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THE MARQUIS OF BOLIBAR

Translated from the German by John Brownjohn

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THE MARQUIS OF BOLIBAR

The death of Eduard von Jochberg occurred at Dillenburg, a small town in the former Duchy of Nassau, not long before the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War. An eccentric and almost pathologically uncommunicative old gentleman, he spent most of each year on his country estate. It was only toward the end of his life, when his health began to fail, that he moved to the little market town for good.

None of Herr von Jochberg's few close acquaintances — horses and hounds were his principal companions — knew that he was an old soldier who had, in his youth, participated in some of Napoleon I's campaigns. No one had ever heard him allude to his experiences during this period of his life, far less describe them in detail. Those who had known him were all the more surprised, therefore, when his personal effects yielded a bundle of manuscript, neatly tied and sealed, which proved on close scrutiny to be his recollections of the Peninsular War.

This unexpected find caused a considerable stir throughout the province of Nassau and in the adjoining Grand Duchy of Hesse. Articles on Herr von Jochberg's memoirs appeared in the local press together with long excerpts therefrom; scholars of repute inspected them; and the dead man's heirs — his nephew Wilhelm von Jochberg, a lecturer at Bonn University, and an elderly lady from Aachen named Fräulein von Härtung — were bombarded with offers by publishers. In short, Herr von Jochberg's memoirs were on everyone's lips, and even the war, which broke out soon afterward, proved insufficient to dispel all public interest in them.

Why? Because they dealt with an obscure and hitherto unexplained chapter in German military history: the annihilation by Spanish guerrillas of two local regiments, the Nassau and the Prince of Hesse's Own.

Little information about this episode in the Spanish campaign can be gleaned from the literature on the subject. August Scherbruch, a captain in the service of the Grand Duchy of Hesse and a noted military historian of the Napoleonic era, devotes only two-and-a-half lines to "the tragedy of La Bisbal" in *Der Kampf auf der Pyrenäischen Halbinsel, 1807-1813*, a six-volume work published by C. A. Schwab and Co. of Halle. Stranger still, Dr Hermann Schwartz, a Darmstadt historian who published an extremely painstaking account of the part played in Napoleon I's campaigns by Hessian troops, makes no reference whatever to the fact that two regiments belonging to the Confederation of the Rhine were wiped out to a man. It also escapes mention in the less comprehensive works by Kraus, Leistikov, and Fischer-Tübingen. A critical study entitled *Die Rheinbundtruppen in Spanien. Ein Beitrag zur Strategie der Unvernunft* (Karlsruhe 1826) and published anonymously, doubtless by an officer discharged from the forces of Baden, is the only one to deal at length with "the catastrophe of La Bisbal", but without contributing any details of moment. It does, however, identify the officer commanding both regiments as Colonel von Leslie, a name that recurs in Lieutenant von Jochberg's memoirs.

Not unnaturally, somewhat fuller accounts are given by the opposing side. Among the major works available to me I would cite that by Don Silvio Gaeta, a colonel on the Spanish General Staff, who concludes that the defeat of the German troops at La Bisbal represented a definite turning point in the course of the campaign and crucially affected General Cuesta's further operations. Simon Ventura, an apothecary who, in addition to a life of Santa Maria de'Pazzi, a *Handbook for Amateurs of Fungi* and *The Tulip Festival*, a tragedy rather too turgid in style for the modern taste, wrote a history of his native La Bisbal, displays a largely accurate but purely superficial knowledge of the course of events.

Pedro Orosco, too, mentions the destruction of the two regiments in *Los jefes de la guerilla en la Asturias*, a work of which I possess one of the few extant copies, though his account teems with glaring errors and inaccuracies.

All in all, however, these and other Spanish historical works do little or nothing to explain the astonishing fact that both German regiments vanished without trace. Lieutenant von Jochberg's literary remains alone shed light on the strange events that ultimately conduced to the tragedy at La Bisbal.

If Jochberg's account is correct, it presents us with a phenomenon unique in the annals of military history: *the annihilation of the Nassau Regiment was directly occasioned - indeed, almost deliberately engineered - by its own officers!* Despite the modern tendency to enlist explanations of an occult and mystical nature, not to mention concepts such as the "death wish" or autosuggestion, one finds this hard to credit. Professional historians will doubtless take a sceptical view of Lieutenant von Jochberg's memoirs and dismiss them as unduly fanciful. Far be it from me to censure them on that account. After all, how great a critical faculty can one attribute to a man who became convinced that one of the persons he encountered in Spain was the legendary Wandering Jew?

Lieutenant von Jochberg's reminiscences have been abridged to some two-thirds of their original length. Many passages not directly relevant to the subject - an account of the fighting at Talavera and Torres Vedras, a description of the so-called "stick dance" at La Bisbal, sundry digressions and conversations of a political, philosophical and literary nature, an appreciation of the art treasures in La Bisbal's town hall, and a long-winded exposition of the genealogical ties between Jochberg's family and that of Captain Count Schenk zu Castel-Borckenstein - all these have fallen prey to the editor's pencil. While denying the reader much that is of historical interest, this has enhanced the narrative's impact and inherent suspense.

And now let Lieutenant von Jochberg himself recount the singular experiences he underwent at La Bisbal, a town in the Asturian highlands, during the winter of 1812.

It was eight in the morning when we at last sighted the two white church towers of La Bisbal. We were soaked to the skin, I and my fifteen dragoons and Captain von Eglofstein, the regimental adjutant, who had come to negotiate with the *alcalde*, or mayor of the town.

Our regiment had, the previous day, survived a fierce encounter with the guerrillas under the Colonel Saracho, whom our men for some reason unknown to me - perhaps on account of his corpulent figure - called the "Tanner's Tub". Having succeeded toward nightfall in scattering the rebels, we pursued them into their forests and very nearly captured Saracho himself, for he suffered from gout and could move but slowly on foot.

Thereafter we bivouacked in open country, much to the chagrin of my dragoons, who cursed their inability even to obtain some dry straw on which to sleep after such a day's exertions. I jokingly promised each of them a feather bed with silken curtains once we reached La Bisbal, and they professed themselves content.

I myself spent a part of the night with Eglofstein and Donop in the colonel's quarters. We drank mulled wine and played faro, hoping to cheer him, but he so persisted in talking of his late wife that we had to put down our cards and listen — and it was all we could do not to give ourselves away, for there was no officer in the whole of the Nassau Regiment whose mistress Françoise-Marie had not some time been.

I set out with Eglofstein and my dragoons at five in the morning. "*Prenez garde des guerillas!*" the colonel called after me as I rode off. It was a task that properly belonged to the officer of the day, but being the most junior subaltern in the regiment, I had no choice.

The road was clear and the insurgents gave us no trouble. A few dead mules lay in our path. Just outside the village of Figueras we came upon two dead Spaniards who had dragged themselves thus far in a moribund condition. One was a guerrilla belonging to Saracho's band, the other wore the uniform of the Numancia Regiment. They must have been hoping to reach the village under cover of darkness when death overtook them.

Figueras itself we found entirely deserted by its inhabitants, the peasants having fled into the mountains with their herds of sheep. Three or four Spaniards — *dispersas*, or stragglers cut off from Saracho's main force - were sitting in a tavern on the outskirts of the village, but they hurriedly made off at our approach. They yelled "*Muerte a los Franceses!*" like madmen as soon as they reached the edge of the forest, but none of them fired a shot. "For ever and ever, amen, you he-goats!" Such was the shouted response of one of my dragoons, Corporal Thiele, who thought — God alone knows why — that "*Muerte a los Franceses*" signified "Praise the Lord Jesus" in German.

On reaching our destination we found the *alcalde* awaiting us outside the town gate with the entire junta and several other citizens. He stepped forward as we dismounted and greeted us with the words that were customary on such occasions. La Bisbal, he assured us, was well-disposed toward the French because Colonel Saracho's guerrillas had done its citizens much harm, looted their property, and driven off the peasants' cattle. Such ill-disposed people as had settled in the town were very few. He begged us to be merciful, for he and his fellow citizens were eager to do all in their power to assist the gallant soldiers of the great Napoleon. Eglofstein curtly replied that he himself could promise nothing; the colonel's decision alone would determine what treatment the town could expect. He then accompanied the *alcalde* and his clerk to the town hall to have the billeting warrants made out. The townsfolk who had mutely and apprehensively witnessed this conversation, hat in hand, dispersed and

hurried home to their wives.

Having posted some of my men at the gate, I repaired to a roadside *posada* or inn beyond the wall there to await the arrival of the regiment over a cup of hot chocolate, which the landlord produced with alacrity.

After breakfast I went out into the garden, for the air in the cramped little tap-room stank of boiled fish and had made me queasy. The garden was neither large nor well-tended, the landlord having planted it at random with onions and garlic, pumpkins and broad beans, but the scent of the rain on sodden soil did me good. Moreover, the garden adjoined a spacious park in which grew fig trees, elm and walnut trees. A narrow footpath flanked by yew hedges led between expanses of grass to a pond and in the background stood a white-walled country house whose slate roof, wet with rain, I had earlier glimpsed from the road.

My corporal followed me out of the tap-room and into the garden. Exceedingly annoyed, he strode up to me with a reproachful air.

"Lieutenant!" he cried. "Musty flour in our breakfast gruel, soup at midday, and bread and garlic for supper — such has been our fare for weeks now, yet when one of us stopped a peasant on the road and requisitioned an egg or two, he was brought before a court martial. Tables laden with food, the best wine put to cool, and a goodly piece of bacon in every cook-pot — that was what you promised when we reached La Bisbal, and now ..."

"Well? What did the landlord serve you?"

"Rotten little pincer-fish, twelve for a groschen!" the corporal cried angrily, and thrust his hand under my nose. On it reposed a small shrimp such as Spanish peasants steep in jugs of vinegar.

"Come now, Thiele," I replied in jocular vein, "the Bible tells us that God gave man everything that moveth and liveth to be for his meat, so why not that shrimp?"

The corporal opened his mouth to remonstrate, but no adequate rejoinder to my Biblical quotation occurred to him.

A moment later he put a finger to his lips and gripped me by the wrist. He had seen something that made him forget his ill-temper in an instant.

"Lieutenant," he said softly, "there's someone hiding over yonder."

I dropped to the ground in a trice and crawled stealthily toward the garden fence.

"One of the guerrillas," the corporal whispered close beside me, "— there, under that bush."

Sure enough, I saw a man crouching among the laurel bushes barely ten paces from me. He carried neither sword nor musket; if he was armed, he must have had his weapons concealed beneath his clothes.

"There's another - and another, and another! There must be more than a dozen of them, Lieutenant. What devil's work can they be up to?"

I could make out more men lying or crouching everywhere — behind the trunks of the elms and walnut trees, in the yew hedges, in the bushes, on the grass. As yet, none of them appeared to have seen us.

"I'll hurry back to the inn and warn the others," whispered the corporal. "This must be the guerrilla lair or headquarters. The Tanner's Tub cannot be far away."

Just then a tall old man in a dark cloak trimmed with velvet came out of the house and slowly descended the steps, head bowed.

"They're after him, I'll wager," I said softly, and drew my pistol.

"The bandits plan to murder him!" hissed the corporal.

"When I vault the fence," I told him, "follow me and have at them." No sooner had I spoken than

figure rose from the lee of a mound of gravel and ran up behind the old man.

I raised the pistol and took aim, only to lower it a moment later, for then we witnessed the strange occurrence I ever saw in my life. One of my mother's brothers is a physician to a lunatic asylum at Kissingen - I used to visit him on occasion as a boy — and in truth, I now fancied myself transported to the garden of that same madhouse. One pace to the old man's rear the fellow came to a halt, doffed his cap, and addressed him at the top of his voice.

"Greetings, Señor Marques de Bolibar! A very good morning to Your Excellency!"

The same instant, a lanky, bald-headed fellow in muleteer's garb darted out from behind a sandstone statue. He, too, pranced clumsily up to the old man, halted, and bowed low.

"My respects, Señor Marques. May you live a thousand years."

But the strangest thing of all was that the old man continued on his way as if he had neither seen nor heard the pair of them. I could discern his face, now that he was closer to me, and inordinately stiff and motionless it looked. His locks were snow-white, his brow and cheeks pale, his eyes lowered. As for his bold and terrible cast of feature, I shall never forget it.

While he walked on, the other men deserted their places of concealment one by one. Like figures in a puppet show they popped out of bushes, emerged from behind tree trunks and under garden benches, jumped down from trees, and, placing themselves in his path, accosted him.

"Your most obedient servant, Señor Marques de Bolibar!"

"Good day, Señor Marques. How fares Your Grace?"

"My humblest respects, Your Honour!"

But the nobleman threaded his way in silence through the lackeys who swarmed around him like flies around a dish of honey. He made no attempt to fend off their importunities. His face was unmoved as if all these noisy salutations were directed, not at him, but at some other person invisible to me.

While the corporal and I were gazing open-mouthed at this curious spectacle, a shaggy little fellow darted out of a summer-house and minced up to the old man in the manner of a dancing master. Having halted, he busily scratched at the ground with his feet like a hen on a dunghill and addressed him in execrable French.

"If it isn't my friend Bolibar! Delighted to see you!"

But not even he, who behaved as if they were the best of friends, attracted a single glance. A long figure lost in thought, or so it seemed, the old nobleman returned to his house, climbed the steps, and as silently as he had come, vanished into the gloomy interior.

We rose to our feet and watched while the servants, arm in arm now, followed their master into the house in small groups, chatting and smoking as they went.

"Well," I said to the corporal, "what the devil was all that about?"

He thought awhile. Then he said, "These Spanish grandes are dignified beyond measure and melancholy in the extreme. It's in their nature to be so."

"The Marquis of Bolibar must be a perfect idiot, so his servants treat him as such and make sport of him. Come, let's return to the tap-room. The landlord will be able to tell us why the Marquis's gardeners, coachmen, grooms and lackeys greeted him with such ceremony, and why they earned their thanks for it."

"They were celebrating his name-day, I'll be bound," said the corporal. "If you wish to return to the tap-room, Lieutenant, do so alone. I would sooner remain outside than venture back into that rat's nest. The tablecloth is as tattered as our regimental colours after the battle of Talavera, and the landlord's floor is covered with dung enough to dress every Spanish field between Pamplona and Malaga."

He lingered outside the door while I betook myself to the proprietor of the posada, who was busy frying thin slices of bread in oil. His wife was lying on the floor and fanning the flames with the aid of a makeshift bellows, the tube being an old musket barrel.

