

## BREAKING BONDS; OR, LEAVES FROM PRISON-LORE. II.

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THE escape of Sir Sidney Smith from the prison of the Temple in Paris was skilfully designed and boldly carried out. As captain of the *Diamond* frigate, during the French Revolutionary war, he had distinguished himself by his unresting activity, and acquired the special detestation of the French government. When the fortune of war threw him a prisoner into their hands, they showed little disposition to treat him generously, and refused the proposal of the British ministry to exchange him for a French officer of equal rank. At first he was imprisoned in the Abbaye, along with his clerk, and a Royalist *émigré*, who had been taken with him, but was supposed to be Sir Sidney's servant. Thence the three prisoners were removed to the Temple, where Sir Sidney soon gained the goodwill and confidence of the governor, and was kindly treated by him. When it became evident that the government did not intend to release him, some Royalist friends whose acquaintance he had formed began to devise measures for effecting his deliverance, but for some time could not decide upon anything definite. The pretended servant, meanwhile, after a year's imprisonment, was released, and allowed to return to England.

Sir Sidney remained in captivity—a captivity not undisturbed by alarms and apprehensions. On one occasion he heard his gaoler shouting to him to come downstairs: “On vous demande en bas!” And on reaching the bottom of the staircase, found him standing there, with a pistol in each hand. “Monsieur,” he cried, “voilà tout ce qui je puis vous faire; c'est pour vous défendre la vie!” (“This is all I can do for you, sir; you must defend your life”). Sir Sidney asked him what it meant. “Voilà la garde en insurrection,” he replied; and proceeded to explain that the prime object of the insurgents would be to release the criminals, and that then he, as a State official, would be the first to fall a victim. Said Sir Sidney: “Well, then, I must defend your life as well as mine.” And, looking round, he added, “This was an ancient fortress of the Templars. There must be a well within the walls as well as outside of them; and we have some bread. Take care to hold the gate; and we can protect ourselves against all attack but that of artillery, and that can come only from a constituted authority to which we should be bound to yield.”

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Advancing to the gate, the insurgents shouted to the gaoler, "Ouvrez la porte!"

The gaoler answered gruffly, "Forcez-vous le dehors; je répondrai pour l'intérieur" ("Force it outside; I will answer for the inside").

A voice was heard to say, "Ah, s'il ouvre, je répondrai bien pour lui!" ("Ah, if he opens it, I'll answer for *him!*").

A vigilant watch was maintained until the *émeute* subsided and order was restored. Sir Sidney's conduct was reported next day to the authorities, and called forth warm expressions of approbation.

The man employed to carry fuel and water to the different apartments in the prison often stopped to chat with Sir Sidney about current events and the frequent changes of government. He was wont to remark with philosophical composure, "Tenez! ah, ils passeront tous; il n'y a que vous et moi qui restons" ("Well, they all pass away; only you and I remain")—a reflection which did not convey so much comfort to Sir Sidney as he seemed to expect.

In the spring of 1796, Sir Sidney's friends resolved to attempt his deliverance by forging an order for his removal to another prison, and then carrying him off *en route*. The order was accurately imitated, and by means of a bribe the actual stamp of the minister's signature was procured, so that nothing remained but to find two men bold enough to put the scheme into execution. This was undertaken by two gentlemen of Royalist proclivities, distinguished for their courage and address. Attired, the one as an adjutant, the other as a military officer, they presented themselves at the gate of the Temple. The keeper, after examining the order, and satisfying himself as to the signature, sent for Sir Sidney, who professed to be greatly concerned. The pretended adjutant, however, gravely informed him that the government had no intention of aggravating his misfortunes, and that he would not fail to be comfortable at the place to which he was instructed to convey him.

The *greffier*, who was present, here observed that at least six men from the guard must accompany the prisoner. The adjutant, retaining his composure, said that was quite correct, and gave orders for the men to be called out. But in a moment, as if he had been reflecting, he addressed Sir Sidney, saying: "Commodore, you are an officer; I am an officer also; your parole will be sufficient. Give me that, and there will be no necessity for an escort." "Sir," replied the prisoner, "if that be enough, I swear, on the faith of an officer, to accompany you wherever you choose to conduct me."

The keeper then asked for a formal discharge. The *greffier* produced the prison-register, and Mons. B.— boldly signed it with a flourish—*L'Oger, Adjutant-General*. Meanwhile, Sir Sidney kept the turnkeys

employed in listening to his pretty speeches and accepting his farewell presents. The registrar (or *greffier*) and the keeper then accompanied them to the second court, and the last gate being opened, the parties separated with elaborate manifestations of courtesy and goodwill.

In a *fiacre*, driven by one of Sir Sidney's friends, he started from the Temple. At a very short distance the coach ran up against a passer-by, and much confusion ensued, in the course of which, as had been arranged, Sir Sidney and his companion, M. Phéliepeaux, got out, mingled with the crowd, and afterwards made their way on foot to the house of a member of the Clermont-Tonnerre family, where Sir Sidney spent the night. Early next morning he and his friend started on their hazardous journey to the coast. It had been settled that two travellers should arrive at the house from Nanterre, and that the return horses should take Sir Sidney the first stage. On turning out of the courtyard, the pole of the carriage was broken, and a delay took place, by which the fugitives profited to walk on, and get past the barrier. This was fortunate, for when the carriage reached the barrier, it was stopped and examined by the police, who, finding it empty, and driven by Nanterre post-boys, allowed it to pass without further trouble.

Having bidden farewell to their kind friends, Sidney Smith and Phéliepeaux proceeded to Rouen, but were obliged to wait for several days until passports could be obtained. In company with a Captain Wright, whom he met there, he had occasion one day to pass the barrier, where some sentinels were stationed, and the expedient he adopted vividly illustrates his remarkable coolness and presence of mind. Neither he nor his friend had a passport, and the difficulty was how to pass the sentinels without being stopped and questioned. Sir Sidney, who was well accustomed to the usages at the barrier, requested Wright to go first, explaining that if he were stopped by the guard, he would then advance and endeavour to impose upon him by a bold assumption of authority. Wright did as he was instructed, and when he was asked for his passport, Sir Sidney stepped forward, and with an air of dignity said, "Je reponds pour ce citoyen ; je le connais" ("I answer for this citizen ; I know him"). Fully satisfied, the sentinel replied, "C'est bien, citoyen"; and the two went on their way.

At length all arrangements were completed for crossing the Channel. They quitted Rouen, and struck towards Honfleur. As the seaport of Havre and the mouth of the Seine opened before them, their postillion turned round, and remarked to Phéliepeaux, "Ah, voilà, citoyen, où nous avons pris l'Amiral Smith" ("It was yonder, citizen, that we took prisoner Admiral Smith"); adding, with a significant smile, "Mais nous le tenons à présent" ("But we have got him now").

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At Honfleur, while, concealed in a fisherman's hut, he waited for the tide, Sir Sidney heard a man exclaim, "I know him very well; he is Admiral Schmit." Our gallant seaman began to think he was betrayed, and as he went down to the boat which had been hired to take him out to sea, kept a vigilant look-out, lest an attempt should be made to seize him from behind. He embarked, however, unmolested; but was breathless with anxiety while the smack ran past a line of gunboats at anchor, not knowing but that at any moment he might be forced on board one of them. They were hailed, but answering, "*Pecheur, Numéro*"—were not interfered with. As they stood out to sea, one of the men recognised Sir Sidney, having often been on board his frigate, *The Diamond*, and liberally entertained there with rum and biscuit. "Monsieur l'Amiral," said the honest mariner, "c'est inutile de vous cacher de nous; nous vous connaissons bien. Nous avons été souvent abord votre frégate, *Le Diamant*, et vous nous avez toujours bien traité; vous m'avez souvent donné un verre d'eau-de-vie et encore des biscuits, et nous avons toujours tenu compte de ces bons offices." "Monsieur Admiral, it is useless to hide yourself from us, for we know you well. We have often been on board your frigate, *The Diamond*, and have always been well treated. You have often given us a glass of brandy and some biscuits, and we have never forgotten those good offices"). In a few minutes they sighted an English man-of-war, *The Argo*, and signalling her as best they could, they succeeded in attracting her attention. She bore down upon them, took Sir Sidney and his friends on board, and crowded on all sail for Portsmouth.

Shortly after the Bourbon Restoration in France, the Count de Lavalette, a devoted partisan of Napoleon, was condemned to death on a charge of high treason. His execution was fixed to take place on the 20th of December, but on the preceding evening he was saved by the devotion and courage of his wife, who caused herself to be carried to his prison in a sedan chair, accompanied by her daughter (aged 14) and an elderly governess. Dining with her husband in a private room, she persuaded him to assume her clothes, while she dressed herself rapidly in his. Then, affecting great grief, and covering his face with a veil, the count, supported by his daughter and the governess, contrived to leave the prison without attracting attention or exciting suspicion. He remained in Paris until the 20th of January concealed in the very hotel of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and finally contrived to escape from French territory, thanks to the generous assistance of three English gentlemen, who were punished for their good services by three months' imprisonment. The reader will remember that the Scotch Jacobite, the Earl of Nithisdale, escaped

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from the Tower, disguised in his wife's clothes, under very similar circumstances.

Going back to the 15th century, we find a sufficiently romantic episode in the escape of the Duke of Albany from Edinburgh Castle, where he had been imprisoned by his brother, James III. Fearing that his life might be in danger, some of his friends determined to accomplish his rescue. A small sloop, with a cargo of Gascony wine on board, put into Leith Roads, and landed a couple of small casks, as a present for the imprisoned duke. The governor having permitted them to be conveyed to the prince's apartment, the latter, on examining them in private, found in one a large ball of wax, in which was enclosed a letter entreating him to attempt his escape, and promising that the sloop should be held ready to take him on board, if he could make his way to the sea-shore. The writer implored him to waste not a moment, as it was reported that he was to lose his head on the following day. In the same cask was concealed a great coil of rope, so that he might lower himself from the summit of the castle-wall to the foot of the rock which it surmounts. His chamberlain, whose fidelity was beyond doubt or suspicion, shared his master's prison, and readily promised to assist him in his perilous enterprise.

The most important point was to make sure of the captain of the guards. For this purpose Albany invited him to sup with him, and taste the red wine of Gascony which had just arrived. The captain, after posting his guards wherever danger might be expected, repaired to the prince's chamber, accompanied by three soldiers, and partook heartily of the viands put before him. After supper, the duke engaged him at a game of trictrac, and the captain, seated beside a great fire, and affected by the strong wine, with which the chamberlain constantly filled his cup, began to sleep, as well as his soldiers, to whom the wine had been just as freely administered. Thereupon the prince, a man of great strength, whose energies were redoubled by despair, sprang from the table, and with one blow of his dagger stretched the captain dead. He dealt with two of the soldiers in the same manner, the third was despatched by his chamberlain; and they threw their bodies in the fire. Then they took the keys from the unfortunate captain's pocket, and, ascending to the ramparts, chose a dark corner, out of view of the sentinels, to effect their perilous descent.

The chamberlain insisted on being the first to test the rope. It proved to be too short; he fell, and broke his thigh; but was able to cry to his master to lengthen the cord. Albany returned to his apartment, undaunted by the presence of the dead, tore the coverings from his couch, fastened them to the rope, and alighted in safety at the foot

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of the rock. Then he hoisted his chamberlain on his broad shoulders, carried him to a secure place, where he could lie hidden until he recovered from his accident, hastened to the sea-shore, and making the signal agreed upon, was immediately taken on board the sloop, which at once set sail for France.

In the castle the night passed undisturbed, for the guards knew that their commandant, with three men, was supping with the prince; but when at daybreak they perceived a rope suspended from the rampart their suspicions were aroused. Rushing to the duke's apartment, they recoiled with horror from the bloody spectacle it presented. One of their comrades lay dead in front of the door, the other two, with their captain, were stretched, half-burned, upon the hearth. The king was greatly surprised, it is said, at this extraordinary escape, and refused to credit it until he had examined the place with his own eyes. It was certainly an exploit of remarkable courage and resolution.

More remarkable still was the escape of Francis Alard, a celebrated Protestant theologian of the 16th century, who had been condemned to death by the Inquisition as a heretic, and was allowed only three days in which to prepare for the fires of martyrdom. On the last night, while sitting in his cell alone, and absorbed in prayer, he suddenly heard a voice, as he thought, which said to him, "*Francisce, surge et vade*" ("Francis, arise and go forth"). He started to his feet, and perceiving an opening through which the moon shone, satisfied himself that his body could pass. Then he cut up his coverlet and sheets, and twisted them into a cord, which he fastened to the iron bar of the window; and after flinging his clothes to the bottom of the tower, lowered himself by the cord, and passed, unperceived, close by the sentinel. Hiding in a clump of bushes, he spent three days without food; was then taken up by a wagoner, and eventually reached in safety the duchy of Oldenburg, where the reigning prince protected him from his enemies, and appointed him his almoner.