely on our royal gratitude.’

‘Ah, here is M. Dandré!’ cried de Blacas. At this instant the minister of police appeared at the door, pale, trembling, and as if ready to faint. Villefort was about to retire, but M. de Blacas, taking his hand, restrained him.

forfeiting the gratitude of the king, he had made a friend of one on whom, in case of necessity, he might rely.

‘Tis well,’ resumed the king. ‘And now, gentlemen,’ he continued, turning towards M. de Blacas and the minister of police, ‘I have no further occasion for you, and you may retire; what now remains to do is in the department of the minister of war.’

‘Fortunately, sire,’ said M. de Blacas, ‘we can rely on the army; your majesty knows how every report confirms their loyalty and attachment.’

‘Do not mention reports, duke, to me, for I know now what confidence to place in them. Yet, speaking of reports, baron, what have you learned with regard to the affair in the Rue Saint-Jacques?’

‘The affair in the Rue Saint-Jacques!’ exclaimed Villefort, unable to repress an exclamation. Then, suddenly pausing, he added, ‘Your pardon, sire, but my devotion to your majesty has made me forget, not the respect I have, for that is too deeply engraved in my heart, but the rules of etiquette.’

‘Go on, go on, sir,’ replied the king; ‘you have today earned the right to make inquiries here.’

‘Sire,’ interposed the minister of police, ‘I came a moment ago to give your majesty fresh information which I had obtained on this head, when your majesty’s attention was attracted by the terrible event that has occurred in the gulf, and now these facts will cease to interest your majesty.’

‘On the contrary, sir,—on the contrary,’ said Louis XVIII., ‘this affair seems to me to have a decided connection with that which occupies our attention, and the death of General Quesnel will, perhaps, put us on the direct track of a great internal conspiracy.’ At the name of General Quesnel, Villefort trembled.

‘Everything points to the conclusion, sire,’ said the minister of police, ‘that death was not the result of suicide, as we first believed, but of assassination. General Quesnel, it appears, had just left a Bonapartist club when he disappeared. An unknown person had been with him that morning, and made an appointment with him in the Rue Saint-Jacques; unfortunately, the general’s valet, who was dressing his hair at the moment when the stranger entered, heard the street mentioned, but did not catch the number.’ As the police minister related this to the king, Villefort, who looked as if his very life hung

on the speaker's lips, turned alternately red and pale. The king looked towards him.

'Do you not think with me, M. de Villefort, that General Quesnel, whom they believed attached to the usurper, but who was really entirely devoted to me, has perished the victim of a Bonapartist ambush?'

'It is probable, sire,' replied Villefort. 'But is this all that is known?'

'They are on the track of the man who appointed the meeting with him.'

'On his track?' said Villefort.

'Yes, the servant has given his description. He is a man of from fifty to fifty-two years of age, dark, with black eyes covered with shaggy eyebrows, and a thick moustache. He was dressed in a blue frock-coat, buttoned up to the chin, and wore at his button-hole the rosette of an officer of the Legion of honour. Yesterday a person exactly corresponding with this description was followed, but he was lost sight of at the corner of the Rue de la Jussienne and the Rue Coq-Héron.' Villefort leaned on the back of an armchair, for as the minister of police went on speaking he felt his legs bend under him; but when he learned that the unknown had escaped the vigilance of the agent who followed him, he breathed again.

'Continue to seek for this man, sir,' said the king to the minister of police; 'for if, as I am all but convinced, General Quesnel, who would have been so useful to us at this moment, has been murdered, his assassins, Bonapartists or not, shall be cruelly punished.' It required all Villefort's coolness not to betray the terror with which this declaration of the king inspired him.

'How strange,' continued the king, with some asperity; 'the police think that they have disposed of the whole matter when they say, "A murder has been committed," and especially so when they can add, "And we are on the track of the guilty persons."'

'Sire, your majesty will, I trust, be amply satisfied on this point at least.'

'We shall see. I will no longer detain you, M. de Villefort, for you must be fatigued after so long a journey; go and rest. Of course you stopped at your father's?' A feeling of faintness came over Villefort. 'No, sire,' he replied, 'I alighted at the Hotel de Madrid, in the Rue de Tournon.'

'But you have seen him?'

'Sire, I went straight to the Duc de Blacas.'

'But you will see him, then?'

'Sire, the duke is right, and I believe your majesty will think it equally important.' 'In the first place, and before everything else, sire, is the news as bad in your opinion as I am asked to believe?'

'Sire, I believe it to be most urgent, but I hope, by the speed I have used, that it is not irreparable.'

'Speak as fully as you please, sir,' said the king, who began to give way to the emotion which had showed itself in Blacas's face and affected Villefort's voice. 'Speak, sir, and pray begin at the beginning; I like order in everything.'

'Sire,' said Villefort, 'I will render a faithful report to your majesty, but I must entreat your forgiveness if my anxiety leads to some obscurity in my language.' A glance at the king after this discreet and subtle exordium, assured Villefort of the benignity of his august auditor, and he went on:

'Sire, I have come as rapidly to Paris as possible, to inform your majesty that I have discovered, in the exercise of my duties, not a commonplace and insignificant plot, such as is every day got up in the lower ranks of the people and in the army, but an actual conspiracy—a storm which menaces no less than your majesty's throne. Sire, the usurper is arming three ships, he meditates some project, which, however mad, is yet, perhaps, terrible. At this moment he will have left Elba, to go whither I know not, but assuredly to attempt a landing either at Naples, or on the coast of Tuscany, or perhaps on the shores of France. Your majesty is well aware that the sovereign of the Island of Elba has maintained his relations with Italy and France?'

'I am, sir,' said the king, much agitated; 'and recently we have had information that the Bonapartist clubs have had meetings in the Rue Saint-Jacques. But proceed, I beg of you. How did you obtain these details?'

'Sire, they are the results of an examination which I have made of a man of Marseilles, whom I have watched for some time, and arrested on the day of my departure. This person, a sailor, of turbulent character, and whom I suspected of Bonapartism, has been secretly to the Island of Elba. There he saw the grand-marshal, who charged him with an oral message to a Bonapartist in Paris, whose name I could not extract from him; but this mission was to prepare men's minds for a return (it is the man who says this, sire)—a return which will soon occur.'

'And where is this man?'

'In prison, sire.'

‘No, no, Blacas; he is a man of strong and elevated understanding, ambitious, too, and, *pardieu!* you know his father’s name!’

‘His father?’

‘Yes, Noirtier.’

‘Noirtier the Girondin?—Noirtier the senator?’

‘He himself.’

‘And your majesty has employed the son of such a man?’

‘Blacas, my friend, you have but limited comprehension. I told you Villefort was ambitious, and to attain this ambition Villefort would sacrifice everything, even his father.’

‘Then, sire, may I present him?’

‘This instant, duke! Where is he?’

‘Waiting below, in my carriage.’

‘Seek him at once.’

‘I hasten to do so.’

The duke left the royal presence with the speed of a young man; his really sincere royalism made him youthful again. Louis XVIII. remained alone, and turning his eyes on his half-opened Horace, muttered:

‘Iustum et tenacem propositi virum.’

M. de Blacas returned as speedily as he had departed, but in the antechamber he was forced to appeal to the king’s authority. Villefort’s dusty garb, his costume, which was not of courtly cut, excited the susceptibility of M. de Brezé, who was all astonishment at finding that this young man had the audacity to enter before the king in such attire. The duke, however, overcame all difficulties with a word—his majesty’s order; and, in spite of the protestations which the master of ceremonies made for the honour of his office and principles, Villefort was introduced.

The king was seated in the same place where the duke had left him. On opening the door, Villefort found himself facing him, and the young magistrate’s first impulse was to pause.

‘Come in, M. de Villefort,’ said the king, ‘come in.’

Villefort bowed, and advancing a few steps, waited until the king should interrogate him.

‘M. de Villefort,’ said Louis XVIII., ‘the Duc de Blacas assures me you have some interesting information to communicate.’

‘I think not, sire.’

‘Ah, I forgot,’ said Louis, smiling in a manner which proved that all these questions were not made without a motive; ‘I forgot you and M. Noirtier are not on the best terms possible, and that is another sacrifice made to the royal cause, and for which you should be recompensed.’

‘Sire, the kindness your majesty deigns to evince towards me is a recompense which so far surpasses my utmost ambition that I have nothing more to ask for.’

‘Never mind, sir, we will not forget you; make your mind easy. In the meanwhile? (the king here detached the cross of the Legion of honour which he usually wore over his blue coat, near the cross of St. Louis, above the order of Notre-Dame-du-Mont-Carmel and St. Lazare, and gave it to Villefort)—in the meanwhile take this cross.’

‘Sire,’ said Villefort, ‘your majesty mistakes; this is an officer’s cross.’

‘*Ma foi!*’ said Louis XVIII., ‘take it, such as it is, for I have not the time to procure you another. Blacas, let it be your care to see that the brevet is made out and sent to M. de Villefort.’ Villefort’s eyes were filled with tears of joy and pride; he took the cross and kissed it.

‘And now,’ he said, ‘may I inquire what are the orders with which your majesty deigns to honour me?’

‘Take what rest you require, and remember that if you are not able to serve me here in Paris, you may be of the greatest service to me at Marseilles.’

‘Sire,’ replied Villefort, bowing, ‘in an hour I shall have quitted Paris.’

‘Go, sir,’ said the king; ‘and should I forget you (kings’ memories are short), do not be afraid to bring yourself to my recollection. Baron, send for the minister of war. Blacas, remain.’

‘Ah, sir,’ said the minister of police to Villefort, as they left the Tuileries, ‘you entered by luck’s door—your fortune is made.’

‘Will it be long first?’ muttered Villefort, saluting the minister, whose career was ended, and looking about him for a hackney-coach. One passed at the moment, which he hailed; he gave his address to the driver, and springing in, threw himself on the seat, and gave loose to dreams of ambition.

Ten minutes afterwards Villefort reached his hotel, ordered horses to be ready in two hours, and asked to have his breakfast brought to him. He was about to begin his repast when the sound of the bell rang sharp and loud. The

valet opened the door, and Villefort heard someone speak his name. 'Who could know that I was here already?' said the young man. The valet entered.

'Well,' said Villefort, 'what is it?—Who rang?—Who asked for me?'

'A stranger who will not send in his name.'

'A stranger who will not send in his name! What can he want with me?'

'He wishes to speak to you.'

'To me?'

'Yes.'

'Did he mention my name?'

'Yes.'

'What sort of person is he?'

'Why, sir, a man of about fifty.'

'Short or tall?'

'About your own height, sir.'

'Dark or fair?'

'Dark,—very dark; with black eyes, black hair, black eyebrows.'

'And how dressed?' asked Villefort quickly.

'In a blue frock-coat, buttoned up close, decorated with the Legion of honour.'

'It is he!' said Villefort, turning pale. 'Eh, *pardieu*!' said the individual whose description we have twice given, entering the door, 'what a great deal of ceremony! Is it the custom in Marseilles for sons to keep their fathers waiting in their anterooms?'

'Father!' cried Villefort, 'then I was not deceived, I felt sure it must be you.'

'Well, then, if you felt so sure,' replied the new-comer, putting his cane in a corner and his hat on a chair, 'allow me to say, my dear Gérard, that it was not very filial of you to keep me waiting at the door.'

'Leave us, Germain,' said Villefort. The servant quitted the apartment with evident signs of astonishment.

to render, but cannot; they trust to fortune, and rely upon some unexpected event in some way to justify their predictions.'

'Well, sir, go,' said Louis XVIII., 'and remember that I am waiting for you.'

'I will but go and return, sire; I shall be back in ten minutes.'

'And I, sire,' said M. de Blacas, 'will go and find my messenger.'

'Wait, sir, wait,' said Louis XVIII. 'Really, M. de Blacas, I must change your armorial bearings; I will give you an eagle with outstretched wings, holding in its claws a prey which tries in vain to escape, and bearing this device—*Tenax*.'

'Sire, I listen,' said De Blacas, biting his nails with impatience.

'I wish to consult you on this passage, "*Molli fugiens anbelitu*," you know it refers to a stag flying from a wolf. Are you not a sportsman and a great wolf-hunter? Well, then, what do you think of the *molli anbelitu*?'

