

# THE GOLDEN BOOK\* MAGAZINE

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THE GOLDEN BOOK is indexed for ready reference in the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature.

# Who's Who *in the* Golden Book



**H**ONORÉ DE BALZAC began writing each night at midnight, and continued at a furious rate until three or four o'clock the next afternoon. Even

then it is hard to understand how, in his fifty-one years, he produced so many hundreds of thousands of words, and still maintained a standard that ranks him one of the great novelists of the world. By 1824, before he was twenty-five years of age, he had written two-score volumes now unheard of, and not included in his collected works—novels in which the true Balzac had not yet shown himself. In 1829, when he had but twenty years more to live, he first found his real manner.

Working always under a pressure of debt—the result of an unfortunate venture into the publishing business, a love of travel, a fancy for collecting beautiful trifles—he produced an average of six full-length novels a year until the time of his death. At the same time, he was producing a succession of short stories—many of them superb—and of plays—most of which would have better remained unwritten.

He first conceived the idea of the *Comédie Humaine* in 1842. Under this title all of his works were to be presented as one great panorama of humanity. It was a stupendous vision, more embracing perhaps than that which any other author has ever had, and it was of course incomplete when he died. Zola compares the gigantic and uneven achievement to a cyclopean palace, with splendid halls and wretched corners, broad corridors and narrow passageways. . . . Balzac's style is not beautiful, but it is forceful. Stories such as "In the Time of the Terror," unvarnished but powerful, depend for their excellence, as do his novels, upon his minute observation, illumined with imagination.



# In the Time of the Terror

By HONORÉ DE BALZAC

*de Balzac*

ON JANUARY 22, 1793, about eight o'clock in the evening, an old lady was walking down the steep incline which ends in front of the Church of Saint Laurente in Paris. It had snowed so hard all day that her footsteps were scarcely audible. The streets were deserted, and the feeling of fear which silence naturally inspires was increased by the remembrance of the terror under which France then groaned. The old lady had met no one on the way, and her eyesight, which had long been failing, did not allow of her distinguishing in the lamplight the few passersby, scattered here and there like shadows along the immense vista of the *faubourg*. She went on bravely alone through the solitude, as if her age were a talisman to preserve her from all harm. When she had passed the Rue des Morts, she thought she could distinguish the firm, heavy tread of a man walking behind her. She fancied it was not the first time that she had heard the sound. She was afraid, thinking that she was being followed, so she tried to walk faster than before, in order to reach a shop-window in which the lights were bright enough for her to test the truth of her suspicions. As soon as she found herself in the gleam of light which streamed out horizontally from the shop, she turned her head suddenly and perceived a human form in the mist. This indistinct glimpse was enough; a feeling of terror fell upon her; she tottered for a moment under it, for now she felt certain that this stranger had accompanied her from the first step she had taken outside her own house. Her desire to escape from this spy gave her strength; incapable of reasoning, she walked twice as fast as before, as though it were possible for her to distance a man necessarily much more active than she. After running for some minutes, she reached a pastry-cook's shop, went in and fell, rather than sat down, on a chair which was standing before the counter. As her hand rattled upon the latch a young woman seated at her embroidery raised her eyes from her work, looked through the square pane of glass, and recognized the old-fashioned violet silk mantle which enveloped the old lady; then she hurriedly opened a drawer, as if to take out something that she had been keeping there for her. Not only did this movement and the expression on the young woman's face betray her desire to get rid of the stranger as soon as possible, as a person whom she did not want to see, but she even let a gesture of impatience escape her when she found the drawer empty. Then, without looking at the lady, she went out hastily from behind the counter into the

back part of the shop and called her husband; he appeared at once.

"Wherever have you put—?" she asked, mysteriously, glancing in the direction of the old lady, and not finishing the sentence.

The pastry-cook could see only the old lady's head-dress, a huge black bonnet, trimmed with violet ribands, but he looked at his wife as much as to say, "Do you think I should leave a thing like that in your counter?" and disappeared. His wife, surprised that the old lady sat so still and silent, went close up to her; when she saw her she was seized with a feeling of compassion, and perhaps of curiosity too. Although the old lady's face was naturally pallid, like the face of a person who practices austerities in secret, it was easy to see that some recent emotion had rendered it even more pallid than usual. Her head-dress was so arranged as to hide her hair, which was white, no doubt from age, for it was evident that she did not wear powder, as there was no sign of it upon the collar of her dress. This absence of ornament gave her face a look of religious severity. Her features were proud and grave. In former times the manners and habits of people of rank were so different from those of the other classes that it was easy then to distinguish a noble. Thus the young woman felt sure that the strange lady was a *ci-devant*, who had at one time been attached to the Court.

"Madame?" said she involuntarily, forgetting, in the respect she inspired, that the title was proscribed.

THE OLD LADY made no answer; she kept her eyes fixed on the shop window, as if some terrible object were depicted on the glass.

"What is the matter, *citoyenne*?" asked the shopman, returning at this moment.

The worthy pastry-cook awoke the lady from her reverie, by handing her a small cardboard box wrapped up in blue paper.

"Nothing, nothing, my friends," she said in a gentle voice.

She raised her eyes to the pastry-cook, as if to thank him by a look; but seeing a red cap upon his head, she cried aloud:

"Ah! you have betrayed me!"

The young woman and her husband answered with a gesture of horror; the stranger blushed, either with relief, or with regret at having suspected them.

"Forgive me!" she said at once, with childish sweetness. Then she drew a gold louis out of her pocket

and gave it to the pastry-cook. "That is the price we agreed upon," said she. There is a state of want recognized instinctively by those in want themselves. The pastry-cook and his wife looked at one another, interchanging the same thought as they glanced at the old lady. The louis was evidently her last. Her hands trembled as she held out the coin to them; she looked at it sorrowfully, but without grudging, though she seemed to be conscious of the full extent of the sacrifice. Hunger and misery were engraved upon her face in as legible characters as her ascetic habits and her present fear. Her clothes still bore the traces of past richness. She was dressed in faded silk, with carefully mended lace, and an elegant though worn mantle—in fact, the rags of former wealth. The shopkeepers, wavering between pity and self-interest, tried to soothe their consciences with words.

"*Citoyenne*, you seem very poorly."

"Would madame like to take anything?" asked the woman, catching up her husband's words.

"We've got some very good broth," said the pastry-cook.

"It's so cold, perhaps you have caught a chill, madame, coming here: you are welcome to rest a bit and warm yourself."

"We are not so black as the devil," said the pastry-cook.

Reassured by the friendly tone of the charitable pastry-cook, the lady admitted that she had been followed by a man, and was afraid to go home alone.

"Is that all?" replied the man with the red cap. "Wait a minute for me, *citoyenne*."

HE GAVE THE LOUIS to his wife; then, moved by that sense of acknowledgment which steals into the heart of a vendor who has received an exorbitant price for goods of slight value, he went and put on his uniform as a *garde national*, took his hat and sword, and returned under arms. But his wife had had time to reflect. As in many other hearts, reflection closed the hand which benevolence had opened. The woman had become frightened: she was afraid her husband would get into trouble, so she plucked at the lapel of his coat to detain him. However, in obedience to an instinct of charity, the good man offered on the spot to escort the old lady.

"It looks as if the man whom the *citoyenne* is afraid of were still prowling round the shop," said the young woman sharply.

"I am afraid he is," frankly admitted the lady.

"Suppose it were a spy? or perhaps there is a conspiracy! Do not go—and take the box away from her."

These words were whispered into the pastry-cook's ear by his wife; they froze the extempore courage which had inflated his breast.

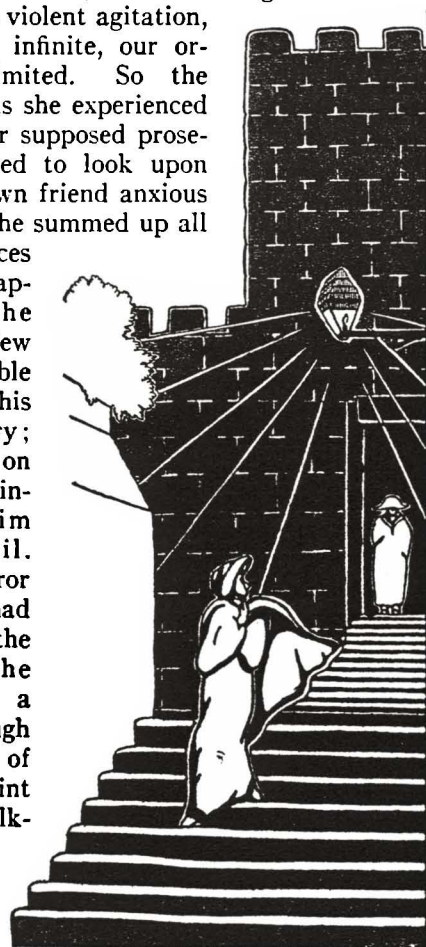
"Eh! I'll just go and say a word to him, and he'll be off in a minute," he exclaimed, opening the door and going out precipitately.

The old lady sat down again on her chair as passive as a child; she looked almost silly. The honest shopman speedily returned: his face, red enough to begin with, and further inflamed by the fire of his oven, had

suddenly become livid; he was so overcome with terror that his legs tottered under him, and his eyes looked like a drunkard's.

"D'you want us to lose our heads, wretched aristocrat!" he cried, furious. "Come, take to your heels, and never show yourself here again. Don't expect me to become a party to conspiracy!"

AS THE PASTRY-COOK uttered these words, he tried to snatch back the little box, which the old lady had put into one of her pockets. But scarcely had the impudent fellow's hands touched her clothes, when the strange lady—preferring to face the dangers of her walk unprotected save by God, rather than lose what she had just purchased—regained all the agility of her youth; she sprang to the door, opened it suddenly, and vanished from the gaze of the pastry-cook and his wife, leaving them trembling and stupefied. As soon as she found herself outside, she set off at a quick walk; but her strength soon failed her, for she heard the heavy footsteps of the spy who was following her so pitilessly, crunching the snow behind her. She was obliged to stop; he stopped too. Whether from fear or lack of intelligence, she did not dare either to speak or to look at him. She went on, walking slowly; then the man slackened his steps, always keeping at a distance from which he was able to watch her. The stranger seemed to be the very shadow of the woman. Nine o'clock as this silent pair passed again before the Church of Saint Laurent. It is in the nature of every heart, even the feeblest, that a feeling of calmness should succeed to violent agitation, for, if feeling is infinite, our organization is limited. So the strange woman, as she experienced no harm from her supposed prosecutor, was inclined to look upon him as an unknown friend anxious to protect her. She summed up all the circumstances attendant on the apparitions of the stranger with a view to discover plausible corroboration of this consoling theory; she was bent on finding out good intentions in him rather than evil. Forgetting the terror with which he had recently inspired the pastry-cook, she passed on with a firm step through the higher parts of the faubourg Saint Martin. After walking for half an hour, she reached a house situated at the



corner formed by the principal street of the faubourg and the street which leads to *la barrière de Pantin*. Even now this is still one of the loneliest places in the whole of Paris. The north wind blows over *les buttes de Saint Chaumont* and *de Belleville*, and whistles through the houses—or rather hovels—sprinkled over a nearly deserted valley, divided by walls of mud and bones. This desolate spot seemed the natural refuge of misery and despair. The man, implacable in his pursuit of this poor creature, who was yet bold enough to traverse those silent streets by night, seemed impressed by the scene that rose before him. He stopped to consider, standing upright in an attitude of hesitation. A lamp, whose flickering flame could scarcely penetrate the mist, cast its faint light upon him. Fright gave the old woman eyes. She thought she could descry a sinister look upon the man's features. She felt her fears reawakening—then, taking advantage of a sort of uncertainty which seemed to make him linger, she glided through the darkness to the door of the solitary house, touched a spring, and was gone as swiftly as a dream. The man stood motionless, looking at the house. In a certain measure it might have served for the type of the wretched dwellings of this faubourg. The crazy cabin was built of ashlar smeared with a coat of plaster, so rotten and with such big cracks that it looked as if the least puff of wind would blow the whole thing down. The roof, covered with brown moss-grown tiles, had sunk in several places, and seemed on the point of falling in under the weight of the snow. There were three windows in each story, the frames mouldering with damp and starting with the action of the sun; it was evident that the cold must find its way through them into the rooms. The house was as isolated as an ancient tower that time has forgotten to destroy. The attics at the top of the wretched building were pierced with windows at irregular intervals, and from these shone a dim light, but the rest of the house was in complete darkness. The old woman had some difficulty in climbing the rough, awkward staircase, up which a rope served for a handrail. She knocked mysteriously at the door of a lodging in the attic; an old man offered her a chair; she sat down in it precipitately.

