

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 "Prophet." 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 "Prophet."

"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.

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 cupolas rose 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 bring your revolver, either," 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 vantage 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.

"That's the gunboat Farcy," said Bourke, as a shadowy shape loomed up in mid-stream. "She's got a big gun aboard, but, to my thinking, the recoil must raise the mischief with her pieces."

Already the dark, endless facade of the Louvre appeared on the left, bridge after bridge spanned the river, bright with festoons of gas lamps, until a black bulk surged up before them, crowned with clustered pinacles, lighted only by the stars. It was the City. Their voyage had come to its end.

As they climbed the steps of the quay below the Palais de Justice, away in the south a ball of fire sped up into the sky and burst, spraying the night with vermilion stars.

"What's that signal?" muttered Bourke.

The distant report of a cannon confirmed the answer that the newboys were shouting along the boulevard: "Extra! The Orleans railway blown up between Ablon and Athis! The Prussians have reached the forest of Senart! Extra!"

Harewood bought a paper and stood reading it under a gas jet, while on every side an increasing tumult arose from the crowded sidewalks as rocket after rocket whirled up into the night and the dull thud muttered from the forts of the west.

In the glare of the lighted shop windows black masses of people gathered, gesticulating, blocking the street, hanging in knots under the gas lamps, where some boulevard orator alternately read from a newspaper and harangued his neighbors. Hoarse voices with the sinister intonation

of alarm bells dominated the deeper hum of the multitude—insistent voices, clamorous disaster. "Extra! extra!"—every discordant cry rang out harsh and tense, vibrating with the mail of prophecy.

"It's true," said Harewood, soberly. "The Prussians have cut the Orleans railroad near Athis."

"He handed the journal to Bourke, adding: 'There'll be the devil to pay in the streets tonight. I've a mind to stay here and dine at the Cafe Rouge. What do you say?'"

"I told Yoleto not to expect us," replied Bourke, "so it's all right. Come on."

They threaded their way through the crowd, crossed the street and traversed the Place St. Michel, where a jam of omnibuses and cabs, huddled in a jam, blocked the passage of a battery of artillery.

The black mass silhouetted of riders, towering in their high saddles, crossed and recrossed the gaunt bridge; here a horse's head tossed, sharply outlined; here the slim shape of a cannon detached itself from the shadowy chaos.

As they pressed on up the hill of the St. Michel and entered the brightly lighted terrace of the Cafe Rouge cavaliers were passing through the Boulevard St. Germain, sabres, caissons and polished armor shining, criss-crossed with mirrored reflections from the flaming torches borne by single cavaliers. A

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 swordsmen, 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 emblazoned chronicles, silent, vague-eyed, dreaming dreams of chivalry and paradise, and the blessed sainte 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 followed by Harewood, entered the Cafe Rouge 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 leave 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-

talion 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 looked at Harewood.

"Bourke!" he repeated under his breath.

"It wouldn't surprise me," muttered Harewood, "if that ruffian is in Paris, the 'Undertakers' 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 Buckhurst had at last been caught during the dark riots in New York, and, after being clubbed into insensibility, had been locked in the Tombs prison to be dealt with later.

The next day the warden reported him dying; the next day after he was gone, but not to let. Where he had gone the authorities tried for awhile to find out, until at last the fame of his exploits faded into legendry and nothing was left of his memory except an occasional line in a newspaper and a faded photograph in the Rogues' gallery.

The scout began again to tease the National Guardsman, asking sneering questions about Belleville and the battalions quartered there, until the guardsman jumped up in a rage, cursing impartially the whole Latin quarter.

"If you think Belleville is so funny come up and see; come up and tell us how funny we are!" he shouted. "Henri Rochefort will answer you—Major Florens will reply to you—M. Buckhurst may have a word to say! What is the Latin quarter, anyway, but a gutter full of cocottes and students and imbecile professors! Don't tell me! And just wait a bit. The dance is beginning, my friend, and the red flag is a better flag than Balaugue's tri-colored one."

The scout dashed a glass of red wine into the guardsman's face, somebody in the room threw a chair at somebody else, howls and curses mingled with the crash of crockery until somebody shrieked, "I'm stabbed!" and there was a rush for the sidewalk, warding off the cuts and kicks of several enthusiastic citizens, who kept shouting: "He's a Prussian spy! Kill him!" until the hazard of battle brought Harewood to his aid.

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.

"Buckhurst arose.

At the first quiet word a hush fell over the hall. His voice was placid, passionless, cool, and grateful as summer showers.

"Citizens," he said, "you have organized your battalion, you have added your voices 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 at every step which we make in the name of the Palais Bourbon will be commanded by orders issued from the Hotel de Ville. The undertakers need a larger hall—the Hotel de Ville is not too large."

The frantic cheering checked him for a moment. Then he resumed: "For a time it is best that we go to the ramparts, that we fight the Prussians under the tricolor. This is policy—for the moment. But—policies 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 Buckhurst.

The two men were Speyer and Stauffer. Amid a whirlwind of applause their names were presented and accepted. Buckhurst administered the oath. Florens dramatically returned their salutes. Mortier, his ape-like face alighted a dull red with excitement, sat back in his seat, on which lay a pile of red coarles. His little insane 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. Buckhurst's cold, less eyes met his own. For a full minute they gazed silently at each other across that smoke-reeking chaos. The bugle's ear-splitting racket, 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!"

Speyer and Stauffer, with his eyes still fixed on him, touched Speyer on the elbow. Stauffer, too, was looking up now. Speyer had turned livid when he saw Harewood.

"Come," muttered Bourke, "we might as well get out of this, and be moved toward the gateway. Harewood following.

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



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