"Who owns the big house over yonder?" I asked.

"A nobleman," replied the landlord, without looking up from his work. "The wealthiest man in the entire province."

"I can well believe that such a mansion wasn't built to house geese or goats," I said. "How does the owner style himself?"

The landlord eyed me warily. "His Excellency the noble Señor Marques de Bolibar," he said in length.

"The Marquis of Bolibar," I mused. "A haughty gentleman, no doubt, and unduly jealous of his rank."

"Not at all! An affable and kindly soul, for all his noble birth - a truly devout Christian and far from haughty. No matter who salutes him in the street, be it a water-carrier or the Reverend Father himself, he returns their greetings with equal friendliness. "

"But he's somewhat weak in the head, surely?" I hazarded a lie to draw him out. "Urchins run after him in the street, I'm told. They taunt and tease him by calling his name aloud."

"What!" the landlord exclaimed with a look of surprise and consternation. "Who could have fed you such untruth, Señor caballero? There isn't a wiser man in all the province, believe me. Peasants from every village in the neighbourhood make pilgrimage to him when they don't know where to turn on account of their cattle, or their wives, or the high taxes."

The landlord's words seemed quite out of tune with the scene I had just witnessed in the garden, and again I had a vision of the old man as he walked, mute and expressionless, through that noisy chattering throng of servants, making no attempt to shoo them away. I was just debating whether to tell the landlord precisely what I had seen from his garden when my ears were assailed by a blare of trumpets and a clatter of hoofs. Hearing the colonel's voice, I hurried out into the street.

My regiment had arrived. The grenadiers, begrimed and streaked with sweat after their hours-long march, had fallen out and were sitting by the roadside to left and right. The officers dismounted and called for their servants. I went up to the colonel and presented my report.

The colonel listened to me with only half an ear. He was studying the terrain and wondering how best to improve the fortifications. In his mind's eye he was already constructing ramparts and bastions, mines and redoubts for the defence of the town.

Captain Brockendorf and several other officers were standing beside the ox cart laden with the valises. I joined him and described the Marquis of Bolibar's curious morning promenade. He listened with an air of disbelief, shaking his head the while, but Lieutenant Günther, who was seated beside him on an upturned bucket, had an explanation ready.

"Many of these Spanish grandees are the queerest fish imaginable. They never tire of hearing the fine-sounding names, which are so long that you could say three whole rosaries in the time it takes to recite them. It delights them to hear their servants reel off their titles in full, all day long. At Salamanca, when I was billeted on the Conde de Veyra ..."

He launched into an account of his experiences in the household of that proud Spanish nobleman, but Lieutenant Donop cut him short.

"Bolibar? Did you say Bolibar? Why, that was the name of our late lamented Marquesin!"

"Yes indeed," cried Brockendorf, "you're right. What's more, he once told me that his family owned an estate in the neighbourhood of La Bisbal."

A young Spanish nobleman had served in our regiment as a volunteer — one of the few of his nation to have been so fired with the ideals of liberty and justice that he espoused the cause of France and the Emperor. He was estranged from his family and had disclosed his true name and provenance to two or three of his comrades only, but the Spanish peasants called him "el Marquesin" - for he was short and slight of stature — and we, too, addressed him by that sobriquet. Having fallen in battle with the guerrillas the previous night, he now lay buried in the village graveyard at Bascaras.

"That settles it," said Donop. "Your Marquis of Bolibar, Jochberg, is a kinsman of our Marquesin. It behoves us to inform the old man, as gently and considerately as possible, of our gallant comrade's death. Since you're already acquainted with the Marquis, Jochberg, will you take it upon yourself to do so?"

I saluted and made my way to the nobleman's house with one of my men, meanwhile rehearsing the words with which I proposed to fulfil my difficult and thankless task.

A wall lay between the house and the road, but it had crumbled away at so many points that one could easily get across. As I neared the building I was met by a babble of loud, plaintive, quarrelsome voices. I knocked on the door, and the din ceased at once.

"Who's there?" called a voice.

"I come in peace," I replied.

"Who comes in peace?"

"A German officer."

"*Ave Maria purissima!*" wailed someone. "It isn't he!" The door was opened and I walked in.

I found myself in a vestibule where lackeys, coachmen, gardeners and other servants were running hither and thither in great dismay and confusion. The shaggy little fellow who had addressed the Marquis as "my friend" was also present. He minced up to me in his dancing master's fashion, puce the face with agitation, and introduced himself as His Grace the Marquis's steward and majordomo.

"I wish to speak with the Marquis in person," I told him.

The majordomo clasped his head with both hands, breathing heavily.

"The Señor Marques?" he groaned. "O merciful God, merciful God!" He stared at me awhile. Then he said, "Alas, Lieutenant or Captain or whatever you may be, His Grace isn't here."

"How so, not here?" I said sternly. "I myself saw him in his garden earlier this morning."

"Earlier this morning, perhaps, but now he's gone." The majordomo turned and called to a man who was hurrying through the vestibule.

"Pasqual! Have you looked in the stables? Is none of the horses missing?"

"None, Señor Fabricio. They're all accounted for."

"The saddle horses too? Capitan the grey and San Miguel the roan? What of Hermosa the mare - she also in her stall?"

"They're all there," the groom repeated. "Not one is missing."

"Then may God, the Virgin and all the Saints assist us. Our master has vanished - he must have met with an accident."

"When did you see him last?" I asked.

"Not half an hour ago, in his bedchamber. He was standing before the mirror, looking at himself. He had instructed me to burst into the room, time and again, and inquire after his health. 'Did Your Grace pass a restful night?' I had to ask, or, as if I were one of his friends from Madrid, 'Heaven bless you Bolibar, what are *you* doing here?' I had to repeat that several times while he stood before the mirror and studied his reflection."

"And this morning in the garden?"

"The Señor Marques behaved strangely all morning. He made us hide in the bushes and call his name aloud. God alone knows what he had in mind, but our master never does anything without an excellent reason."

At that point the gardener entered with his lad. The major-domo promptly abandoned me and fled at him.

"What are you waiting for? Drain the pool at once, do you hear?" Then, turning to me, he sighed and said, "God grant we may give him an honourable Christian burial if we find him at the bottom of the pool ..."

I left the house and told my comrades what I had heard. We were still discussing the matter when the wounded officer was carried past on a litter.

"Bolibar?" he exclaimed suddenly. "Who spoke that name?"

Although he wore the uniform of another regiment, I knew him. The wounded officer was Lieutenant von Röhn of the Hanoverian Chasseurs, with whom I had shared quarters for two weeks the previous summer. He had been shot through the chest.

"I did," I said. "What of the Marquis of Bolibar? Do you know him?"

He gazed at me in horror, his eyes glittering with fever.

"Seize him quickly," he cried in a hoarse voice, "or he'll destroy you all."

Lieutenant von Röhn succumbed to the effects of his wound two days later in the Convent of San Engracia, which we fitted out as a hospital immediately after our arrival in La Bisbal. During this time he was repeatedly questioned by our colonel and Captain Eglolfstein about the details of his encounter with Colonel Saracho and the Marquis of Bolibar. Although he was not always fully conscious, his statements gave us a sufficient knowledge of what had been agreed that night — the night after our skirmish with the guerrillas — between the Marquis of Bolibar, the "Tanner's Tub" and Captain William O'Callaghan of the British Army. His account of what happened at St Rochus' chapel in the woods of Bascaras enlightened us on the nature and abilities of the Marquis of Bolibar, and on what to expect from that dangerous foe of France and the Emperor.

Lieutenant von Rohn's regimental commander had dispatched him to Marshal Soult's headquarters at Forgosá with some important papers, to wit, the *feuilles d'appel* or muster rolls of the Hanoverian Chasseurs, because the assistant paymaster had refused to disburse any monies without them. The area between Marshal Soult's Fourth Corps and General d'Hilliers' brigade, to which the Hanoverian Chasseurs belonged, was temporarily controlled by the insurgents who also held La Bisbal and its environs, so Lieutenant von Röhn was compelled to avoid the more convenient highroad and use the winding forest tracks that led through the mountains to Forgosá.

At this stage in his account Lieutenant von Röhn inveighed bitterly against the army's book-keepers. He wished he could dig all the quartermasters and planners and pen-pushers out of their comfortable chairs at headquarters and transplant them to the rugged Spanish highlands; *that* would soon teach them to treat honest soldiers in a fitting manner. His regiment was always short of something, be it boots or cartridges, and they had once been obliged to use garden tubs instead of gabions. Here he went off at a tangent and began to speak of pay, fiercely complaining that a lieutenant earned twenty-two thalers a month at home but only eighteen on campaign. "Junot is insane!" he cried, half delirious with fever. "How can an utter lunatic continue to command an army corps! He's a brave man, mark you. In battle he has been known to borrow a private soldier's musket and blaze away ..."

Eglolfstein broke in with a question, whereupon the lieutenant grew calmer and returned to the subject in hand.

On the evening of the second day he traversed the wood near Bascaras escorted by his soldier and servant. While picking their way through the dense undergrowth - their horses were more of a hindrance than a help in such difficult terrain — they heard musket-fire and the din of the battle in progress between us and the guerrillas on the highroad not far away. Röhn at once changed direction and set off uphill, seeking safety in the recesses of the wood. A few minutes later he was hit in the chest by a stray bullet. He fell to the ground and briefly lost consciousness.

On regaining his senses he found that the servant had lashed him to his saddle with two thongs. They had almost reached the summit of the hill, but the din of battle was far louder than before. Individual voices and words of command could now be distinguished, together with oaths and the cries of wounded men.

In a clearing on the brow of the hill stood a ruined chapel once dedicated to St Rochus but now employed as a barn. Here the servant reined in, for the wounded lieutenant had lost so much blood that he feared he would die on him. They would be bound to fall into the Spaniards' hands unless something were done quickly, he said, so he lifted the lieutenant off his horse and carried him into the chapel. Röhn, who was in severe pain and weakened by loss of blood, made no demur. The servant

carried him up a ladder to the loft, where he wrapped him in his cloak and covered him with bales of straw. Then he gave him his canteen, put two loaded pistols where Röhn could reach them, and covered those, too, with straw. That done, he went off with the horses, but not before he had urged Röhn to lie still, promising to remain close at hand and not to desert him under any circumstances.

Meantime, night had fallen and the firing and shouting had died away. For a while all remained quiet. The lieutenant was just about to put his head out of a skylight and call his servant back, thinking the danger past, when he heard voices and saw lanterns and torches approaching the chapel.

Perceiving at once that the men were guerrillas, he hurriedly concealed himself once more beneath the bales of straw. The holes and chinks in the floor on which he lay enabled him to observe the Spaniards as they carried their wounded into the chapel. One of them climbed the ladder and threw down some bales of straw to his companions while the lieutenant held his breath for fear he should be discovered and butchered on the spot.

But the Spaniard failed to notice him and descended the ladder with his lantern to bandage the wounded. He went from one to another with his instruments, but never before had the lieutenant seen a surgeon ply his trade in such a sullen and surly manner.

"Why are you sitting there like Job the Jew on his dunghill?" he railed at one of the wounded, and poured scorn on another who groaned that he felt he would soon be entering the realms of eternal bliss.

"You fool!" he jeered. "Eternal bliss costs more than you think. Do you really imagine that all you need to get you to heaven is a hole in the belly?"

"What do you have for me in that medicine chest of yours?" cried another man. "Monkey's fat? Bear's grease? Raven's dung?"

"All I have for you is a Paternoster," the surgeon snapped.

"You've too many holes to mend." And, as he busied himself with the next man, he growled, "Yes, Death is a heathen — he never takes a holiday. Wars make hummocky churchyards, that's what we always say."

"How soon will you come to me?" called a wounded man lying in a corner.

"Wait your turn, damn you!" the surgeon cried angrily. "I know you of old — you want a plaster on every little gnat-bite. A pity the bullet didn't fly up the Devil's backside, then I'd not be having much trouble with you now."

The guerrillas had meanwhile kindled a fire outside the chapel. Sentries had been posted on the edge of the woods and an orderly officer was going the rounds. The insurgents, who numbered upwards of a hundred and fifty, lay sprawled around the fire, many of them asleep and some smoking tobacco rolled in paper. They were armed and clothed with what they had taken from the French: infantrymen's gaiters, long cuirassiers' swords, heavy German riding boots. Near the chapel stood a cork oak with an effigy of the Virgin and Child affixed to its trunk, and before this two Spaniards knelt in prayer. A British officer, a captain in the Northumberland Fusiliers, stood leaning on his sword and gazing into the fire. His scarlet cloak and the white panache in his cap made him look, beside the ragged guerrillas, like a gold ducat among copper stivers. (From Rohn's description, this officer could only have been Captain William O'Callaghan, whom General Blake, as we already knew, had sent to instil order and discipline into the guerrilla bands of the district.)

The surgeon, having completed his work in the chapel, came out and limped over to the fire. An exceedingly stout little man, he wore a brown jacket, short trousers, and torn blue hose, but his collar was adorned with colonel's insignia. As soon as the firelight fell upon his face, Lieutenant von Röhn perceived that it was Saracho himself that had bandaged the wounded in the chapel and, spiteful as

monkey, dispensed such poor consolation. On his head he wore a velvet cap embroidered with gold thread. This the lieutenant recognized at once as Marshal Lefebvre's nightcap, which was renowned throughout the army because, when it fell into the insurgents' hands together with some other baggage belonging to Lefebvre, the furious marshal's aides-de-camp and all the other officers in the baggage train had been placed under arrest.

The Tanner's Tub held his hands to the fire to warm them. For a while all was quiet save for the groans of the wounded, a man cursing in his sleep, and the murmured prayers of the two Spaniards on their knees before the Madonna.

At this stage Lieutenant von Rohn's fatigue was so extreme that he would have fallen asleep, despite his thirst and the proximity of his enemies, had he not been suddenly roused by a shout from one of the sentries. He peered through the skylight and caught sight of the Marquis of Bolibar, who was just emerging from the dark wood into the glow of the fire.

Röhn described him as a tall, elderly man whose hair was as white as the moustache beneath his aquiline nose. There was something fierce and awe-inspiring about his features, although, try as he would, Röhn could not define it.

