

A THOUGHT.

How many wish their lives away,
 All fraught with care and woe,
 Bearing burdens day by day,
 But wishing still to go.
 Troubled one, pray tell me,
 Has the youthful heart grown cold?
 Has joy and pleasure left thee
 Since the happy days of old?

Has Nature, with all her beauty,
 No power to move the soul—
 Must we only do stern duty
 As the time will onward roll?
 Is there no pleasure in thee
 For the blue and changing sky—
 No charms of flowers to stay thee
 As thou art passing by?

Does the bright and shaded river
 Flow on unloved by thee—
 No love for all earth's beauty
 God made for you and me?
 What matters it though hearts are sad,
 And dark hair silver white—
 There's enough in life to make us glad
 In the path of love and right.

Hope, with its fairy finger,
 Is pointing us onward ever—
 To something bright in the future,
 Which we could love forever—
 With its golden halo o'er us
 To brighten our dark way;
 With our loved ones all around us
 Let us pass our lives away.

A DASHIN' EXPLOIT.

When the revolution of 1830 set in, Alexandre Dumas, then a very young man, and seeing nothing in life but one series of tableaux, took his share in the most stirring scenes in the capacity of a skirmisher. He tells the whole story in his memoirs, and his account seems an anticipation of the best portions of Rabagas. But his narrative of his expedition to Soissons to seize some powder will be found one of the most stirring bits of adventure in modern times. He had heard Lafayette say that if the king were to advance on Paris there would be no powder to meet him. Alexandre conceived a bold scheme and proposed to the General to set off for Soissons—a town he well knew—and seize on the magazine there. Lafayette laughed at the idea, but consented to give him a pass to General Gerard, to which Dumas coolly added, "and we recommend his scheme to you." From Gerard he, with some difficulty, obtained a requisition addressed to the authorities of the town for the powder. In this he ingeniously interpolated the words "minister of war"—a rank which no one but himself had conferred on the General. With this official document he returned to Lafayette, and persuaded the old patriot to write him a sort of letter of introduction to the citizens of Soissons, recommending them "Alexandre Dumas, one of our combatants," as a fit and proper person to whom they should hand over the powder. Then our hero—for such he was on this occasion—prepared himself for as spirited and dramatic an adventure as can be found in the books of romance.

It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon of the 30th of July, 1830. As he was hurrying away, he met a young painter by the name of Bard, who was only nineteen. He asked him to join. The other agreed with alacrity, and Alexandre sending him back for his double barreled pistols and his horse, set off himself in a cabriolet for Le Bourget, then the first post on the road to Soissons, and which has since obtained such a disastrous notoriety. Arrived there, he exhibited his Lafayette and Gerard letters to the Postmaster, and demanded a chaise and horses for his mission. The Postmaster was friendly and even empressé, and supplied him at once with what he asked. He went out to buy some pieces of calico—red, white and blue—which were sewn into a tricolor flag fixed to a broomstick, which latter was tied on to the chaise. With this ensign they started, in hopes of getting to Soissons about midnight. The Postmaster shook his head, but, as he sagaciously remarked, "so many miracles had been performed during the last three days that it might be possible." As they hurried through the various villages, the flag caused the greatest excitement. His fellow traveler, delighted, declared that all was going on splendidly, "but they ought to have some sort of cry."

"Shout away, then," said Dumas, "and while you are shouting I'll take some sleep."

The only difficulty was what was to be the cry, and with some hesitation the now well-worn and tattered *Vive la Republique* was decided on. Accordingly, the young painter, his head out of the window and his flag waving, roared

on. On the high road they met a chaise going to Paris, and a traveler of some fifty years old asked for news.

"The Louvre is taken; the Bourbons fled; Provisional Government established *Vive la Republique!*" the excited painter roared out. The gentleman fifty years old scratched his ear and continued his journey. For the next stage they had an old postilion, who persisted in going at a steady trot, and at every remonstrance answered doggedly, "Leave it all to me; a man knows his own business best." Dumas at last, from the chaise window, laid on the backs of the horses with a stick and made them gallop. In a rage the man pulled up, swore he would unyoke his beasts, and actually proceeded to do so. Dumas fired at him with blank cartridge and so scared him that he rolled on the ground in terror. Alexandre then put on the huge posting-boots, and, mounting, galloped on to the next post. They soon reached the old familiar Villers-Cotterets—the whole town, as may well be imagined, being thrown into intense excitement by the appearance of the chaise with the tricolor and the excited Alexandre Dumas. Late as it was every house poured out its inhabitants, who rushed to the post-house. A thousand eager questions were put to him—what did it mean, this flag and the guns? He knew all the townspeople, and told the story of the past few days. It was insisted that he should stay a short time and have something to eat, and he was carried off to the house of an old friend, where a hasty supper was got ready. A number of old companions, who had been boys when he was in the little town, gathered round, listening eagerly as their old friend declaimed and recounted between every mouthful. As he dashed in for them, which he could do admirably, vivid sketches of these thrilling scenes, the rustics listened with delight and wonder; but when he came to explain the object of his present expedition—"when I announced that I meant to capture, single-handed, all the powder that was in a military town containing eight thousand inhabitants, and a garrison of eight hundred men"—they looked at him doubtfully, and thought he was crazed. This was, of course, welcome to Alexandre, who always delighted to put himself in a theatrical attitude, and be the centre of a dramatic sensation. He turned to his companion Bard:

"What were my words when proposing this expedition to you?"

