

Ashes of Empire.

By ROBERT W. CHAMBERS.

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CHAPTER X. The Prophecy.

The Rue d'Ypres was a surging turmoil. Swarms of eager, anxious people thronged the street and the ramparts, where an irregular cloud of white smoke hung, half concealing the "Propheet." A company of line soldiers were driving the crowd back to the sidewalk, a mounted gendarme shouted orders and wheeled his horse right and left, white-gloved hand raised, the grenade on his back, glittering like a live coal.

"From everywhere came a murmur, growing louder, deeper, more persistent. 'The Prussians! The Prussians! The Prussians!' until the monotonous chant swept from the Porte Rouge to the Prince Murat barracks like the thrill of a tense chord, deep, strong, trembling, vibrating in the arches of the sky.

"The Ulmans were signalled near 'Hay,' cried a boy, raising himself on the point of his wooden shoes to catch a glimpse of the "Propheet."

"Can one see the Prussians out there?" asked a woman, looking up anxiously at Hilde, who leaned from the window.

"I see nothing, madame," replied Hilde, faintly.

"They're there," insisted a man in a blue blouse. "The Prussians are in Meudon woods, madame."

"Who saw them?" asked a dozen voices at once.

"How do I know? Everybody says they're there."

"They're over by that spit—one could see them with a glass," said an old man, who immediately became the center of attention.

"What spit?" demanded the man in the blue blouse.

"Can you see them? Are there many?" asked another.

"The Ulmans! The Ulmans!" shouted the crowd.

through the palace grounds, starting up at the exquisite gray facade with unaccustomed emotion of curiosity and apprehension.

A group of mounted officers, returning from an inspection of the Haras carrefour, passed slowly beneath the terraces, spurs and helmets jingling, breastplates glittering like mirrors.

"Who's that?" asked Bourke.

"General Bellemare, commanding at St. Denis," said Harewood. "He's going to let me know when anything is up in that direction."

It was sunset before they rose to go, with a last glance at the distant splendor of the arch of pearl, the obelisk to a flaming torch—battlements, spires, bridges, impalpable as structures of opalescent mist, faded enchantment-waves, fainter, dimmer, until in the rose-haze a star broke out, another glimmered in the zenith.

"Come on," said Bourke, strapping his binocular and starting down the terrace steps.

Harewood followed him, entering the belvedere. Just as the cupressus rode out of the court, in the twilight one of the passing cavaliers stopped, calling to Harewood in English, tinged with an accent:

"It is you, my friend? Ma foi, you are not amiable—no, scarcely amiable. I am glad to see you again."

Harewood shook hands with him as the horse passed, saying: "Good evening, General Bellemare. I am coming to see you at St. Denis soon."

"I shall expect you," said General Bellemare, turning in his saddle. "Don't forget to see me at the Bois de Boulogne," and passed on with the cavalry into the dusk, saluting them both with easy grace.

The two Americans pursued their way toward the river, saying little to each other until they were standing on the deck of a steamer, speeding through the twilight under the high viaduct of the Point du Jour.

Red and green lights on the fleet of river gunboats sparkled under the shadowy arches of the viaduct. On the eastern bastions an electric light sparkled, blue and blinding, casting luminous shadows over quay and dock and long rows of polished siege guns, lying on car-trucks below the ramparts.

Other boats passed them, clustered lights on bow and stern, rows of illuminated windows and ports staining the dark waters with golden beams as they passed. The little waves danced along the wake, criss-crossed with green and crimson streaks, distorting the lantern reflections until the black water surged under a polished surface, shot to its depth with jagged, trembling shafts of colored light.

trumpeter rode by, a trooper carrying a guidon, staff in stirrup, followed, then, all alone, came a general, sombre face shadowed, gilded cash, chapeau and epaulettes glittering with woven gold. Under his cocked hat his dreamy eyes looked out into the glare unseeing. He saw neither torch nor shadow, nor the steel blades of sword—his, the mystic, the oracle of vagueness, the apostle of mystery—this Breton governor of Paris, General Trochu.

So he passed with his armored troop, a remnant of ancient pageantry, a Breton of emblematized chronicles, silent, vague-eyed, dreaming dreams of chivalry and paradise, and the blessed saint whose filmy veil was a shield of God for the innocent.

When the last squadron had tramped past and was blotted out in the darkness Bourke flung and found seats at a table between a soldier of the National Guard and one of Franchetti's scouts.

The latter was taunting the National Guardsman with the indiscipline of his battalion; the guardsman answered sulkily, and saved away at his steak, washing huge mouthfuls down with goblets of red wine.

"You and your major, eh?" sneered the scout. "Tell me, my friend, since you have a battalion of the National Guard, do you have a major?"

"I have it to these two gentlemen," here he turned and nodded at Bourke and Harewood—"I leave it to these gentlemen if it is possible for a National Guard bat-

alion to have a major unless it's a company of fanatics!"

"Fantoche yourself!" shouted the guardsman, stung to fury by the taunt; "let me tell you that Major Florens is major because he's accepted the command of three Belleville battalions. If you don't like it go up to the undertaker's tonight and say so to Bourke—and see what happens."

"Who is Bourke?" inquired the scout sarcastically.

The guardsman swallowed a mouthful of bread, emptied his goblet, smacked his lips and said: "None of your business."

"Bourke?" he repeated under his breath.

"It wouldn't surprise me," muttered Harewood, "if that ruffian is in Paris, the 'Undertaker' is just the place for him."

They ate in silence for awhile, preoccupied with this bit of news, news which they knew was well worth cabling to America. Forger, murderer and incendiary, Jack Bourke had at last been caught during the riot in New York, and, after being clubbed into insensibility, had been locked in the Tombs prison to be dealt with later.

CHAPTER XI.—The Undertakers.

The Reign of Terror inoculated Paris with a virus, the first symptom of which was an eruption of "clubs." A hundred years later the city was again violently infected. The Third Empire, poisoned Paris, and a fresh outbreak of "clubs" resulted, aggravated by the declaration of war in July, 1870. Now that the German armies were closing in on the city, the irresponsible mania for organizing clubs increased to such an extent that in certain quarters of Paris every street had its club. And of all the clubs organized to discuss politics or to combat political parties, the grimmest, the most sinister, the most thoroughly revolutionary, was the so-called "Undertakers' club" of Belleville.

In the beginning this club had been extremely radical, but perfectly sane. It flouted into life with the birth of the Third Empire, blazed like a comet during the fallades of the boulevard and streets, and finally went out like a greasy candle, leaving a doubtful stench in the city. The flame, however, was relighted when Napoleon III. declared war against his "good

crowd, the stench, the furious fulminations from militant anarchists, denouncing everything, including the Maker of everything, sharpened pencils, or flicked the ashes from good cigars under the very noses—in the very faces—of the most irresponsible crowd of ruffians that ever gathered to encourage each other's criminal instincts. Mortier began to speak, rising on his crooked legs, his long throat swathed in a red handkerchief. Under the grotesque dome of his bald forehead his villainous face contracted till the scraggy beard bristled. When he opened the black cavern of his mouth a single tooth broke the monotony of his grinning gums.

He spoke for a long time, his piercing voice splitting the choked atmosphere till the crowd howled again and the dreadful tumult broke back from the echoing rafters into a very hell of sound.

Florens followed, speaking first earnestly, then with frightful impetuosity. He stepped to the platform before his desk and stretched out his arm. Every movement set the gaslight glittering and shimmering over the gilded arabesques on his uniform. The crowd roared, mad with exultation.

"Bourke!" he cried, "you have organized your battalion, you have added your voice to the voices of the other two battalions; a legion has been formed. Major Florens is your leader."

"The government says that he is not. We differ from the government—we expect to differ more seriously still—when the time comes. At present we can afford to wait. But—politics change, so do flags, so does what is now called patriotism."

"Citizen Mortier has reminded you that universal brotherhood is not compatible with patriotism; that the red flag of revolt is the universal banner of human brotherhood, that there is nobler game for your rifle bullets than the hearts of battle-driven peasants, who, although Prussians, are your brothers and your comrades in arms against the wealth of all the world. It is well to bear this in mind—and wait."

"And now, as you have elected Major Florens chief of the new legion, and as you have elected me commandant of your battalion, I ask you for the privilege of naming to you two of my fellow countrymen for election as captains in the Third Battalion."

"Name them! Name them!" shouted the crowd.

Bourke leaned over the balcony, clutching Harewood's arm.

"By heaven!" he whispered, "do you see who he's going to name?"

Harewood, mute with astonishment, stared down at the platform, where two men had mounted from the crowded floor and now stood facing Bourke. Bourke's eyes snapped as Speyer and Stauffer marched up to be invested with the badge of anarchy. The crowd howled, drums and bugles crashed out, the meeting was at an end.

Suddenly, in the midst of the tumult, Harewood felt that somebody on the swarming floor below was looking straight at him. He turned his head unthinkingly. Bourke's colorless eyes met his own. For a full minute they gazed silently at each other across that smoke-reeking chaos. The bugle's crackling rattle, the crashing of brass drums, the echoing howl died away in Harewood's ears. He only heard a clear, penetrating voice repeating, "Silence, silence, silence!"