"Hide! hide!" said she. "Though we only go out so seldom, they know everything we do, and spy out every step we take."

"What is it now?" asked another old woman who was sitting by the fire.

"The man who has been prowling round the house since yesterday morning has been following me this evening."

At these words the three inhabitants of the garret looked at each other; they did not try to conceal the signs of profound terror visible on their faces. The old man was the least agitated of the three, perhaps because he was in the most danger. A brave man, under the burden of great misfortune or under the yoke of persecution, has already—so to speak—begun his self-sacrifice; he looks upon each day of his life only as one more victory gained over fate. It was easy to see from the looks the two women fastened

on the old man that he and he alone was the object of their intense anxiety.

"Why should we cease to trust in God, sisters?" said he in a hollow voice, but with much earnestness: "we sang His praises amid the shouts of the murderers and the cries of the dying in the Carmelite Convent; if He will that I should be saved from the massacre, it was doubtless to preserve me for a destiny that I must endure without murmuring. God protects His own; He can dispose of them according to His will. It is you we must take thought for, not for me."

"No," said one of the two old women, "what are our lives compared with the life of a priest?"

"When I was once outside the Abbaye de Chelles I looked upon myself as dead," exclaimed the nun who had not been out. "Look," said the one who had just come in, "here are the Hosts. . . . But," she exclaimed, "I can hear some one coming up the stairs."

At these words they all three listened; the noise ceased.

"Do not be alarmed," said the priest, "if some one tries to find you. Some one, on whose fidelity we can count, was to take all necessary steps for crossing the frontier, and will come for letters which I have written to le Duc de Langeais and le Marquis de Beauséant, asking them to consider means for rescuing you from this terrible country, and the death or misery which await you here."

"But will you not follow us?" whispered the two nuns eagerly, with a sort of despair.

"My place is where there are victims," said the priest simply.

The women looked at their guest in silence, with holy admiration.

"Sœur Marthe," said he, addressing the sister who had gone out for the Hosts, "this messenger will answer *Fiat voluntas* to the word *Hosanna*."

"There is some one on the stair!" exclaimed the other nun, opening a hiding-place contrived under the roof.

THIS TIME, in the profound silence, they could easily hear the steps, which were covered with lumps of dried mud, creaking under the tread of a man. The priest squeezed with difficulty into a sort of wardrobe, and the nun threw some clothes over him.

"You can shut the door, Sœur Agathe," said he in a muffled voice.

He was scarcely hidden when there were three raps at the door. The two holy women trembled; they took counsel by looks, not daring to pronounce a single word. They appeared to be both about sixty years old. Cut off from the world for forty years, they were like plants accustomed to the atmosphere of a greenhouse, which die if they are put out of it. They were so habituated to convent life that they could not conceive any other. One morning their gratings had been broken down, and they had shuddered at finding themselves free. It is easy to picture the sort of unnatural numbness that the events of the Revolution had produced in their innocent hearts. Incapable of reconciling their monastic ideas with the difficulties



of life, they could not even understand their own situation; they were like children who have been once cared for and then abandoned by their special providence—their mother—praying instead of crying. Thus in the face of the danger they foresaw at this moment, they remained mute and passive, knowing no other defense than Christian resignation. The man who had asked for admittance interpreted their silence as consent; he opened the door at once and presented himself. The two nuns shuddered when they recognized him as the person who had been prowling round their house for some time past collecting information about them. They sat motionless, looking at him with apprehensive curiosity, like a shy child silently staring at a stranger. The man was stout and of lofty stature; there was nothing in his bearing, his manner, or his physiognomy suggestive of an evil nature. He imitated the stillness of the nuns, while his eyes slowly examined the room he had just entered.

Two straw mats, placed on the bare boards, served as beds for the two nuns; there was only one table, in the middle of the room; on it stood some plates, three knives, and a round loaf; a small fire burned in the grate; some pieces of wood piled up in a corner bore further witness to the poverty of the two recluses. The walls were covered with a layer of very old paint, showing, by the stains upon it, the bad condition of the roof, which marked with brown streams the infiltration of the rain. A relic, no doubt rescued from the village of the Abbaye de Chelles, was placed like an ornament upon the mantelpiece. Three chairs, two chests, and a wretched cupboard completed the furniture of the room, but a door near the fireplace suggested that there might be a second.

THE PERSON who had introduced himself under such terrible auspices into the bosom of this family did not take long to make an inventory of their cell. His features assumed an expression of pity as he cast a look of benevolence upon the two women; he was at least as embarrassed as they. The strange silence which they all three kept did not last long, for presently the stranger began to comprehend the moral feebleness and inexperience of the two poor creatures, so he said to them in a voice which he tried to make gentle: "I am not come to you as an enemy, *cito-yennes*—" He stopped short, and then went on: "*Mes sœurs*, if any misfortune should happen to you, believe me it is not I who will have contributed to it. I have a favour to ask of you."



with sadness when he saw this gesture; then he waited to sit down until the two worthy ladies had done so themselves.

"You have given refuge," he went on, "to a venerable priest who has not taken the oaths, who escaped miraculously from a massacre of the Carmelites."

"*Hosanna!*" said Sœur Agathe, interrupting him, and looking at him with nervous curiosity.

"No, I do not think that is his name," he replied.

"But, Monsieur," said Sœur Marthe eagerly, "we have not got any priest here; and——"

"Then you should have been more prudent and wary," answered the stranger, stretching out his hand and taking a breviary from the table. "I do not think that you are likely to know Latin, and——"

He did not go on; the extraordinary emotion expressed by the faces of the poor nuns made him afraid he had gone too far; they trembled, and their eyes filled with tears.

"Do not distress yourselves," he said frankly. "I know the name of your guest and your own; three days ago I learned all about your distress, and your devotion to the venerable Abbé de——"

"Sh!" said Sœur Agathe simply, putting her finger to her lips.

"You see, *mes sœurs*, that if I had conceived the horrible plan of betraying you, I might have already accomplished it more than once."

When the priest heard these words he extricated himself from his prison, and appeared in the middle of the room.

"I cannot believe, Monsieur," said he to the strange man, "that you are one of our persecutors: I trust myself to you. What is it that you want of me?"

The holy confidence of the priest, the noble fervour expressed in all his features, would have disarmed a murderer. The mysterious person who had thus brought excitement into this scene of misery and

They still kept silence.

"If I intrude upon you—if I annoy you, tell me so freely—I will leave you; but I hope you will understand that I am entirely devoted to you; that if there is any service I could render you, command me without fear, for I alone, perhaps—now that there is no king—am above the law."

There was a ring of truth in his words. Sœur Agathe, the nun who belonged to the family of Langeais, and whose manners seemed to show that she had formerly been familiar with brilliant society and had breathed the air of a Court, hastened to point to a chair, as if to invite their visitor to sit down. The stranger showed a sort of pleasure mingled



resignation sat for a moment looking at the group of the three before him; then, assuming a confidential tone, he addressed the priest thus: "Mon père, I came to entreat you to celebrate a requiem mass for the repose of the soul of—of a—of a consecrated person whose body will never rest in hallowed ground." The priest shuddered involuntarily. The two nuns, not yet comprehending to whom the stranger referred, remained in an attitude of curiosity, their necks stretched out and their faces turned to the two speakers. The ecclesiastic scrutinized the man; genuine anxiety was visible in his face, and his eyes expressed ardent supplication.

"*Eh bien!* Come back tonight, at midnight: I shall be ready to celebrate the only funeral office we can offer in expiation of the crime of which you speak."

THE STRANGER TREMBLED, but he looked as if some feeling of satisfaction, at once solemn and sweet, had triumphed over some secret sorrow. After respectfully saluting the priest and the two holy women, he departed with an expression of mute gratitude understood by these three generous hearts. About two hours after this scene, he returned, knocked cautiously at the outer door of the attic, and was received by Mademoiselle de Beauséant, and led into the second room of their humble retreat. Here all had been prepared for the ceremony. Between the two pillars of the chimney-piece the nun had pushed up the old cupboard: its antique shape was hidden under a magnificent altar frontal of green moiré. A large ebony and ivory crucifix was fastened to the yellow wall, making the bareness only more apparent, and of necessity attracting the eye to itself. The sisters had managed to set up four little slender tapers upon this temporary altar, by fastening them to it with sealing wax. The tapers cast a pale light, almost absorbed by the dead walls, their feeble flicker scarcely reaching the rest of the room; it cast its beams only upon the Holy Instruments, as it were, a ray of light falling from heaven upon the naked altar. The floor was reeking with damp. The roof sloped rapidly on both sides like the roof of the other garret, and was scored with cracks through which came the icy blast. Nothing could have been less stately, yet nothing was more solemn than this mournful ceremony. Profound silence, through which the least sound arising from *la route d'Allemagne* could be heard, cast a veil of sombre majesty over the midnight scene. Indeed, the grandeur of the action contrasted strongly with the poverty of the instruments; therefrom arose a feeling of religious awe. On each side of the altar, regardless of the deadly damp, knelt the two aged nuns upon the tiling of the floor, and prayed together with the priest. Clad in his sacrificial vestments, he set out a golden chalice adorned with precious stones, no doubt one of the sacred vessels saved from the pillage of the Abbaye de Chelles. By the side of this ciborium, recalling by its richness the splendour of the monarchy, were placed two glasses, scarcely good enough for the lowest inn, containing the water and the wine for the Holy Sacrifice. For want of a missal, the priest had placed his breviary upon the corner of the altar. A

common towel was put ready for the washing of the innocent and bloodless hands. The whole was infinite yet little; poor but noble; at once holy and profane. The stranger came and knelt down devoutly between the two nuns. The priest had tied a piece of crape around the chalice and the crucifix; having no other means of showing the intention of this requiem mass, he had put God Himself in mourning weeds. Suddenly the man noticed it; he was seized with a memory that held such power over him, that the sweat stood in drops upon his wide and lofty brow. The four silent actors of this scene looked at one another mysteriously. Then their souls, rising with one another in their mutual influence, communicated one to another their own sensations, and were melted together in religious pity. It seemed as if their thought had called upon the martyr whose remains had been devoured by quick-lime, and that his shadow rose before them in all its royal majesty. They were celebrating an *obit* without the body of the dead. Under these gaping laths and tiles four Christians were about to intercede before God for a King of France, were about to celebrate his funeral without the coffin. Here was the purest of all devotion, an astonishing act of fidelity performed without one thought for the future. Doubtless to the eyes of God, it was as the glass of water which weighs in the balance as heavy as the greatest virtues. The whole monarchy was present in the prayers of a priest and two poor women; perhaps, too, the Revolution itself was represented in the man, for his face betrayed too much remorse not to cause the belief that he was fulfilling the vows of a boundless repentance.

INSTEAD OF PRONOUNCING the Latin words, *Introibo ad altare Dei*, etc., the priest, by some divine inspiration, looked upon the three assistants—the symbols there of Christian France—and said to them, as though to blot out the wretchedness of the garret: "We are about to enter into the Sanctuary of God!" At these words, uttered with thrilling earnestness, the server and the two nuns were filled with religious awe. God could not have revealed Himself in greater majesty under the vaults of Saint Peter at Rome, than He revealed Himself then to the eyes of these Christians in this refuge of poverty. The truth is so perfect—that between Him and man every intermediary seems useless, and that He draws His greatness only from Himself. The stranger's devotion was real, the sentiment, too, which united the prayers of these four servants of God and the King was unanimous. The holy words rang through the silence like heavenly music. There was a moment when the stranger was overcome with tears; it was at the *Pater Noster*. The priest added, in Latin, this petition, which the man no doubt understood: *Et remitte scelus regicidis sicut Ludovicus eis remisit semetipse*. (And forgive the regicides as Louis himself forgave them.) The two nuns saw two great tears roll down the stranger's manly cheeks and fall upon the floor. The priest recited the Office for the Dead. The *Domine salvum fac regem* intoned in a low voice, went to the hearts of the faithful Royalists when they remembered that the child-

king, for whom their prayers ascended to the Most High, at the moment was a captive in the hands of his enemies. The stranger shivered at the thought that a new crime might still be committed, wherein he would no doubt be forced to take part. When the funeral service was over, the priest made a sign to the two nuns, and they went out. As soon as he found himself alone with the stranger he went up to him with a sad and gentle air, and said in a fatherly voice: "My son, if you have stained your hands in the blood of the martyr-king, confide in me. There is no sin which cannot be effaced in the eyes of God by repentance as touching and sincere as yours seems to be."

AT THE FIRST WORDS pronounced by the ecclesiastic the stranger let a movement of involuntary terror escape him; but his face recovered its calmness and he looked at the astonished priest with confidence.

"Father," said he in a voice visibly affected, "no one is more innocent than I of the blood shed——"

"I must believe you," said the priest. He paused while he once more scrutinized his penitent; then, persisting in the belief that he was one of those timorous *Conventionnels* who betrayed an inviolable and consecrated head in order to save their own, he replied in a grave voice: "Consider, my son, the fact that you have not coöperated in so great a crime is not sufficient to be absolved from it. Those men who were able to defend the King, and left their swords in their scabbards, will have a very heavy account to render to the King of Heaven. Oh! yes," continued the old priest, shaking his head impressively from right to left—"yes, very heavy!—for, by remaining aloof, they became the passive accomplices of this terrible crime."

"You think," asked the stranger in amazement, "that indirect participation will be punished? The soldier commanded to fall into line—is he then responsible?"

The priest hesitated.

The stranger was glad of the embarrassment into which he had thrown this puritan Royalist, by placing him between the dogma of passive obedience—which, according to the Monarchists, was the essence of all military law—and the equally important dogma which magnifies into sanctity the respect due to the royal person; in the priest's silence he eagerly descried a solution to the doubts which tormented him. Then, in order not to leave the venerable *jansenist* time for further reflection, he said to him: "I should blush to offer you any fee for the funeral service you have just celebrated for the repose of the King's soul and the relief of my conscience; one cannot pay for a thing of inestimable value except by an offering also above price. Will you deign, Monsieur, to accept the gift of a holy

relic which I offer you? The day will come, perhaps, when you will understand its value."

AS THE STRANGER finished these words he presented the ecclesiastic with a little box, which felt extremely light. He took it, as it were, unconsciously, for the man's solemn words, the tone in which he spoke, and the respect with which he held out the box, struck him with the profoundest astonishment. Then they returned into the room where the two nuns were waiting.

"You are in a house," said the stranger, "belonging to a man—Mucius Scaevola, the plasterer, who lives on the first floor—who is well known in the section for his patriotism; but he is secretly attached to the Bourbons. He was formerly huntsman to Monseigneur le Prince de Conti, and owes all his fortune to him. As long as you do not go out of his house, you are safer than in any other place in France. Stay here; there are pious souls who will watch over your wants, and you will be able to wait, without danger, for less evil times. In a year, on the 21st of January"—(as he pronounced these last words he could not hide an involuntary shudder)—"if you do adopt this wretched place for your refuge, I will return to celebrate the expiatory mass with you——"

He did not finish his sentence. Then, saluting the silent inhabitants of the attic, he cast a last look on all the signs of their poverty and disappeared.

For the two innocent nuns, such an adventure assumed all the interest of a romance. As soon, then, as the venerable Abbé had informed them of the mysterious gift which the man had made him so solemnly, they placed the box on the table, and their three anxious faces, faintly lit up by the light of a tallow dip, betrayed an indescribable curiosity. Mademoiselle de Langeais opened the box, and found a very fine batiste handkerchief, soiled with sweat; when they unfolded it they found that there were stains upon it.

"It is blood!" said the priest.

"It is marked with the royal crown!" exclaimed the other sister.

The two nuns dropped the precious relic in horror. For these two simple souls the mystery which enveloped the stranger became inexplicable; as to the priest, from that day he did not even attempt to account for it.

The three prisoners soon perceived, in spite of the Terror, that a powerful hand was stretched out over them. First, they received provisions and fuel; then, the two nuns discovered that there must be a woman coöperating with their protector, for linen and clothes were sent them which enabled them to go out without exciting remark by the aristocratic fashion of the dresses



which they had been obliged to continue to wear; finally, Mucius Scaevola gave them two *cartes civiques*. From time to time warnings necessary to the safety of the priest reached them in roundabout ways. These counsels came so opportunely that they were convinced they could only have been given by a person initiated into secrets of state. In spite of the famine which weighed over Paris, these outlaws found rations of white bread regularly brought to the door of their cabin by invisible hands; however, they thought they had discovered in Mucius Scaevola the mysterious agent of these benefactions, which were always both suitably timed and ingeniously carried out. The three nobles, then, who continued to dwell in the same attic, could not doubt that the protector was the person who had come to celebrate the mass of expiation during the night of the 22nd of January, 1793; thus he became the object of their special devotion; he was their only hope, they lived through him alone. They had added to their prayer special prayers for him; night and morning the pious creatures offered their vows for his happiness, prosperity, and safety; they besought God to keep far from him every snare, to deliver him from his enemies and grant him a long and peaceful life. To their gratitude, renewed so to speak every day, was necessarily allied a feeling of curiosity which grew each day more intense. The circumstances that had attended the stranger's apparition were the subject of their conversations; they formed a thousand conjectures concerning him; even the mere distraction of thought which he caused was a fresh source of advantage to them. They promised themselves to make sure of not letting him escape from their gratitude the evening he would come back, according to his promise, to celebrate the sad anniversary of the death of Louis XVI. That night, so impatiently awaited, arrived at last. At midnight, the sound of the stranger's heavy footsteps was heard upon the old wooden staircase; the room had been prepared to receive him, the altar was vested. This time the sisters opened the door to greet him, and both hastened to the stairs with a light. Mademoiselle de Langeais even went a few steps down in order to see their benefactor the sooner.

"Come," she said kindly, in a voice broken by emotion—"come, we were expecting you."

**T**HE MAN RAISED his head, cast a sombre look at the nun, and made no answer. She felt as if a mantle of ice had fallen upon her; she was silent. Gratitude and curiosity expired in their hearts at the sight of him. Perhaps he seemed to them, whose hearts were excited by sentiment and disposed to expand into friendship, more chilling, taciturn, and terrible than he

really was. The three poor prisoners comprehended that he desired to remain a stranger to them, and resigned themselves. The priest fancied he saw a smile upon the man's lips at the moment he perceived the preparation that they had made for his reception; but he immediately repressed it. He heard mass and prayed, then he departed, after having replied with a few polite words of refusal to Mademoiselle de Langeais's invitation to partake of the little collation which they had prepared.

**A**FTER THE 9TH OF THERMIDOR, the nuns and the Abbé de Marolles were able to walk through Paris without the least risk. The first expedition which the Abbé made was to a perfumery shop, at the sign of *La Rein des fleurs*, kept by a *citoyen* and *citoyenne* Ragon, late perfumers to the Court, who remained faithful to the royal family, and whom the Vendéans made use of to correspond with the Princes and the Royalist Committee in Paris. The Abbé, dressed as the times required, was just at the doorstep of this shop, which was situated between Saint Roche and *la rue des Trondeurs*—when a crowd that filled *la rue Saint Honoré* prevented his going out.

"What's this?" said he to Madame Ragon.

"It is nothing," she replied; "only the tumbril and the executioner going to *la Place Louis XV*. Ah! we saw it often enough last year; but today, just four days after the anniversary of the Twenty-first of January, one can look at the ghastly procession without any pain."

"Why!" said the Abbé, "what you say is not Christian."

"Ah! but it is the execution of Robespierre's accomplices. They defended themselves as long as they could, but now it's their turn—over there, where they have sent so many innocent men."

The crowd filled *la rue Saint Honoré*, and passed by like a flood. The Abbé de Marolles, yielding to an impulse of curiosity, looked, and saw above the heads of the crowd, standing erect on the tumbril, the man who had heard his mass three days before.

"Who is it?" said he; "the man——"

"It's the executioner," answered Monsieur Ragon, calling him by his title under the monarchy.

"*Mon ami, mon ami!*" cried Madame Ragon; "Monsieur d'Abbé is dying!" and the old lady fetched a flask of vinegar to bring the priest to his senses, for he had fainted. "No doubt what he gave me," said the venerable Abbé, "was the handkerchief with which the King wiped his face when he was going to his martyrdom—Poor man! The axe had a heart in its steel when all France was without one!"

The perfumers thought the poor priest was delirious.