'Admirable, sire; but my messenger is like the stag you refer to, for he has posted two hundred and twenty leagues in scarcely three days.'

'Which is undergoing great fatigue and anxiety, my dear duke, when we have a telegraph which transmits messages in three or four hours, and that without getting in the least out of breath.'

'Ah, sire, you recompense but badly this poor young man, who has come so far, and with so much ardour, to give your majesty useful information. If only for the sake of M. de Salvieux, who recommends him to me, I entreat your majesty to receive him graciously.'

'M. de Salvieux, my brother's chamberlain?'

'Yes, sire.'

'He is at Marseilles.'

'And writes me thence.'

'Does he speak to you of this conspiracy?'

'No; but strongly recommends M. de Villefort, and begs me to present him to your majesty.'

'M. de Villefort!' cried the king, 'is the messenger's name M. de Villefort?'

'Yes, sire.'

'And he comes from Marseilles?'

'In person.'

'Why did you not mention his name at once?' replied the king, betraying some uneasiness.

'Sire, I thought his name was unknown to your majesty.'

M. de Blacas pondered deeply between the confident monarch and the truthful minister. Villefort, who did not choose to reveal the whole secret, lest another should reap all the benefit of the disclosure, had yet communicated enough to cause him the greatest uneasiness.

‘Well, well, Dandré,’ said Louis XVIII., ‘Blacas is not yet convinced; let us proceed, therefore, to the usurper’s conversion.’ The minister of police bowed.

‘The usurper’s conversion!’ murmured the duke, looking at the king and Dandré, who spoke alternately, like Virgil’s shepherds. ‘The usurper converted!’

‘Decidedly, my dear duke.’

‘In what way converted?’

‘To good principles. Tell him all about it, baron.’

‘Why, this is the way of it,’ said the minister, with the gravest air in the world: ‘Napoleon lately had a review, and as two or three of his old veterans expressed a desire to return to France, he gave them their dismissal, and exhorted them to “serve the good king.” These were his own words, of that I am certain.’

‘Well, Blacas, what think you of this?’ inquired the king triumphantly, and pausing for a moment from the voluminous scholiast before him.

‘I say, sire, that the minister of police is greatly deceived or I am; and as it is impossible it can be the minister of police as he has the guardianship of the safety and honour of your majesty, it is probable that I am in error. However, sire, if I might advise, your majesty will interrogate the person of whom I spoke to you, and I will urge your majesty to do him this honour.’

‘Most willingly, duke; under your auspices I will receive any person you please, but you must not expect me to be too confiding. Baron, have you any report more recent than this, dated the 20th February, and this is the 3rd of March?’

‘No, sire, but I am hourly expecting one; it may have arrived since I left my office.’

‘Go thither, and if there be none—well, well,’ continued Louis XVIII., ‘make one; that is the usual way, is it not?’ and the king laughed facetiously.

‘Oh, sire,’ replied the minister, ‘we have no occasion to invent any; every day our desks are loaded with most circumstantial denunciations, coming from hosts of people who hope for some return for services which they seek

Chapter XII

Father and Son



Noirtier—for it was, indeed, he who entered—looked after the servant until the door was closed, and then, fearing, no doubt, that he might be overheard in the antechamber, he opened the door again, nor was the precaution useless, as appeared from the rapid retreat of Germain, who proved that he was not exempt from the sin which ruined our first parents. M. Noirtier then took the trouble to close and bolt the antechamber door, then that of the bedchamber, and then extended his hand to Villefort, who had followed all his motions with surprise which he could not conceal.

‘Well, now, my dear Gérard,’ said he to the young man, with a very significant look, ‘do you know, you seem as if you were not very glad to see me?’

‘My dear father,’ said Villefort, ‘I am, on the contrary, delighted; but I so little expected your visit, that it has somewhat overcome me.’

‘But, my dear fellow,’ replied M. Noirtier, seating himself, ‘I might say the same thing to you, when you announce to me your wedding for the 28th of February, and on the 3rd of March you turn up here in Paris.’

‘And if I have come, my dear father,’ said Gérard, drawing closer to M. Noirtier, ‘do not complain, for it is for you that I came, and my journey will be your salvation.’

‘Ah, indeed!’ said M. Noirtier, stretching himself out at his ease in the chair. ‘Really, pray tell me all about it, for it must be interesting.’

‘Father, you have heard speak of a certain Bonapartist club in the Rue Saint-Jacques?’

‘N° 53; yes, I am vice-president.’

‘Father, your coolness makes me shudder.’

'Why, my dear boy, when a man has been proscribed by the mountaineers, has escaped from Paris in a hay-cart, been hunted over the plains of Bordeaux by Robespierre's bloodhounds, he becomes accustomed to most things. But go on, what about the club in the Rue Saint-Jacques?'

'Why, they induced General Quesnel to go there, and General Quesnel, who quitted his own house at nine o'clock in the evening, was found the next day in the Seine.' 'And who told you this fine story?'

'The king himself.'

'Well, then, in return for your story,' continued Noirtier, 'I will tell you another.'

'My dear father, I think I already know what you are about to tell me.'

'Ah, you have heard of the landing of the emperor?'

'Not so loud, father, I entreat of you—for your own sake as well as mine. Yes, I heard this news, and knew it even before you could; for three days ago I posted from Marseilles to Paris with all possible speed, half-desperate at the enforced delay.'

'Three days ago? You are crazy. Why, three days ago the emperor had not landed.'

'No matter, I was aware of his intention.'

'How did you know about it?'

'By a letter addressed to you from the Island of Elba.'

'To me?'

'To you; and which I discovered in the pocket-book of the messenger. Had that letter fallen into the hands of another, you, my dear father, would probably ere this have been shot.' Villefort's father laughed.

'Come, come,' said he, 'will the Restoration adopt imperial methods so promptly? Shot, my dear boy? What an ideal! Where is the letter you speak of? I know you too well to suppose you would allow such a thing to pass you.'

'I burnt it, for fear that even a fragment should remain; for that letter must have led to your condemnation.'

'And the destruction of your future prospects,' replied Noirtier; 'yes, I can easily comprehend that. But I have nothing to fear while I have you to protect me.'

'I do better than that, sir—I save you.'

Dandr  himself; and M. Dandr , announced by the chamberlain-in-waiting, entered.

'Come in,' said Louis XVIII., with repressed smile, 'come in, Baron, and tell the duke all you know—the latest news of M. de Bonaparte; do not conceal anything, however serious,—let us see, the Island of Elba is a volcano, and we may expect to have issuing thence flaming and bristling war—*bella, horrida bella*.'

M. Dandr  leaned very respectfully on the back of a chair with his two hands, and said:

'Has your majesty perused yesterday's report?'

'Yes, yes; but tell the duke himself, who cannot find anything, what the report contains—give him the particulars of what the usurper is doing in his islet.'

'Monsieur,' said the baron to the duke, 'all the servants of his majesty must approve of the latest intelligence which we have from the Island of Elba. Bonaparte—'

M. Dandr  looked at Louis XVIII., who, employed in writing a note, did not even raise his head. 'Bonaparte,' continued the baron, 'is mortally wearied, and passes whole days in watching his miners at work at Porto-Longone.'

'And scratches himself for amusement,' added the king.

'Scratches himself?' inquired the duke, 'what does your majesty mean?'

'Yes, indeed, my dear duke. Did you forget that this great man, this hero, this demigod, is attacked with a malady of the skin which worries him to death, *prurigo*?'

'And, moreover, my dear duke,' continued the minister of police, 'we are almost assured that, in a very short time, the usurper will be insane.'

'Insane?'

'Raving mad; his head becomes weaker. Sometimes he weeps bitterly, sometimes laughs boisterously; at other time he passes hours on the seashore, flinging stones in the water and when the flint makes "duck-and-drake" five or six times, he appears as delighted as if he had gained another Marengo or Austerlitz. Now, you must agree that these are indubitable symptoms of insanity.'

'Of wisdom, my dear baron—or of wisdom,' said Louis XVIII., laughing; 'the greatest captains of antiquity amused themselves by casting pebbles into the ocean—see Plutarch's life of Scipio Africanus.'