

THE MARTYRDOM OF DREYFUS.

[Extracts from his personal letters to his wife from prison—His degradation before the French army—fifty months of suffering at the Ile du Diable.]

The universal interest in the new trial of Dreyfus, now proceeding at Rennes, makes especially timely L. G. Moreau's translation of "The Letters of Captain Dreyfus to His Wife," which has just been brought out. The reader who expects to find in the epistles arguments tending to prove the innocence of the writer will be disappointed, for even if he actually attempted defense it was not allowed to pass the censor. Only a persistent declaration of innocence will be found—a declaration that is repeated with awful and tragic monotony. When her husband was convicted, Mme. Dreyfus attempted to reply in *Le Figaro* to the many vicious calumnies which were heaped upon him, but Parisians laughed at her, declaring that she was not the only deceived wife in the world. Finally, wearied of the unequal combat—one woman against a whole horde of anti-Semitic vilifiers—she published this volume of his letters, which she called "Les Lettres d'un Innocent," to rehabilitate the prisoner as a husband and a father in the eyes of Frenchmen.

In his introduction, "Dreyfus, the Man," Walter Littlefield says:

"In August, 1894, Commandant Comte Walsin-Esterhazy, who was carrying on treasonable negotiations with the German embassy in Paris, sent to Lieutenant-Colonel von Schwarzkoppen some notes of information, together with a memorandum. This memorandum, or "bordereau," fell into the hands of a French spy. It was taken to the secret intelligence department. Its importance as revealing the presence of a traitor who had access to the secrets of the war office was at once recognized. General Mercier, then minister of war, placed the investigation in the hands of Commandant du Paty de Clam. Owing to the similarity between the handwriting in the "bordereau" and that of Dreyfus, this officer was suspected of being its author. He was arrested and taken to the military prison of Cherche Midi."

Commandant Forzinetti was in charge of Cherche Midi. His first impression of the prisoner as deposed before the court of cassation was as follows:

"I went to Captain Dreyfus. He was terribly excited. I had before me a man bereft of reason, with bloodshot eyes. He had upset everything in his room. I succeeded, after some trouble, in quieting him. I had an intuition that this officer was innocent. He begged me to allow him some writing materials, so that he might ask the minister of war to be heard by him or by one of the general officers of the ministry. He described to me the details of his arrest, which were neither dignified

nor soldierly.'" On October 24 Mercier asked Forzinetti what he thought of the prisoner's guilt. This was the reply: "They are evidently on a false scent. This officer is not guilty."

On December 5, 1894, Dreyfus wrote his first letter to his wife from the prison of Cherche Midi:

"At last I can write a word to you; they have just told me that my trial is set for the nineteenth of this month. I am refused the right to see you. I will not tell you that I have suffered; there are not in the world words strong enough to express it. Do you remember when I used to tell you how happy we were? Everything in life smiled on us. Then all at once a fearful thunderbolt; my brain is still reeling with the shock. For me to be accused of the most monstrous crime that a soldier can commit! Even today I feel that I must be the victim of an awful nightmare. But I hope in God and in justice. In the end the truth must come to light. My conscience is calm and tranquil. It reproaches me with nothing. I have done my duty, never have I turned from it. I have been crushed to the earth, buried in my dark prison; alone with my reeling brain. There have been moments when I have been nearly crazed, ferocious, beside myself, but even in those moments my conscience was on guard. 'Hold up thy head!' it said to me. 'Look the world in the face! Strong in thy conscience, go straight onward! Rise! The trial is bitter, but it must be undergone!'"

Two days later he wrote:

"I am waiting with impatience for a letter from you. You are my hope; you are my consolation; were it not for you life would be a burden. At the bare thought that they could accuse me of a crime so frightful, so monstrous, my whole being trembles; my body revolts against it. To have worked all my life for one thing alone, to avenge my country, to struggle for her against the infamous ravisher who has snatched from us our dear Alsace, and then to be accused of treason against that country—no, my loved one, my mind refuses to comprehend it! Do you remember my telling you how, when I was in Mulhouse, ten years ago, in September, I heard a German band under our windows celebrating the anniversary of Sedan? My grief was such that I wept; I bit the sheets of my bed with rage, and I swore an oath to consecrate all my strength, all my intelligence, to the service of my country against those who thus offered insult to the grief of Alsace. No, no. I will not speak of it, for I shall go mad, and I must preserve my reason. Moreover, my life has henceforth but one aim: To find the wretch who has betrayed his country, to find the traitor, for whom no punishment could be too severe. * * * If I had not my honor to defend, I assure

you that I should prefer death: at least, death would be forgetfulness."

On December 11 he supplicated his wife not to go to his trial:

"It can do no good for you to impose new sufferings upon yourself; those that you have already borne, with a grandeur of soul and with a heroism of which I am proud, are more than sufficient. Save your strength for our children. We shall need all our united strength to care for each other, to help each other to forget this terrible trial."

That he expected to be acquitted is evident from the following extract from a letter dated December 14:

"I am convinced that eventually the truth will be known; that the assurance of my innocence will be finally borne in upon all minds. At my trial I shall be judged by soldiers as loyal and as honest as myself. They will recognize—I am sure of it—the error that has been committed. Error, unhappily, is a human thing."

Nearly every day du Paty de Clam visited Dreyfus and tried in every way to force a confession. The position of Minister of War Mercier was this:

"For months a campaign had been carried on against him in the radical press. One fortunate act would vindicate him—the conviction of a traitor. It is impossible that he could have long entertained a belief in the guilt of the prisoner. Yet, having in the first flush of seeming success publicly accused him, he dare not draw back. Thus his reputation, and very possibly the existence of the cabinet, became staked on the conviction. On the nineteenth of December the court-martial began. Forged evidence was introduced unknown to the prisoner or to his counsel, and the criminal code was grossly violated."

As a result Dreyfus was convicted on the 23d. That evening he wrote:

"To be innocent, to have lived a life without a stain, and to be condemned for the most monstrous crime a soldier can commit! What could be more terrible? It seems to me at times that I am the victim of an awful nightmare.

* * * No matter what may become of me, search for the truth; move earth and Heaven to discover it; sink in the effort, if need be, all our fortune, to rehabilitate my name, which now is dragged through the mud. No matter what may be the cost, we must wash out the unmerited stain."

Mme. Dreyfus' courage and devotion during these trying days led her husband to pay her this touching tribute:

"You are sublime, my adored one, and I am amazed at your courage and your heroism. I loved you before. Today I kneel before you, for you are a sublime woman. * * * It may be that in my desire to be worthy of