"There he is!" cried the Tanner's Tub, and withdrew his hands from the fire. "The Marquis of Bolibar," he said, turning to the British officer. "Señor Marques, a thousand pardons for having disturbed your night's rest" — here he made a clumsy obeisance — "but I shall doubtless have quit the district by tomorrow, and I have to acquaint you with certain information of great importance. It relates to your family."

The Marquis abruptly turned his head and looked Saracho in the eye. All the blood had left his face but the firelight suffused his cheeks with a reddish glow. The British captain addressed him in a courteous tone.

"Are you, My Lord Marquis, a kinsman of the Lieutenant-General de Bolibar who commanded the Spanish Second Corps two years ago?"

"The lieutenant-general is my brother," replied the Marquis, without taking his eyes off Saracho.

"An officer of your name saw service in the British Army, too. He captured the French artillery depot at Acre."

"That was my cousin," said the Marquis. He continued to stare at the Tanner's Tub, almost as if he were awaiting a surprise attack from that quarter and had to meet it with a steadfast gaze.

"The family of the Señor Marques has provided many an army with outstanding officers," said Saracho. "One of his nephews served until lately in the French Army."

The Marquis shut his eyes.

"Is he dead?" he asked quietly.

"He had a fine career," the Tanner's Tub replied with a laugh. "He became a French lieutenant despite his seventeen years. I myself have a son and would gladly have made a soldier of him, but he is a hunchback and fit only for a monastery."

"Is he dead?" asked the Marquis. He stood there unmoving, but his shadow leapt wildly about in the fire's fitful light. It was as if the old man's shadow, not the old man himself, were awaiting Saracho's tidings in fear and uncertainty.

"Men of many nations fight with the French Army," Saracho said, shrugging his shoulder. "Germans and Dutchmen, Neapolitans and Poles. Why should a Spaniard not serve with the French for once?"

"Is he dead?" cried the Marquis.

"Dead? Yes!" Saracho blurted out, and he laughed with such fierce and delighted abandon that the

grisly sound reverberated among the trees of the forest. "Yes, and now he's racing the Devil to hell!"

"I was there when his mother bore him," the Marquis said in a low, choking voice. "It was I that carried him to his christening, but he was as inconstant from his earliest childhood as a shadow on the wall. God grant him eternal rest."

"May the Devil grant him eternal rest in Hades," cried Saracho with mingled anger and contempt.

"Amen," said the British captain, but it was uncertain whether his amen related to Bolibar's prayer or Saracho's curse.

The Marquis walked over to the shrine and bowed down before the Madonna. The Spaniards who had been praying there rose and made room for him.

"For myself," Saracho remarked to the captain, "I cannot boast of any noble kinsmen. My mother was a maidservant and my father a cobbler, that is why I serve my king and Holy Mother Church. We cannot all be noblemen."

"Lord," prayed the Marquis, kneeling before the image of the Mother of Heaven, "you know that wretched mortals cannot live without sin."

"And *you* should know, Captain," Saracho said with a scornful, bitter laugh, "that our high-born noblemen — the Duke of Infantado and the Marquis of Villafanca, the two Counts of Orgaz, father and son, and the Duke of Albuquerque — all went to Bayonne to pay homage to Joseph, the new king."

"You cannot have forgotten, O Lord," the Marquis of Bolibar cried to the Madonna, "that one of your own twelve Apostles was a perjurer and a scoundrel!"

"Yes," Saracho pursued, "our proud grandes were the first to go to Bayonne and sell their vows for money, and why not? Are French louis-d'or of baser gold than Spanish doubloons?"

"St Augustine was a heretic, yet you forgave him," the Marquis cried with a fervour born of despair. "Do you hear me, Lord? Paul was a persecutor of the Church, Matthew a miser and a devotee for money, and Peter forswore himself, yet you forgave them one and all. Do you hear me, Lord?"

"But they'll never escape eternal damnation!" Saracho roared triumphantly. "They're doomed, and hell awaits them. Flames, fire and sparks, fire above and below, fire on every side, fire in perpetuity. And he stared enraptured into the nocturnal gloom as if he could see the flames of hell blazing far away beyond the dark woods.

"Have mercy on him, have mercy, Lord, and let your everlasting light shine upon him!"

Lieutenant von Röhn, listening to this strange prayer in his hiding place, was smitten with surprise and consternation, for the Marquis's tone was far from that of a humble suppliant. He bellowed at the Almighty, sometimes angrily, sometimes threateningly, and sometimes as if striving to bully Him into doing his, Bolibar's, will.

At last the Marquis rose and went over to Saracho with knitted brow, twitching lips, and eyes alight with anger. The Tanner's Tub affected to be surprised to see him still there.

"Señor Marques," he said, "the hour grows late, and if you wish to pay your respects to the French commander early in the morning —"

"Enough!" cried the Marquis, and his face looked more fearsome than ever. Saracho broke off once. The two men stood facing one another, mute and motionless. Only their shadows flitted back and forth in the fire's restless light, crouching and leaping, retreating and lunging, and it seemed to Röhn in the heat of his fever that their hatred and belligerence had silently entered into those darting shadows.

All at once, however, the sentries shouted their challenge once more and a man came running out of the trees toward the fire. As soon as Saracho caught sight of him, he forgot his quarrel with the Marquis of Bolibar.

"*Ave Maria purissima!*" panted the messenger, this being the customary Spanish greeting, and on that can be heard a hundred times a day in street or tavern.

"Amen, she conceived without sin," Saracho replied impatiently. "You came alone? Where's the priest?"

"His Reverence got the colic from a hot blood sausage —"

"A curse on his soul, his body and eyes!" roared Saracho. "That man has less heart than a tripe-cook would sell you for half a quarto. Fear, that's his sickness!"

"He's dead, I can swear to it," said the messenger. "I saw him laid out in his bedchamber."

Saracho ran both hands through his hair and proceeded to curse roundly enough to bring the sky down about his ears. His face turned as red as a stone in a brick-kiln.

"Dead?" he cried, struggling to catch his breath. "Did you hear that, Captain? The priest is dead!"

The British officer stared silently into space. The guerrillas had jumped up and clustered around the fire, shivering under their cloaks.

"What now?" asked the captain.

"I swore on General Cuesta's sword that we would take the town or die. Our plans had been skilfully laid and set in train, and now this priest has to die an untimely death."

"Your plans were worthless," the Marquis of Bolibar said suddenly. "Your plans would have earned you a bullet in the head, nothing more."

Saracho glared at the Marquis indignantly. "What do you know of our plans?" he demanded. "I didn't shout them from the rooftops."

"Father Ambrosius sent for me when he knew he was going to die," said the Marquis. "He asked me to perform the task with which you entrusted him, but your plans are ill-conceived. I tell you this in your face, Colonel Saracho: you know nothing of the art of war."

"And you do, I suppose, Señor Marques?" Saracho was beside himself with rage. "The enemy will gobble up that town like cold apple sauce."

"You buried a sack of gunpowder beneath the town wall, wedged between sandbags and provided with a fuse. The vicar was to light the fuse under cover of darkness and blow a breach in the wall."

"Quite so," Saracho broke in, "that being the only way of taking the town. La Bisbal would withstand the heaviest of cannon, for the chronicles tell us that it was built more than five thousand years ago by King Hercules and St James."

"Your knowledge of history is admirable, Colonel Saracho, but did it never occur to you that the French would round up all the monks and detain them as soon as they arrived? Tomorrow they'll show them up, either in their monastery or in a church, post a cannon at the entrance with slow-match burning, and let none of them out. Did you think of that, Colonel Saracho? Even had the priest contrived to escape, you're confronted by the whole of the Nassau Regiment and part of the Hessians. All you have is a handful of ill-trained, indisciplined regulars, each of whom goes his own sweet way."

"True, true," Saracho cried angrily, "but my men are adroit and courageous enough to trample the German colossus underfoot."

"Are you so sure?" demanded the Marquis. "As soon as the charge explodes, the general alarm will sound in every street and the Germans will run to their guns. Two salvoes of grapeshot will put paid to your assault. Hadn't you thought of that, Colonel Saracho?"

The Tanner's Tub, at a loss for a rejoinder, chewed his fingers and said nothing.

"And even should a few of your men succeed in penetrating the town," the Marquis went on, "they will come under fire from every nook and cranny, every barred window and cellar light, for La Bisbal's inhabitants are more than ever favourably disposed toward the French. Your guerrillas uprooted the

vines and set their olive trees ablaze. Why, only lately you had two young men from La Bisbal shot because they refused to join you.

"Yes, that's true," said one of the guerrillas. "The town is against us. The citizens scowl at us, the women turn their backs on us, the dogs bark at us—"

"And the landlords serve us sour wine," grumbled another.

"But for military reasons," said the captain, "the possession of La Bisbal is of the utmost importance to us. If the French hold the town, they can take General Cuesta in the flank and rear whenever his troops make a move."

"Then General Cuesta must send us reinforcements," Saracho exclaimed. "He has the Princesa and Santa Fe Regiments and half the Santiago Cavalry. He must—"

"He'll send us not a single man or cart-horse. He himself is in difficulty, and you know full well that one cripple seldom helps another across the road. What's to be done, Colonel?"

"How can I tell you when I myself have no idea?" Saracho said sullenly, staring at his fingers. The guerrillas around the fire set up a clamour when they saw how perplexed, irresolute and at odds the commanders were. Some cried out that the war was lost and they wanted to go home, others that they had no wish to go home and fetch firewood for their wives, and one man ran to his donkey and proceeded to saddle it as if he meant to set off for his village without delay.

All at once, a voice made itself heard above the hubbub. It belonged to the Marquis of Bolibar.

"If you're willing to obey me, Colonel, I know what to do."

On hearing these words in his lair, Lieutenant von Röhn once more fell prey to the mysterious sense of dread inspired in him by his very first glimpse of the Marquis's face and eyes. Heedless of the danger that he might be discovered, he thrust his head through the skylight rather than miss a word. His thirst and pain had vanished: his one thought was that fate had ordained him to overhear and foil the schemes of the Marquis of Bolibar.

Such were the clamour and commotion made by the guerrillas, who continued to argue whether it was better to fight on or disband, that Röhn could not at first catch what passed between the Marquis and the other two. After a short while, however, Saracho bade his men be silent, accompanying the order with oaths and imprecations, and the din ceased abruptly.

"Please continue, Your Grace," the captain said, very courteously. Saracho's demeanour, too, had undergone a sudden and complete transformation. He betrayed no lingering trace of scorn, hatred or ill-will as he stood there in a respectful, almost subservient attitude. All three men - the British officer, the rebel commander, and Lieutenant von Röhn-bent an expectant gaze on the Marquis of Bolibar.

THREE SIGNALS

At this point in his narrative Lieutenant von Röhn gave a description of the sinister spectacle presented by this nocturnal conference, which had deeply imprinted itself upon his mind. He recalled how Saracho, squatting down like a goblin, stoked the fire with brushwood — for the night was cold — and looked up at the Marquis intently as he did so; how the British officer, whose impassive face belied his obvious excitement, paid no heed when his scarlet cloak slipped from his shoulders and fell to the ground; how the guerrillas crowded around the fire, in part so as to hear what was said, in part because of the chill night air; and how the cork oak bearing the Madonna, which had been uprooted and half toppled by the wind, seemed to lean toward the Marquis and hang upon his every word. Indeed, the lieutenant fancied in his fearful and feverish state of mind that Christ and the Virgin were in league with the guerrillas and privy to their conspiracy.

Standing in their midst, the Marquis of Bolibar acquainted the others with his murderous plans.

"You will send your men home, Colonel Saracho," he commanded. "You will order them home to their fields and vineyards, their fish ponds and mule stables. Your cannon and powder waggons you will hide in readiness for the time when we are stronger than the Germans."

"And when will that time come?" Saracho inquired doubtfully, shaking his head and blowing on the fire.

"It will come soon enough," the Marquis declared, "for I shall find you an ally. You will receive assistance from a quarter you now dismiss."

Saracho stood up. "If you mean Empecinado and his guerrillas at Campillos," he growled, "that man is my enemy. He will not come when I need him."

"Who spoke of Empecinado? It is the citizens of La Bisbal who will come to your aid. One fine night they will rebel and fall upon the Germans."

"Those bloated, pot-bellied Judases of La Bisbal?" Saracho exclaimed, sinking to the ground again in rage and disappointment. "All they ever think of at night, when they lie alongside their wives, is how best to betray us and our native land."

"I shall persuade them to quit their beds and rise in revolt!" cried the Marquis. He gestured with menace at the town slumbering in the valley far below. "The great insurrection will come, be assured of that. I have my plans ready-made in my head, and I'll stake my body and soul on their success."

For a while the three men gazed silently into the fire, each engrossed in his own thoughts. The guerrillas whispered among themselves and the night wind rustled in the trees, shaking raindrops from branch and twig.

"And what is our part in this venture?" the captain asked at length.

"You will await my signals. I shall give three of them. At the first you will assemble your men, occupy the approaches to the town, place your cannon in position, and blow up both bridges over the Alhar - but not until I give the signal, for it is of prime importance that the Germans should be secure until then."

"Go on, go on!" Saracho said eagerly.

"On receiving the second signal you will at once proceed to bombard the town with shot, shell, and fire-balls. At the same time, you will take the outer defences."

"And then?"

"By then the revolt will have broken out. While the Germans are busy defending themselves against insurgent townsfolk on every side, I shall give the third signal and you will order a general assault."

"Very good," said Saracho.

"And the signals?" The captain took out his slate.

"Do you know my house in La Bisbal?" the Marquis asked Saracho.

"The house beyond the walls or the one adorned with Saracens' heads in the Calle de la Carmelitas?"

"The latter. You will see a column of thick black smoke ascending from its roof. Smoke from damp smouldering straw, that will be the first signal."

"Smoke from damp, smouldering straw," the captain repeated.

"One night, when all is quiet in La Bisbal, you will hear the strains of the organ in St Daniel's Convent: that will be the second signal."

"The organ in St Daniel's Convent," wrote the captain. "And the third?"

The Marquis pondered for a moment. Then he said, "Give me your knife, Colonel Saracho."

From under his coat the Tanner's Tub produced a broad-bladed dagger with a hilt of carved ivory — a weapon of the kind the Spaniards call an ox-tongue. The Marquis took it.

"When a messenger brings you this knife, command your men to storm the town — but then and not before. The success of the whole undertaking depends on that, Colonel Saracho."

Lieutenant von Röhn had caught every word from his vantage point beneath the chapel roof. His brow was on fire and the blood pounded in his temples. He now knew the three signals that were designed to bring down destruction upon the garrison of La Bisbal, and he also knew that the success or failure of the undertaking depended on himself, not Saracho.

"There are one or two contingencies to be considered," the British officer said thoughtfully, replacing the slate in his pocket. "For instance, the Germans might deem it advantageous to take a personage such as the Marquis of Bolibar into custody. If they did so, our wait for the signals would doubtless be long and tedious."

"The Germans will never find the Marquis of Bolibar. They may see a blind beggar offering his consecrated *Agnus Dei* candles for sale outside the church door, or a peasant transporting eggs, cheeses and chestnuts to market on donkeyback. Picture me as a sergeant posting sentries outside the powder magazine, or a dragoon leading the regimental commander's charger to the horse-pond."

The captain laughed.

"Yours is not the kind of face one readily forgets, My Lord Marquis. I could recognize you in any disguise, I feel sure."

"Could you indeed?" said the Marquis, and pondered in silence for a while. "Are you acquainted with General Rowland Hill, Captain?"

"I have been privileged to see General the Lord Hill of Hawkstone on many occasions, the last of them being at Salamanca four months ago, when I was making some purchases in the neighbourhood of his headquarters." The captain broke off. "Have you lost something, My Lord Marquis?"

The Marquis had bent down. When he straightened up, Lieutenant von Röhn saw that he had draped the captain's scarlet cloak around his shoulders. Röhn failed to perceive any other difference in his appearance until his attention was aroused by the Britisher's look of boundless amazement.

From one moment to the next, the Marquis's face had taken on a wholly strange and unfamiliar appearance. Röhn had never before set eyes on those gaunt, furrowed cheeks, those mobile orbs that darted so restlessly in all directions, that hard, firm mouth, and that massive chin which gave evidence of vigour and grim determination. Then the unfamiliar face opened its mouth and a snarling, drawling voice emerged.

"The next time your assault exposes you to such heavy fire, Captain —"

The Britisher grasped the Marquis roughly by the shoulders and uttered an oath or imprecation whose meaning was lost on Lieutenant von Röhn. "What hell-hound of a playactor taught you the accursed trick?" he cried. "If I didn't happen to know that Lord Hill speaks no word of Spanish. Give me back my cloak, it's devilish cold!"

The guerrillas laughed at his annoyance and astonishment, but one of them crossed himself and said with a timid glance at the Marquis, "Our gracious lord the Señor Marques can do other things as well. Give him two measures of blood, twelve pounds of flesh and a sack of bones, and he'll make you a man - Christian or Moor, it's all the same to him."

"Well, Captain," said the Marquis, who had reverted to his previous appearance, "do you still believe the Germans will arrest me if I decide to disappear? I shall pass through the Puerta del Sol at vesper this very day, and not a soul will prevent me from doing so."

"I wish you would tell me your chosen disguise," the captain said anxiously. "Should my men fail to recognize you while storming La Bisbal, I fear they may do you harm."

"My one desire," exclaimed the Marquis, "is to be buried unrecognized. In losing my life, I shall also lose a name that has for ever been stained with dishonour."

The fire in their midst had dwindled and begun to go out. The wind blew cold and damp, and a pale dawn was rising beyond the gloomy woods. The captain stared into the dying embers.

"The glory your exploit will bring you —" he ventured.

"Glory?" the Marquis broke in angrily. "Know this, Captain: no glory derives from battle and conquest. I despise war, which for ever compels us to do evil. The humble peasant who innocently tills his field is more glorious than any general or marshal, for his poor hands tend soil which the rest of us have profaned and defiled with our blood-letting."

At these words, all who stood round the dying fire fell silent and stared with surprise and respect at the man who despised war, yet took it upon himself to perform war's bloody work in expiation of the treason committed by someone of his name.

"I am a soldier," Saracho said at long last, "and I shall persuade you of the glory that war can bring a gallant soldier when our venture is successfully concluded, Señor Marques, for I shall recognize you."

"If you recognize me, have pity and refrain from addressing me by my name, which is disgraced for all eternity. Look away and let me walk on unrecognized. And now, farewell."

"Farewell," the captain called after him, "and may heaven assist you in your undertaking."

While the Marquis was striding off, Saracho turned to the captain and said in a low voice, "I doubt the Marques de Bolibar —"

He broke off, for the Marquis had halted and looked back.

"You turn your head on hearing your name, Señor Marques," Saracho called, laughing loudly. "That is how I shall know you again."

"You're right, and I thank you. I must teach my ear to be deaf to the sound of my name."

That, it seems, was the moment when the Marquis of Bolibar hit upon the idea whose execution he observed in his garden the following day, not that I grasped the purpose of such a strange proceeding. Lieutenant von Röhn, meanwhile, was consumed with fear and impatience. Knowing that he alone could preserve the Nassau Regiment from the danger that threatened it at La Bisbal, he could hardly wait for his servant to release him from his hiding place and convey him there. He was tormented by the fear that Bolibar, having reached the town before him and vanished unhindered into the crowd, would put his terrible scheme into effect.

But now at last Saracho gave the order to depart. The guerrillas promptly sprang to their feet and began bustling to and fro. Some fetched the wounded from the chapel, others loaded the mules with

baskets of victuals, wineskins, and valises. Some sang as they worked, a few bickered, the mules set up a piercing din, the muleteers cursed. In the midst of this turmoil the British captain suspended his camp kettle over the fire and prepared some tea for breakfast. Saracho, who had attached a lantern and a mirror to the tree beside the Virgin and Child, was shaving in haste. Glancing at the mirror and the Madonna in turn, he scraped away at his beard and prayed as he did so.

At the hour of the rosary, or vespers, on the evening of the same day, the Marquis of Bolibar made his way without let or hindrance through the Puerta del Sol. No one recognized him, and he might well have escaped detection, like an eel in a turbid stream, amid the water-carriers and fishmongers, spice and oil merchants, wool-dressers and friars who crowded around the church door to say their Hail Marys and greet familiar faces. It was, however, his misfortune to become privy to the secret that bound the five of us together - the other four and myself - with bonds of memory. What secret? Our own and that of the dead Françoise-Marie, which at other times we kept locked away in the depths of our hearts, and of which we that night bragged to one another, fuddled with Alicante wine and stricken with homesickness by the sight of the snow on the roofs.

And the ragged muleteer who sat in the corner of my room, a rosary in his hands, overheard the secret and had to die.

We ordered him shot beside the town wall, secretly and in haste, without trial or absolution. None of us dreamed that it was the Marquis of Bolibar who fell bleeding into the snow beneath our bullets, nor did we guess what a curse he had laid upon us before he died.

I had command of the gate guard that evening. Toward six o'clock I detailed the night pickets that were to patrol the town wall at intervals of half an hour. My sentries, with their loaded carbines hidden beneath their cloaks, stood silent and motionless like saints in their niches.

It began to snow. Snowy weather was no great rarity in that mountainous region, it seemed, but we had never seen snowflakes in Spain before that evening.

I had two copper pans filled with glowing ashes brought to my room, there being no stoves in the houses of La Bisbal. The smoke stung my eyes and the snowstorm made the windows rattle with a faint, menacing sound, but the room was warm and snug. In the corner lay my couch of fresh gathered heather with a cloak draped over it. The makeshift table and benches were fashioned from planks and barrels, and on the table were gourds filled with wine, for I was awaiting a visit from my comrades, who proposed to spend Christmas Eve with me.

I could hear the voices of my dragoons as they lay talking on the floor of the loft overhead, wrapped in their cloaks. Without a sound, I tiptoed up the wooden stairs.

I often prowled among my men in the dark and listened to them conversing, for I was in constant dread lest our secret had been discovered, and lest the dragoons, when they thought themselves alone and out of earshot at night, should whisper to each other of the dead Françoise-Marie and her surreptitious goings-on.

Although the loft was as dark as a bake-oven, I recognized Sergeant Brendel's voice.

"Did you find the fellow who made off with your purse?" he was asking.

"I gave chase," replied a glum voice, "but I couldn't catch him. He's gone, and he'll take good care not to come back."

"All these Spaniards are the same!" another man said angrily. "They pray their mouths off from dawn till dusk, empty the fonts of holy water out of sheer piety and devotion, and all the while the rogues and bloodsuckers are debating how best to cheat and rob us."

"When we were quartered in Corbosa five days ago," I heard Corporal Thiele say, "one such unhuman thief — one of the waggoners, he was — made off with a chest belonging to our colonel. It contained the bonnets and petticoats of his late lamented wife, and now the thief has borne them off to his

stinking lair!"

Our colonel was so reluctant to be parted from the dead Françoise-Marie's clothes that he carried them in his baggage wherever he went. Now, on hearing the dragoons speak of his wife, I felt my heart begin to pound in the certainty that our secret had been discovered. But I heard not another word about Françoise-Marie. The dragoons proceeded to grumble at the campaign and their generals, and Sergeant Brendel fiercely castigated Marshal Soult and his staff.

"Let me tell you something," he exclaimed. "Those gentlemen who go to war in their carriages and carioles are often more frightened under fire than the likes of us. At Talavera I saw them cower like mules when the case-shot was flying."

"We have worse foes than shells," said someone else. "Our worst foes are these nonsensical marches back and forth, eight hours at a stretch, to hang some wretched peasant or priest. Shells do us less harm than damp ground, lice, and half rations."

"And the mutton, don't forget the mutton," said Dragoon Stüber. "It stinks to high heaven. When sparrows fall lifeless from the air when they fly over it!"

"Soult cares nothing for his men, that's the truth of the matter," Corporal Thiele said gloomily. "He is a niggard - wealth and honours are all he craves. He may be a marshal and Duke of Dalmatia, but believe me, he isn't fit to fill a corporal's boots."

Not another word about Françoise-Marie. I listened in vain, hearing naught save the eternal criticisms of the Spanish campaign with which the soldiers customarily whiled away the time before falling asleep in their billets, fatigued by marching and fighting. I let them argue and politicize their hearts' content. They performed their duties none the worse for that.

At length, hearing Lieutenant Günther's voice below, I hurried downstairs to my room and lit a lamp.

Günther was patting the snow from his uniform. Lieutenant Donop, with Virgil peeping out of his pocket as usual, had also turned up. Donop was the most intelligent and erudite of my comrades. He knew Latin, was well-versed in ancient history, and always travelled with a few fine editions of the Roman classics in his baggage.

We sat down, drank wine, and fell to cursing our Spanish landlords and our wretched billets. Donop complained that his room had neither stove nor fireplace and a piece of oiled paper in lieu of a windowpane. "Let someone else try reading the *Aeneid* in there!" he said with a sigh.

"Every wall is covered with pictures of saints, but there isn't a clean bed in the house," Günther said peevishly of his own quarters. "Prayer books lie heaped in the kitchen, but I've yet to see a ham or a sausage."

"It's impossible to carry on a sensible conversation with my landlord," Donop said. "He spends the whole day mumbling the name of the Holy Virgin, and whenever I come home he's on his knees before some St James or Dominic."

"For all that," I interposed, "they say the citizens of La Bisbal are well-disposed toward the French. Your health, comrade! I drink to you."

"And I to you, comrade, but they also say that disguised priests and insurgents are hiding in the town."

"Very meek insurgents," said Günther. "They neither shoot at us nor murder us — they confine themselves to despising us. "

"I'll wager my landlord is a priest in disguise," said Donop, chuckling to himself. "I know of no other trade that makes a man so fat."

He passed his glass across the table and I refilled it. Just then the door burst open and Captain Brockendorf came blundering into the room in a cloud of wind-blown snowflakes.

He must already have been drinking somewhere, because his full moon of a face, with its huge crimson scar, was gleaming like a freshly hammered copper kettle. His cap sat askew over his left ear, his black moustache was waxed, and his two thick black braids hung stiffly from temples to cheeks. "Well, Jochberg," he bellowed, "have you caught him?"

"Not yet," I replied, knowing that he meant the Marquis of Bolibar.

"My Lord Marquis is taking his time. The weather isn't clement enough for him — he's afraid it may spoil his shoes."

Brockendorf bent over the table and put his nose to the gourds.

"What holy water is that in Bacchus's font?"

"Alicante wine from the priest's cellar."

"Alicante, eh?" Brockendorf cried gaily. "*Allons*, that's worth making a beast of oneself for!"

When Brockendorf "made a beast" of himself in honour of good wine, he stripped off his tunic, waistcoat and shirt and sat there naked save for his breeches and boots and the mat of shaggy black hair on his chest. Two old women who were passing our windows in the street stopped short and stared into the room aghast. They crossed themselves, doubtless wondering what had met their eyes, a human being or some outlandish monster.

We all proceeded to do justice to the wine, and for a while no conversation could be heard beyond "I toast you, comrade!" or "I thank you, brother!" or "Your health, comrade. *Proficiat!*"

"I wish I were at home in Germany and had some Barbara or Dorothea in my bed tonight," Günther said suddenly in a maudlin voice, disheartened by his lack of success with the Spanish women who he had been pursuing all day long. Brockendorf chaffed him. He himself, he said, would rather be a crane or a stork so that the wine took longer to travel down his throat. By now the Alicante was beginning to go to our heads. Donop was loudly declaiming Horace above the din when Eglofstein, the regimental adjutant, strode into the room.

I sprang up and submitted my report.

"No other news, Jochberg?" he asked.

"None."

"Has no one passed the guards at the gate?"

"A Benedictine prior come from Barcelona to visit his sister in the town — the alcalde vouches for him — and an apothecary and his wife and daughter passing through here on the way to Bilbao. The papers were issued by General d'Hilliers' headquarters and are perfectly in order."

"No one else?"

"Two townsmen left here this morning to do a day's work in their vineyards. They were given laissez-passers and presented them on their return."

"Very good. Thank you."

"Eglofstein, I drink to you!" called Brockendorf, brandishing his glass. "Your health! Come, my old crane, sit here by me."

Eglofstein looked at our tipsy comrade and smiled. Donop, still steady on his feet, came over to him with two glasses of wine.

"Captain," he said, "we're gathered here tonight to await the Marquis of Bolibar. Bide with us and greet him, when he appears, on behalf of the officers of the regiment."

"To hell with all counts and marquises - liberty for ever!" roared Brockendorf. "Devil take the perfumed puppets with their bag-wigs and *chapeaux bas!*"

"I have to visit the pickets and the men detailed to guard the flour mills and bakehouses, but not

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