"You asked," was the reply, "was I inclined to get myself shot with you?"

"And what do you say now?"

"That I am ready still."

All were confounded at such gallantry. One of his friends now stepped forward, and offered to get him into Soissons, as he had a friend at the gates. Then Alexandre, always anticipating his D'Artagnon, raised his glass and drank to his own return to them on the next evening. "Have dinner ready," he called to the host, "for twenty people, and it is to be eaten just the same, whether we are alive or dead. Here are two hundred francs." The other answered, he might pay on the morrow. "But if I should be shot?" "Then I shall pay." A shout arose, "Hurrah for Cartier!" Dumas drank off his wine, and, we might add, the act-drop fell.

It was now about 11 o'clock. The horses were put to the chaise which was waiting, and the bold trio, Dumas, Bard and Huntin (who was to pass them through the gates) drove away on their daring expedition. By 1 o'clock they had reached the gates of Soissons, they were allowed to pass, "the door-keeper little dreaming," says Alexandre the great, "that he was admitting the revolution."

They went straight to the house of Huntin's mother, where their first business was the manufacture of a large tricolor flag. She contributed her blue and red curtains, with a table cloth, and all the women of the household were set to work to sew the pieces together. By daybreak the task was completed. The pole, of course, gave him no trouble, as the one from which the Bourbon white flag was floating would answer. "The flagstaff," as Dumas says, "had no political opinions."

The plan they had arranged was Quixotic in its extravagance, and indeed seems almost incredible. Making all allowance for Dumas' bombast, it will be seen at the most he has only been guilty of the novelist's exaggeration; and though at the time the story of the adventure was all but scouted, it could not be disproved in the facts, which are given with the most minute detail of dates, names and places. It was settled that Bard and Huntin were to take the flag and contrive to get into the cathedral under pretense of seeing

the sun rise from the tower. If the sacristan made any resistance he was to be flung over the parapet. Then having dragged down the white flag, and set the tricolor floating from the tower, Bard was to hurry on to lend his aid to Dumas, who would be engaged at the powder magazine. Such was the dashing plan of these three men.

They started at daybreak, and Dumas made his way to the Fort St. Jean, where a small pavilion, close to the gateway, was used as the magazine. He dared not attempt the gate, but stealing round, climbed up the wall cautiously, and took a peep into the fort. He saw two soldiers busy hoeing in a little garden at the corner. He let himself down again, and looked over at the distant cathedral. He saw distinctly against the sky a dark outline of some figures; then the white flag, after being tossed about in an extraordinary fashion that could not have been owing to the wind, finally disappeared, and the tricolor took its place. Now was the moment; his companions had done their part. He slung his double-barreled gun about him, and began to climb the wall. When he got to the top, he saw the two soldiers staring with wonder at the strange flag on the cathedral, then, cocking both barrels of his gun, he leaped down and stood before them. One was named Captain Mollard; the other, Sergeant Ragou. He advanced on them, presenting his piece and made them a courteous but hurried speech, explaining who he was, and his errand. He was Monsieur Alexandre Dumas, son of General Dumas, etc. He came in the name of General Gerard to demand the surrender of the powder, and there was his order signed by the General, which he presented with one hand, and holding his cocked gun in the other. The pair were much taken back, and knew not what to do, when the Colonel, D'Orcourt, who was in command, was seen approaching. The matter was explained to him, and, after many curious phrases, a treaty was arranged, by which the three officers promised their neutrality and engaged to keep within doors. Thus the powder magazine would seem to have been captured by Dumas single-handed. It has the air of a very brilliant achievement, and the picture of the hero alone in the fort, his fingers on the triggers of his gun, courteously but firmly controlling his three opponents, is a most dramatic scene. When writing the account of his adventure, from which we take these particulars, however, Dumas forgets that in the official report furnished to the *Moniteur* twenty-three years before, he had stated that three of his friends were waiting at the gate.