As they reached the last step and started to push through the crowded doors a hand fell lightly on Harewood's shoulder. Bourke stood beside him.

The involuntary start that Harewood gave communicated itself to Bourke. He also turned to confront Speyer and Stauffer. "Gentlemen," said Bourke, speaking in English, "your faces are familiar to me. Captain Speyer tells me that you are New York reporters. Do you know me?"

"Yes," said Harewood, sullenly. Bourke's pale eyes stole around to Bourke, directly to Harewood.

"Of course," he said placidly, "if you cable anything unplesant about me I'll have your throat cut."

Harewood started on again toward the door, but Speyer jerked him back, saying slyly: "Listen. Do you hear and Bourke added quietly: "You'd better listen."

If Bourke had not gripped Harewood's arm in time Speyer's face would have suffered. With clenched fists Harewood pushed toward him. Bourke flung him back, showing his teeth slightly, his face distorted with that ghastly smile that none dared meet antagonize Belleville at such a moment.

When Bourke and Harewood entered the hall nobody apparently paid them the slightest attention. They slipped quietly upstairs to the wooden gallery, found a seat on the steps between two aisles, and there was a rush for the tumult below. Bourke found himself out in the open, a thick fog of tobacco smoke hung over everything, through which his jets below, with pale, attenuated, spear-like frames. High on the right flourens, young, flushed, handsome, blue eyes darted and nostrils fairly quivering with impatience; on the left sat Mortier, all body and bony legs, with the holding up a tattered sleeve, "I've a mind to use my revolver next time, and I'll do it, too! Idiots! I'll show them who my spy-yes, I will, Cecil!"

"You'd better not," said Bourke, grimly, regarding his own disheveled attire. "There's no telling what your Parisians may do in this crisis. Jim, you heard what that ruffian said about Bourke's? Of course, we'll cable it—but what would you think of arresting the fellow and getting the government to hold him for extradition?"

"Government? What government? Not this crazy aggregation in Paris? What's that ruffian saying about Bourke's? Of course, we'll cable it—but what would you think of arresting the fellow and getting the government to hold him for extradition?"

"You remember I have a friend at court there, the Mouse," he said, "and, as you suggested, it's possible that he may attempt to cut our throats as an expression of good will."

Bourke hesitated. He looked sharply at Harewood, reflected a little, curious to know how his comrade would set.

"Do you care to go?" he asked after a pause.

"Yes, if you are going," replied Harewood pleasantly.

"Come along, then," said Bourke, wondering whether Harewood had accepted the risk through recklessness, a reporter's instinct of rivalry, or his unwillingness to let him take the risk alone.

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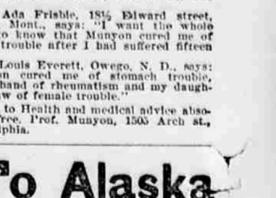
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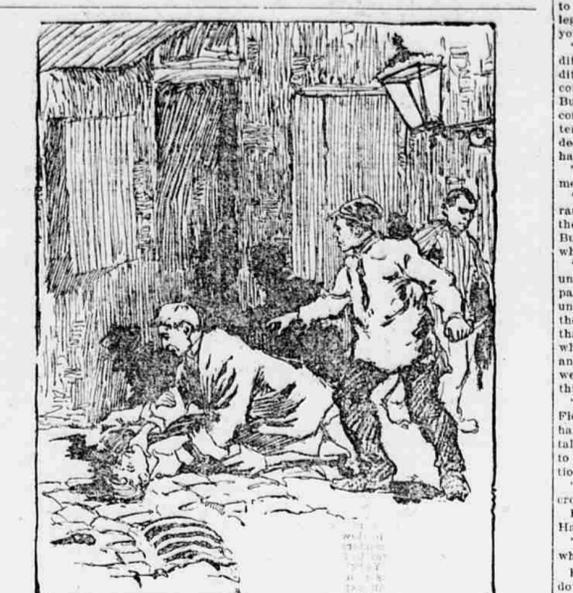
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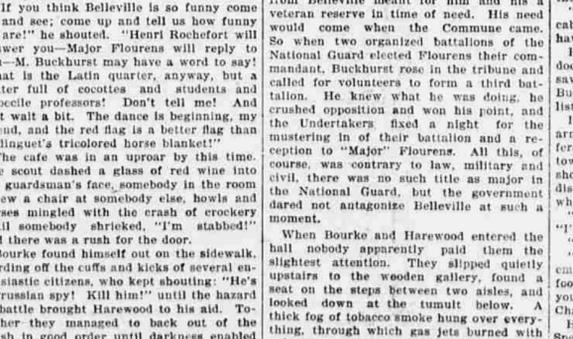


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