Thus successful, he opened the gate and found his friend Bard. To him he handed over the charge of the magazine and went away to deal with the commandant of the fort, Liniers. He found this officer just risen and discussing the news of the sudden appearance of the flag on the cathedral. Dumas laid down his gun at the door, introduced himself and made his demand for an order to remove the powder. The other declined to acknowledge General Gerard's order and said that there was scarcely any powder in the magazine. The commandant seemed, in fact, rather amused, and smiled scornfully when Dumas answered that the party at the magazine were his prisoners. Alexandre, replying that he would go back at once and bring proof under their hand that the powder was there, made his bow and retired. He flew back, found that he was right, and returned presently with satisfactory proof that a large quantity of powder was in the magazine. But when he reached the commandant's office he found that the party had been increased during his absence, and that Lenferna, an officer of gendarmes, and Bonvilliers, Colonel of the Engineers, were there in full uniform and armed. The commandant addressed him in a sort of bantering tone, telling him that he had sent for these officers, who, with him, were in command of the town, in order that they might have the pleasure of hearing M. Dumas explain his mission. The young man saw that boldness was his only resource and coolly told them that he had been engaged by Lafayette to bring the powder to Paris or lose his life, and that he insisted on the commandant's handing that powder over to him. The officers passed on Gerard's order from one to the other with a sort of smiling contempt.

"And so," said the commandant, in the same tone, "so, single-handed, Monsieur Dumas—I think you said that was your name—you propose to force me to do this. You see that we are four."

The young man saw that matters

were coming to a crisis, and took a prompt resolution. He stepped back, pulled his double-barreled pistols from his pockets, and presented them at the startled party. "You are four," he said, "gentlemen. But we are five. If that order be not signed in five seconds, I give you my word of honor I will blow your brains out, beginning with the commandant's there!"

He owned he felt a little nervous, but he was determined.

"Take care," he went on; "I mean what I say. I am going to count. One—two—three—"

At this critical moment a side door was flung open, and a lady flung herself among them in a paroxysm of alarm.

"Agree! agree!" she cried. "Oh! this is another revolt of the negroes! Think of my poor father and mother, whom they murdered in St. Domingo."

Alexandre owned that the lady's mistake was excusable, considering his own natural tint (deepened by violent browning from the sun) and the peculiar character of hair and voice. But we may wonder at the insensibility to ridicule which could prompt him to set down such a jest at his own expense. The truth was, he was so filled with vanity that all the nicer senses became blunted, and he was even unconscious of the roars of laughter which these foolish confidences produced. The commandant could not resist the entreaties of his wife. Alexandre declared that he had infinite respect for the lady, but entreated her husband to send her away and let the men finish the business. The poor commandant protested that self-respect must be respected. He could not decently yield to a single man. Alexandre then offered to sign a paper, to the effect that the order had been extorted at "the mouth of the pistol-barrel." "Or would you prefer," he added, "that I should fetch two or three of my companions, so that you should seem to have yielded to a more respectable force?" The commandant accepted this proposal, and Alexandre left him, bluntly declaring that no advantage should be taken of the delay or he would return and "blow all their brains out," and that the whole party must give their parole of honor that they would remain exactly as they were.

"Yes, yes," cried the lady. Alexandre made her a low bow, but declared that it was not her parole that he wanted. The commandant gave what was required of him, and Alexandre, hurrying away, speedily returned with two or three of his men, whom he placed in the court. Opening the window, he called to them and bade them inform the gentlemen inside that they were ready to fire at them at the first signal, an appeal answered by the significant sound of the cocking of guns. The commandant understood, and going to his desk, wrote out a formal order.

After this the rest was comparatively easy. The magazine was broken open, carts were procured and loaded, and about 5 o'clock they were outside of the town. Dumas was so exhausted that he sank down on the grass, under a hedge, and fell fast asleep. Roused up presently, he started on his journey, and by 8 o'clock reached Villers-Cotterets, where they found the supper ready which had been ordered the evening before. After a jovial meal they set out once more, and by 3 o'clock in the morning were close to Paris, at the post-house whence they had started. At 9 o'clock he had presented himself, with his powder, at the Hotel de Ville, having triumphantly accomplished the daring exploit he had undertaken.

When Alexandre told this adventure, there was many a shrug of the shoulder and loud scoffing laugh; such a romance as this was not thought worth serious refutation, as coming from so amusing and notorious a gasconade—an uncomplimentary appreciation which he owed to the incurable vanity which always made him set his own figure in the most effective and dramatic positions. But the story is perfectly true, abating some harmless exaggeration. It is to be found set forth in a modest official report addressed to Lafayette, published in the *Moniteur* of August 9th, 1830, and signed by Dumas and the friends who assisted him in the expedition. The names of the various officers whom he forced to submit to him are given at length. When the memoirs were published in 1853, the son of the commandant, Liniers, did, indeed, come forward with an indignant "reclamation" to clear the memory of his father, who was then dead, but his testimony, for he was actually present at the scene in the commander's cabinet, only confirms Dumas' account. The report of the son's letter is merely this: