

# Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin

*St Leon*

Edited by  
Pamela Clemit



*THE PICKERING MASTERS*  
COLLECTED NOVELS AND MEMOIRS OF  
WILLIAM GODWIN

Volume 4. *St Leon*



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COLLECTED NOVELS AND MEMOIRS OF  
WILLIAM GODWIN

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4

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ST LEON

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

*St Leon: A Tale of the Sixteenth Century* (4 vols, G. G. & J. Robinson, 1799; 2nd edn., 4 vols, G. G. & J. Robinson, 1800; 3rd edn., 4 vols, W. Simpkin & R. Marshal, 1816; H. Colburn & R. Bentley, 1831). The present text is based on the last edition corrected in the author's lifetime, which first appeared in Bentley's Standard Novels, First Series (1831–55). A guide to the principles of textual treatment will be found in volume 1. There is one further point which bears on this volume: the revised spelling has been retained and regularised.

In Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley's Standard Novels, one of the first monthly series of cheap reprints of classic novels, it was a matter of conscious editorial policy to secure revised texts and new Prefaces in which the author's mature judgement was passed on his earlier work.<sup>1</sup>

According to his diary, Godwin wrote *St Leon* between 31 December, 1797 and 23 November, 1799; it first appears under the title 'The Adept', then 'Opus Magnum', 'Natural Magic', and finally, in July 1798, 'St Leon'.<sup>2</sup> It was originally planned as a three-volume work, but in February 1800 Godwin wrote to Tom Wedgwood describing how the story had grown, requiring a fourth volume.<sup>3</sup> *St Leon* was published on 2 December, 1799, and a second edition was called for within a month.

In the 1799 Preface, Godwin acknowledged as his main source a work which he read in May 1795 and July 1797, Johann Heinrich Cohausen's *Hermippus Redivivus: or, The Sage's Triumph over Old Age and the Grave* (translated by Dr John Campbell, 1744), a collection of histories of several possessors of the philosopher's stone. Godwin's account of the wars between Francis I and Charles V is based on William Robertson's *The History of the Reign of the Emperor Charles V* (1769), read in July 1798, and his depiction of Catholic Spain is indebted to Robert Watson's *The History of the Reign of Philip II* (1777), read in July 1799. For the fourth volume, Godwin consulted Robert Townson's *Travels in Hungary ... in 1793* (1797) and *L'Histoire des Révolutions de Hongrie* (1739) by Abbé Brenner, but his portrait of Bethlem Gabor is derived from a German Gothic novel by Lawrence Flammenberg, *The Necromancer* (translated by Peter Teuthold, 1794), which he read in May 1795.<sup>4</sup> Between November 1798 and February 1799, Godwin read Augustin Barruel's *Memoirs, Illustrating the History of Jacobinism* (translated by Robert Clifford, 1797–8), and John Robison's *Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Religions and Governments of Europe* (1797), two works which linked the figure of the

alchemist with the Illuminati, a vast secret society said to have been responsible for the French Revolution.

There was a mixed reaction to *St Leon* from Godwin's friends and fellow-writers. Comparing it with Godwin's earlier novel, *Caleb Williams* (1794), Coleridge found it 'of a better species . . . because, though less impressive in a first reading, more acceptable in a second', and thought its 'prime beauty' was the encounter of St Leon and Bethlem Gabor.<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald was full of praise for the first two volumes, but was disappointed by the last two, which fell short of 'the brilliant imagination and the grand conception' required to invent the story.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Holcroft compiled a list of the novel's defects, the greatest of which was its apparent similarity to *Caleb Williams*: 'your Count de St Leon is but the counterpart of your Ferdinando Count Falkland.' Later, however, Holcroft relented, and gave special praise to Godwin's idealized portrait of Mary Wollstonecraft: 'Men must have arrived at an uncommon degree of general wisdom, when "St Leon" shall no longer be read. Your Marguerite is inimitable. Knowing the model after which you drew, as often as I recollected it, my heart ached while I read . . . Through the whole work there is so much to censure, and so much to astonish, that in my opinion it is in every sense highly interesting.'<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary reviews were generally unfavourable. The *British Critic* reminded its readers of Godwin's other inflammatory works, and refused to recognise anything new in *St Leon*: 'There is . . . a general sterility with respect to incident, a total ignorance of the manners and customs of the period the writer professes to describe; and above all, a striking similarity throughout to the former publication of *Caleb Williams*.' It ended by listing examples of the work's 'open and offensive profaneness'.<sup>8</sup> The *Antijacobin Review* claimed that *St Leon* contained less 'evil' than expected, and, in the course of a lengthy plot-summary, attributed the hero's sentiments to Godwin himself and cited examples of inconsistency. It expressed approval of Godwin's changed attitude to the domestic affections, but regretted his 'pitiful sneers' at Christianity, and found little to praise in the novel's imaginative conception.<sup>9</sup> The writer in the *Critical Review*, less circumscribed by party politics than the previous two, recognised the moral purpose of the story, but thought the same point could have been made 'without such a poignant aggravation of the distress of St Leon'. Nevertheless he commended the work's passages of reflection as 'frequently just, and sometimes new', and the style as 'spirited'.<sup>10</sup> In the *Monthly Review*, the clergyman Christopher Moody tackled the issue of whether fiction was an appropriate vehicle for the philosopher and moralist: 'Is truth obliged to invoke the aid of the wildest fictions; and will it be said that virtue and contentment are best taught in the school of romance?' Although he praised the work's 'art and genius', and found the characterization of St Leon 'masterly', he ended by advising Godwin's readers to be on their guard against a mind 'as excentric as it is vigorous'.<sup>11</sup>

# INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The last contemporary comments came from the group of early nineteenth-century writers influenced by Godwin. Percy Bysshe Shelley admired *St Leon* and singled out its 'proud & true sentiment, "There is nothing which the human mind can conceive, which it may not execute."'12 In reply to Godwin's remark that writing another novel would kill him, Byron is reported to have said: 'And what matter? We should have another "St Leon".'13 In *The Spirit of the Age* (1825), William Hazlitt ranked *St Leon* and *Caleb Williams* together as 'two of the most splendid and impressive works of the imagination that have appeared in our times. It is not merely that these novels are very well for a philosopher to have produced – they are admirable and complete in themselves, and would not lead you to suppose that the author, who is so entirely at home in human character and dramatic situation, had ever dabbled in logic or metaphysics.'14

## NOTES

1. Michael Sadleir, *XIX Century Fiction: A Bibliographical Guide based on his own Collection* (2 vols, London: Constable and Co., 1955), II 95.
2. Ab. MSS e. 203–4.
3. Ab. MSS c. 527.
4. See Gary Kelly, 'History and Fiction: Bethlem Gabor in Godwin's *St Leon*', *English Language Notes*, 14 (1976), 117–20; and below, note to p. 320.
5. Godwin's note, 'Judgments on the Novel of St Leon, 1799', Ab. MSS c. 604/2.
6. Letter to Godwin, 24 December [1799?], Ab. MSS c. 509.
7. Thomas Holcroft, undated critique of *St Leon*, and letter to Godwin, 29 September, 1800, Ab. MSS c. 511, reprinted in part in C. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries* (2 vols, London: H.S. King, 1876), II 25–6; Mary Wollstonecraft died in September 1797.
8. *British Critic*, 15 (January 1800), 47–52 (47, 52).
9. *Antijacobin Review*, 5 (January 1800), 23–8 (23); (February 1800), 145–53 (151).
10. *Critical Review*, Second Series, 28 (January 1800), 40–8 (48).
11. *Monthly Review*, 33 (September 1800), 23–9 (24, 26, 28).
12. Letters to Elizabeth Hitchener, 26 November, 1811, and Mary Shelley, 22 September, 1818, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones (2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I 195, II 40.
13. William Maginn, 'William Godwin', 'A Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters, No. 53', *Fraser's Magazine*, 10 (October 1834), 463.
14. William Hazlitt, 'William Godwin', *The Spirit of the Age: or, Contemporary Portraits* [1825], in *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe (21 vols, London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930–4), XI 16–28 (24).





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*Travels of St Leon*



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S T A N D A R D

NOVELS.

N° V.

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TRAVELS OF ST. LEON.

BY WILLIAM GODWIN.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

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LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,

NEW BURLINGTON STREET:

BELL AND BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH,

AND CUMMING, DUBLIN.

1831.

Epigraph: William Congreve, *Love for Love* (1695), II. i. 236.

# ST. LEON:

A

TALE OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

BY

WILLIAM GODWIN.

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Ferdinand Mendez Pinto was but a type of thee, thou liar of  
the first magnitude. CONGRATULATE.

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LONDON:

HENRY COLBURN AND RICHARD BENTLEY,

NEW BURLINGTON STREET;

BELL AND BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH

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1831.



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## ADVERTISEMENT

The publishers of the collection of 'STANDARD NOVELS' are extremely desirous that I should furnish them with a few lines, by way of introduction to the appearance of *ST LEON* in its present form.<sup>a</sup> I am however at a loss how to oblige them. In the original Preface I frankly stated the sources upon which I had drawn for the idea and conduct of the work. I have therefore no remarks to offer, but these which follow:—

In 1794 I produced the novel *Caleb Williams*. I believed myself fortunate in the selection I had made of the ground-plot of that work. An atrocious crime committed by a man previously of the most exemplary habits, the annoyance he suffers from the immeasurable and ever-wakeful curiosity of a raw youth who is placed about his person, the state of doubt in which the reader might for a time be as to the truth of the charges, and the consequences growing out of these causes, seemed to me to afford scope for a narrative of no common interest. I was not disappointed. *Caleb Williams* was honoured with the public favour.

The consequence was that I was solicited to try my hand again in a work of fiction. I hesitated long. I despaired of finding again a topic so rich of interest and passion. In those days it was deemed a most daring thought to attempt to write a novel, with the hope that it might hereafter rank among the classics of a language. The most successful English writers / in that province of literature had scarcely gone beyond three. It had not then been conceived that the same author might produce twenty or thirty, at the rate of two or three *per annum*, and might still at least retain his hold upon the partiality of his contemporaries. To Sir Walter Scott we are indebted for this discovery.<sup>b</sup>

At length, after having passed some years in a state of diffidence and irresolution, I ventured on the task. It struck me that if I could 'mix human feelings and passions with incredible situations,' I might thus attain a sort of novelty that would conciliate the patience, at least, even of some of the severest judges.<sup>c</sup> To this way of thinking *ST LEON* was indebted for a 'local habitation, and a name.'<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup> See Introduction.

<sup>b</sup> Sir Walter Scott (1771–1832), whose works were collected in *The Waverley Novels*, New Edition with the Author's Notes (48 vols, Edinburgh, 1829–33), providing a precedent for Bentley's Standard Novels, First Series (London, 1831–55).

<sup>c</sup> Godwin quotes from the Preface to *St Leon* (1799), see below, p. 10.

<sup>d</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream* V. i. 17.



One of my most valued friends (Mr Northcote) has often told me, that the public may sometimes be interested in the perusal of a book, but that they never give themselves any trouble about the author.<sup>a</sup> He therefore kindly advised me on no occasion to say any thing in print about myself. The present race of readers seem scarcely disposed to verify this maxim. They are understood to be desirous to learn something of the peculiarities, the 'life, character, and behaviour,' of an author, before they consign him to the gulph of oblivion, and are willing to learn from his own testimony what train of thoughts induced him to adopt the particular subject and plan of the work, upon the perusal of which they are engaged.

*June, 1831 /*

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<sup>a</sup> James Northcote (1746–1831), painter, royal academician and author, who painted Godwin's portrait in 1801.

## PREFACE

The following passage from a work, said to be written by the late Dr John Campbel, and entitled *Hermippus Redivivus*, suggested the first hint of the present performance:—

‘There happened in the year 1687, an odd accident at Venice, that made a very great stir then, and which I think deserves to be rescued from oblivion. The great freedom and ease with which all persons, who make a good appearance, live in that city, is known sufficiently to all who are acquainted with it; such will not therefore be surprised, that a stranger, who went by the name of signor Gualdi, and who made a considerable figure there, was admitted into the best company, though nobody knew who or what he was. He remained at Venice for some months; and three things were remarked in his conduct. The first was, that he had a small collection of fine pictures, which he readily showed to any body that desired it; the next, that he was perfectly versed in all arts and sciences, and spoke on every subject with such readiness and sagacity, as astonished all who heard him; and it was, in the third place, observed, that he never wrote or received any letter, never desired any credit, or made use of bills of exchange, but paid for every thing in ready money, and lived decently, though not in splendour.

‘This gentleman met one day at the coffee-house with a Venetian nobleman, who was an extraordinary good judge of pictures: he had heard of signor Gualdi’s collection, and in a very polite manner desired to see them, to which the other very readily consented. After the Venetian had / viewed signor Gualdi’s collection, and expressed his satisfaction, by telling him that he had never seen a finer, considering the number of pieces of which it consisted; he cast his eye by chance over the chamber-door, where hung a picture of this stranger. The Venetian looked upon it, and then upon him. “This picture was drawn for you, sir,” says he to signor Gualdi, to which the other made no answer, but by a low bow. “You look,” continued the Venetian, “like a man of fifty, and yet I know this picture to be of the hand of Titian, who has been dead one hundred and thirty years, how is this possible?” — “It is not easy,” said signor Gualdi, gravely, “to know all things that are possible; but there is certainly no crime in my being like a picture drawn by Titian.” The Venetian easily perceived, by his manner of speaking, that he had given the stranger offence, and therefore took his leave.

‘He could not forbear speaking of this in the evening to some of his friends,

who resolved to satisfy themselves by looking upon the picture the next day. In order to have an opportunity of doing so, they went to the coffee-house about the time that signor Gualdi was wont to come thither; and not meeting with him, one of them, who had often conversed with him, went to his lodgings to enquire after him, where he heard, that he had set out an hour before for Vienna. This affair made a great noise, and found a place in all the newspapers of that time.’\*<sup>a</sup>

It is well known that the philosopher’s stone, the art of transmuting metals into gold, and the *elixir vitae*, which was to restore youth, and make him that possessed it immortal, formed a principal object of the studies of the / curious for centuries.<sup>b</sup> Many stories, beside this of signor Gualdi, have been told, of persons who were supposed to be in possession of those wonderful secrets, in search of which hundreds of unfortunate adventurers wasted their fortunes and their lives.

It has been said of Shakespear, that he

Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new†:

but the burthen sustained by Shakespear was too heavy for the shoulders of any other individual. I leave the first part of the task above mentioned to be divided among those celebrated novelists, living and dead, who have attempted to delineate the scenes of real life. In this little work I have endeavoured to gain footing in one neglected track of the latter province. The hearts and the curiosity of readers have been assailed in so many ways, that we, writers who bring up the rear of our illustrious predecessors, must be contented to arrive at novelty in whatever mode we are able. The foundation of the following tale is such as, it is not to be supposed, ever existed. But, if I have mixed human feelings and passions with incredible situations, and thus rendered them impressive and interesting, I shall entertain some hope to be pardoned the boldness and irregularity of my design.

Some readers of my graver productions will perhaps, in perusing these little

\* To this story, in the book from which I have quoted it, is subjoined the following reference: ‘*Mémoires Historiques*, 1687, tom. i. p. 365.’ Being desirous of giving my extract from the oldest authority, I caused the British Museum, and the libraries of Oxford and Cambridge, to be searched for this publication, but in vain. The story and the reference are, not improbably, both of them the fictions of the English writer.

† Johnson’s Occasional Prologue on Garrick’s assuming the management of Drury-lane Theatre.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> J. H. Cohausen, *Hermippus Redivivus: or, The Sage’s Triumph over Old Age and the Grave – Wherein, a Method is laid down for Prolonging the Life and Vigour of Man*, trans. John Campbell (1744), pp. 115–17.

<sup>b</sup> The transmutation of base metals into gold and the search for the alkahest, or universal solvent, were the two branches of alchemy.

<sup>c</sup> Samuel Johnson, ‘Prologue Spoken at the Opening of the Theatre in Drury Lane, 1747’ (1747), l. 4; David Garrick (1717–79), celebrated actor, shared the management of the Drury Lane Theatre 1747–76.

volumes, accuse me of inconsistency; the affections and charities of private life being every where in this publication a topic of the warmest eulogium, while in the Enquiry concerning Political Justice they seemed to be treated with no great degree of indulgence and favour. In answer to this objection, all I think it necessary to say on the present occasion is, that, for more than four years, I have been anxious for opportunity and leisure to modify / some of the earlier chapters of that work in conformity to the sentiments inculcated in this. Not that I see cause to make any change respecting the principle of justice, or any thing else fundamental to the system there delivered; but that I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of man, and from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind of him that cherishes them.<sup>a</sup> True wisdom will recommend to us individual attachments; for with them our minds are more thoroughly maintained in activity and life than they can be under the privation of them; and it is better that man should be a living being, than a stock or a stone. True virtue will sanction this recommendation; since it is the object of virtue to produce happiness, and since the man who lives in the midst of domestic relations will have many opportunities of conferring pleasure, minute in the detail, yet not trivial in the amount, without interfering with the purposes of general benevolence. Nay, by kindling his sensibility, and harmonising his soul, they may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and the public.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>c</sup>

*November 26, 1799 /*

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<sup>a</sup> Godwin omits two sentences from the Preface to the first edition (1799): 'The way in which these seemingly jarring principles may be reconciled, is in part pointed out in a little hook which I gave to the public in the year 1798, and which I will therefore take the liberty to quote. A sound morality requires that "nothing human should be regarded by us as indifferent"; but it is impossible we should not feel the strongest interest for those persons whom we know most intimately, and whose welfare and sympathies are united to our own. . . .'

<sup>b</sup> In the Preface to the first edition, from 'A sound morality . . . ' to the end of the paragraph appeared in quotation marks, followed by the reference: 'Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Ch. VI, p. 90. Ild Edition [1798]'.

<sup>c</sup> Godwin omits his final note to the Preface in the first edition: 'For the sake of the unlearned reader, I subjoin the following illustration of the motto prefixed to these volumes.'

Ferdinand Mendez Pinto was a Portuguese, born about the year 1510. Becoming a fugitive from his country at a very immature age, he travelled through many parts of Africa and Asia for twenty-one years, and, by his own account, encountered a surprising number of distressful adventures. The translation of his travels into French forms a very thick volume in quarto, and bears date in the year 1628.

Vicissitudes de la Fortune, 12mo, Tom. I, p. 1.'



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## CHAPTER I

There is nothing that human imagination can figure brilliant and enviable, that human genius and skill do not aspire to realize. In the early days of antiquity, one of the favourite topics of speculation was a perfect system of civil policy; and no sooner had Plato delineated his imaginary republic, than he sought for a spot of earth upon which to execute his plan.<sup>a</sup> In my own times, and for upwards of a century before them, the subject which has chiefly occupied men of intrepid and persevering study, has been the great secret of nature, the *opus magnum*, in its two grand and inseparable branches, the art of multiplying gold, and of defying the inroads of infirmity and death.

It is notorious that uncommon talents and unparalleled industry have been engaged in this mighty task. It has, I know, been disputed by the audacious adversaries of all sober and reasonable evidence, whether these talents and industry have in any case attained the object they sought. It is not to my purpose to ascertain the number of those whose victory over the powers and inertness of matter has been complete. It is enough that I am a living instance of the existence of such men. To these two secrets, if they are to be considered as two, I have been for years in the habit of resorting for my gratification. I have in my possession the choice of being as wealthy as I please, and the gift of immortal life. Every thing that I see almost, I can without difficulty make my own; for what palaces, pictures, parks or gardens, rarities of art or nature, have not a price at which their owner will consent to yield / them? The luxuries of every quarter of the world are emptied at my feet. I can command, to an extent almost inconceivable, the passions of men. What heart can withstand the assault of princely magnificence? What man is inaccessible to a bribe? Add to these advantages, that I am invulnerable to disease. Every sun that rises, finds the circulations of my frame in the most perfect order. Decrepitude can never approach me. A thousand winters want the power to furrow my countenance with wrinkles, or turn my hairs to silver. Exhaustless wealth and eternal youth are the attributes by which I am distinguished from the rest of mankind.

I do not sit down now to write a treatise of natural philosophy. The

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<sup>a</sup> Plato (427–347 BC), Greek philosopher who in the *Republic* set out the principles on which an ideal society should be based; alluding, presumably, to Plato's twelve years of travels before he settled in Athens and founded the Academy, a school designed to give a philosophical education to those embarking on a political career.

condition by which I hold my privileges is, that they must never be imparted. I sit down purely to relate a few of those extraordinary events that have been produced, in the period of my life which is already elapsed, by the circumstances and the peculiarity to which I have just alluded.

It is so obvious, as to make it almost improper to specify it, that the pursuit in which so many of my contemporaries are engaged, and the end of which I have so singularly achieved, is in its appearance infinitely more grand and interesting than that which occupied the thoughts of Plato and the most eminent writers of antiquity. What is political liberty compared with unbounded riches and immortal vigour? The immediate application of political liberty is, to render a man's patrimony or the fruits of his industry completely his own, and to preserve them from the invasion of others. But the petty detail of preservation or gradual acquisition can never enter into competition with the *great secret*, which endows a man in a moment with every thing that the human heart can wish. Considered in this light, how mean and contemptible does the ambition of the boasted ancients appear, compared with ours? What adept or probationer of the present day would be content to resign the study of God and the profounder secrets of nature, and to bound his ardour to the investigation of his own miserable existence.<sup>a</sup>

It may seem perhaps to many, that the history of a person / possessed of advantages so unparalleled as mine, must be, like the history of paradise, or of the future happiness of the blessed, too calm and motionless, too much of one invariable texture and exempt from vicissitude, to excite the attention or interest the passions of the reader. If he will have patience, and apply to the perusal of my narrative, he will in no long time perceive how far his conjecture is founded in sagacity and reason.

Some persons may be curious to know what motives can have induced a man of such enormous wealth, and so every way qualified to revel in delights, to take the trouble of penning his memoirs. The immortality with which I am endowed seems to put out of the question the common motives that relate to posthumous fame.

The curiosity here mentioned, if it really exists, I cannot consent to gratify. I will anticipate nothing. In the progress of my story, my motive for recording it will probably become evident.

I am descended from one of the most ancient and honourable families of the kingdom of France. I was the only child of my father, who died while I was an infant. My mother was a woman of rather a masculine understanding, and full of the prejudices of nobility and magnificence. Her whole soul was in a manner concentrated in the ambition to render me the worthy successor of the counts de St Leon, who had figured with distinguished reputation in the wars of the

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<sup>a</sup> Adept, one who had attained the great secret of alchemy; probationer, an apprentice in the art.

Holy Land.<sup>a</sup> My father had died fighting gallantly in the plains of Italy under the standard of Louis the Twelfth; a prince whose name was never repeated to me unaccompanied with the praises due to his military prowess, and to the singular humanity of disposition by which he acquired the title of *The father of his people*.<sup>b</sup> My mother's mind was inflamed with the greatness of my ancestors, and she indefatigably sought to kindle in my bosom a similar flame. It has been a long-established custom for the barons and feudal vassals of the kings of France to enter with great personal expense into the brilliant and dazzling expeditions of their sovereigns; and my father greatly impaired his fortune in preparations for that very campaign in which he terminated his life. My mother / industriously applied herself to the restoration of my patrimony; and the long period of my minority afforded her scope for that purpose.

It was impossible for any boy to be treated with more kindness and considerate indulgence than I was during the period of my adolescence. My mother loved me to the very utmost limits perhaps of human affection. I was her darling and her pride, her waking study, and her nightly dream. Yet I was not pampered into corporeal imbecility, or suffered to rust in inactivity of mind. I was provided with the best masters. I was excited, and successfully excited, zealously to apply myself to the lessons they taught. I became intimately acquainted with the Italian writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. I was initiated in the study of the classics, to the cultivation of which the revival of letters at this time gave particular ardour. I was instructed in the principles of the fine arts. There was no species of accomplishment at that time in vogue, that my mother was not anxious I should make my own. The only science I neglected was the very science which has since given rise to the most extraordinary events of my life. But the object to which my attention was principally called, was the pursuit of military exercises, and the cultivation of every thing that could add to the strength, agility, or grace of my body, and to the adventurousness and enterprise of my mind. My mother loved my honour and my fame more than she loved my person.

A circumstance that tended perhaps more than any other to fix the yet fluctuating character of my youthful mind, was my being present as a spectator at the celebrated meeting between Francis the First and Henry the Eighth, king of England, in a field between Ardres and Guines.<sup>c</sup> My mother refused to accompany me, being already arrived at an age in which curiosity and the love of festive scenes are usually diminished, and the expenses incurred by all the

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<sup>a</sup> The Crusades, a series of military expeditions to rescue the Holy Land from infidels 1095–1204.

<sup>b</sup> Louis XII (1462–1515), King of France from 1498, whose foreign policy was dominated by unsuccessful attempts to win territory in Italy 1499–1513; the title of the Father of his People was conferred on him by the Estate of Tours in 1506.

<sup>c</sup> Francis I (1494–1547), King of France from 1515, and Henry VIII (1491–1547), King of England from 1509, met at the Field of the Cloth of Gold near Calais to demonstrate their short-lived friendship in June 1520.



nobility who attended upon this scene being incompatible with the economy to which she rigidly adhered. I was therefore placed under the protection of the Marquis de Villeroy, her brother, and, with two servants who attended me, formed a part of his suite. /

I was at this time fifteen years of age. My contemplations had been familiar with ideas of magnificence and grandeur, but my life had been spent in the most sequestered retirement. This contrast had a particular effect upon my disposition; it irritated to a very high degree my passion for splendour and distinction; I lived in the fairy fields of visionary greatness, and was more than indifferent to the major part of the objects around me. I pined for every thing the reverse of my present condition; I cultivated the exercises in which I was engaged, only as they were calculated to prepare me for future achievements.

By the incident I have mentioned, I was transported at once from a scene of modest obscurity, to a scene of the most lavish splendour that the world perhaps ever contemplated. I never remembered to have seen even Paris itself. The prevailing taste of Europe has for some time led very much to costliness in dress. This taste, in its present profusion, I believe took its rise in the field of the Vale of Ardres. The two kings were both in the vigour of their youth, and were said to be the handsomest men of the age in which they lived. The beauty of Henry was sturdy and muscular; that of Francis more refined and elegant, without subtracting in any considerable degree from the firmness of his make. Henry was four years older than his brother monarch. The first of them might have been taken as a model to represent a youthful Hercules, and the last an Apollo.<sup>a</sup>

The splendour of dress that was worn upon this occasion exceeds almost all credibility. Every person of distinction might be said in a manner to carry an estate upon his shoulders; nor was the variety of garments inferior to the richness. Wolsey, a man whose magnificence of disposition was only surpassed by the pride of his soul, was for the most part the director of the whole.<sup>b</sup> He possessed the most absolute ascendancy over the mind of his master, at the same time that Francis artfully indulged his caprice, that he might claim from him in return a similar indulgence in weightier matters.

The pomp of processions, and the ceremony of opening this memorable festival, went first; a sort of solemn and / half-moving pageant, which the eye took in at leisure, and took in till it was filled. This was succeeded by every thing that was rapid, animated, and interesting: masques and exhibitions of all kinds; and, which was still more to me, and which my soul devoured with indescribable ardour, justings, tilts, and tournaments without end. The beauty

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<sup>a</sup> Hercules was renowned for his feats of physical strength and fortitude; Apollo embodied male beauty and moral excellence.

<sup>b</sup> Thomas Wolsey (c. 1473–1530), Archbishop of York from 1514 and chief minister of Henry VIII 1514–29.

of the armour, the caparisons<sup>a</sup> of the steeds, the mettle of the animals themselves, and the ardour and grace of the combatants, surpassed every thing that my fancy had ever painted. These scenes were acted in the midst of a vast amphitheatre of spectators, where all that was noble and eminent of either country was assembled – the manliness of aspiring youth, and the boundless varieties of female attraction. All were in their gayest attire; every eye was lighted up with complacency and joy. If Heraclitus, or any other morose philosopher who has expatiated on the universal misery of mankind, had entered the field of Ardres, he must have retracted his assertions, or fled from the scene with confusion.<sup>b</sup> The kings were placed at either end of the lists, surrounded with their courtiers. Every eye through this vast assembly was fixed upon the combatants; the body of every one present was inclined this way or that, in unconscious sympathy with the redoubted knights. From time to time, as the favourites of either party prevailed, the air was rent with shouts and acclamations.

What added to the fascination of all that I have yet mentioned, was that now, for the first time in an equal degree perhaps for centuries, the stiffness of unwieldy form was laid aside, and the heart of man expanded itself with generosity and confidence. It burst the fetters of ages; and, having burst them, it seemed to revel in its new-found liberty. It is well known that, after a few days of idle precaution and specious imprisonment on both sides, Francis one morning mounted his horse, and appeared, without guards or any previous notice, before the tent of Henry. The example was contagious, and from this time all ceremony was laid aside. The kings themselves entered personally into the combats of their subjects. It was a delightful and a ravishing spectacle, to witness the freedom of the old Roman manners, almost of the old Roman Saturnalia, / polished and refined with all that was graceful and humane in the age of chivalry.<sup>c</sup>

It may easily be imagined what an effect a scene like this was calculated to produce upon a youth of my age and my education. I recollected with anguish that the immaturity of my years precluded me from taking any active part in the spectacle. My appearance however was sufficiently advantageous. I was presented to Francis the First. He did me the honour to question me respecting my studies; and, finding in me some knowledge of those arts and that literature, of which he was himself so zealous a favourer, he expressed to my uncle a great satisfaction with my figure and acquisitions. I might from this time have been taken to court, and made one of the pages to this illustrious monarch. But the plan of my mother was different. She did not wish for the present that my eye

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<sup>a</sup> Ornamented covering spread over the saddle of a horse.

<sup>b</sup> Heraclitus or Heracleitus (c. 540–c. 480 BC), Greek philosopher notorious for his misanthropy.

<sup>c</sup> In Roman religion, the festival celebrated 17–19 December, a time of goodwill and license in which slaves were freed from their duties.

should be satiated with public scenes, or that the public should grow too familiarly acquainted with my person. She rightly judged that my passion for the theatre of glory would grow more impetuous, by being withheld for some time from the gratifications for which it panted. She wished that I should present myself for the first time among the nobility of France an accomplished cavalier, and not suffer the disadvantage of having exposed in the eye of the world those false steps and frailties, from which the inexperience of youth is never entirely free. These motives being explained to the king, he was graciously pleased to sanction them with his approbation. I accordingly returned to finish the course of my education at my paternal château upon the banks of the Garonne.<sup>a</sup>

The state of my mind during the three succeeding years amply justified the sagacity of my mother. I was more eager for improvement than I had ever yet been. I had before formed some conceptions of the career of honour from the books I had read, and from the conversation of this excellent matron. But my reveries were impotent and little, compared with what I had now seen. Like the author of our holy religion, I had spent my forty days without food in the wilderness, when suddenly my eyes were opened, and I was presented with all the kingdoms of the / world, and all the glory of them.<sup>b</sup> The fairy scene continued for a moment, and then vanished; leaving nothing behind it on all sides, but the same barrenness and gloom by which it had been preceded. I never shut my eyes without viewing in imagination the combats of knights and the train of ladies. I had been regarded with distinction by my sovereign; and Francis the First stood before my mind the abstract and model of perfection and greatness. I congratulated myself upon being born in an age and country so favourable to the acquisition of all that my soul desired.

I was already eighteen years of age, when I experienced the first misfortune that ever befel me. It was the death of my mother. She felt the approach of her dissolution several weeks before it arrived, and held repeated conversations with me, respecting the feelings I ought to entertain, and the conduct it would become me to pursue, when she should be no more.

‘My son,’ said she, ‘your character, and the promise of your early years, have constituted my only consolation since the death of your excellent father. Our marriage was the result of a most sincere and exclusive attachment; and never did man more deserve to be loved than Reginald de St Leon. When he died, the whole world would have been nothing to me but one vast blank, if he had not left behind him the representative of his person, and the heir to his virtues. While I was busied in your education, I seemed to be discharging the last duty to the memory of my husband. The occupation was sacred to the honour of the dead, even before it became so peculiarly pleasing to me upon its own account,

<sup>a</sup> River in S.W. France.

<sup>b</sup> Alluding to Matt. 4: 1–8.

as I afterwards found it. I hope I have in some measure discharged the task, in the manner in which my lord your father would have wished it to have been discharged, if he had lived. I am thankful to Heaven, that I have been spared so long for so dear and honourable a purpose.

'You must now, my son, stand by yourself, and be the arbitrator of your own actions. I could have wished that this necessity might have been a little further deferred; but I trust your education has not been of that sort which / is calculated to render a young man helpless and contemptible. You have been taught to know your rank in society, and to respect yourself. You have been instructed in every thing that might most effectually forward you in the career of glory. There is not a young cavalier among all the nobility of France more accomplished, or that promises to do greater honour to his name and his country. I shall not live to witness the performance of this promise, but the anticipation even now, pours a long stream of sunshine on my departing hour.

'Farewell, my son! You no longer stand in need of my maternal care. When I am gone, you will be compelled more vividly to feel that singleness and self-dependence which are the source of all virtue. Be careful of yourself. Be careful that your career may be both spotless and illustrious. Hold your life as a thing of no account, when it enters into competition with your fame. A true knight thinks no sacrifice and suffering hard, that honour demands. Be humane, gentle, generous, and intrepid. Be prompt to follow wherever your duty calls you. Remember your ancestors, knights of the Holy Cross.<sup>a</sup> Remember your father. Follow your king, who is the mirror of valour: and be ever ready for the service of the distressed. May Providence be your guardian. May Heaven shower down a thousand blessings, upon your innocence, and the gallantry of your soul!'

The death of my mother was a severe blow to my heart. For some time all the visions of greatness and renown which had hitherto been my chosen delight appeared distasteful to me. I hung over her insensible corpse. When it had been committed to the earth, I repaired every day to the spot where it was deposited, at the hour of dusk, when all visible objects faded from the eye, when nature assumed her saddest tints, and the whole world seemed about to be wrapped in the darkness of the tomb. The dew of night drizzled unheeded on my head; and I did not turn again towards the turrets of the château, till the hour of midnight had already sounded through the stillness of the scene.

Time is the healer of almost every grief, particularly in the sprightly season of early youth. In no long period / I changed the oppression of inactive sorrow, for the affectionate and pious recollection of my mother's last instructions. I had been too deeply imbued with sentiments of glory, for it to be possible, when the first excess of grief was over, that I should remain in indolence. The

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<sup>a</sup> Religious order of knights using the figure of a cross as ensign.

tender remembrance of my mother itself, in no long time, furnished a new stimulus to my ambition. I forgot the melancholy spectacle of the last struggles of her expiring life; I even became accustomed no longer to hear her voice, no longer to expect her presence, when I returned to the château from a short excursion. Her last advice was now all that survived of the author of my existence. /

## CHAPTER II

I was in this state of mind, when early one morning in the beginning of summer, soon after I rose, I was startled by the sound of trumpets in the plain near the château. The bugle at the gate was presently sounded; the drawbridge was let down; and the Marquis de Villeroy entered the court-yard, accompanied by about thirty knights in complete armour. I saluted him with respect, and the tenderness excited by recent grief. He took me by the hand, after a short repast in the hall, and led me to my closet.

‘My son,’ said he, ‘it is time to throw off the effeminacy of sorrow, and to prove yourself a true soldier of the standard of France.’

‘I trust, my lord,’ replied I, with modest earnestness, ‘that you well know, there is nothing after which my heart so ardently aspires. There is nothing that I know worth living for but honour. Show me the path that leads to it, or rather show me the occasion that affords scope for the love of honour to display itself, and you shall then see whether I am backward to embrace it. I have a passion pent up within me, that feeds upon my vitals: it disdains speech; it burns for something more unambiguous and substantial.’ /

‘It is well,’ rejoined my uncle. ‘I expected to find you thus. Your reply to my admonition is worthy of the blood of your ancestors, and of the maternal instructions of my sister. And, were you as dull as the very stones you tread on, what I have to tell you might even then rouse you into animation and ardour.’

After this short preface my uncle proceeded to relate a tale, every word of which inflamed my spirits, and raised all my passions in arms. I had heard something imperfectly of the state of my country; but my mother carefully kept me in ignorance, that my ambition might not be excited too soon, and that, when excited, it might be with the fullest effect. While I impatiently longed for an occasion of glory, I was far from apprehending, what I now found to be true, that the occasion which at this period presented itself, was such, that all the licence of fiction could scarcely have improved it.

The Marquis de Villeroy described to me the league now subsisting against France. He revived in my memory, by terms of the most fervent loyalty, the accomplishments and talents of my royal master. He spoke with aversion of the phlegmatic and crafty disposition of his imperial rival,\* and, with the language

\* Charles V.

of glowing indignation, inveighed against the fickleness of the capricious Henry.\*<sup>a</sup> He described the train of disasters, which had at length induced the king to take the field in person.<sup>b</sup> He contrasted, with great effect, the story of the gallant Chevalier Bayard, *the knight without fear and without reproach*, whose blood was still fresh in the plains of the Milanese, with that of the Constable of Bourbon, the stain of chivalry, whom inglorious resentment and ungoverned ambition had urged to join the enemies of his country, in neglect of his loyalty and his oath.<sup>c</sup> He stimulated me by the example of the one, and the infamy of the other; and assured me that there never was an opportunity more favourable for acquiring immortal renown.

I wanted no prompter in a passion of this sort; and immediately set about collecting the whole force of my clients and retainers. I shook off the inglorious softness of my / melancholy, and was all activity and animation. The lessons of my youth were now called into play. I judged it necessary to invite the assistance of some person of experience to assist me in marshalling my men; but I did much of what was to be done myself, and I did it well. It was my first employment in the morning; and the last that was witnessed by the setting sun. My excellent mother had left my revenues in the best order, and I spared no expense in the gratification of my favourite passion.

However eager I felt myself to take the field, the desire to appear in a manner worthy of a Count de St Leon restrained me; and I did not join the royal army till the Imperialists, having broken up the siege of Marseilles, and retreated with precipitation into Italy, the king had already crossed the Alps, entered the Milanese, and gained uncontested possession of the capital.<sup>d</sup>

From Milan Francis proceeded to Pavia. Glory was the idol of his heart; and he was the more powerfully excited to the attack of that place, because it was the strongest and best fortified post in the whole duchy. The more he displayed of military prowess, the more firmly he believed he should fix himself in his newly acquired dominions; the inhabitants would submit to him the more willingly, and the enemy be less encouraged to enter into a fresh contention for what he had acquired. Such at least were the motives that he assigned for his proceedings: in reality perhaps he was principally induced by the brilliancy which he conceived would attend on the undertaking.

\* Henry VIII.

<sup>a</sup> Charles V (1500–58), Duke of Burgundy (the Netherlands) 1506–55, King (Charles I) of Spain 1516–56, Holy Roman Emperor from 1519; when in April 1521 Francis I declared war on Charles V, Henry VIII allied himself with Charles and Pope Leo X against France.

<sup>b</sup> Charles V recaptured Milan in November 1521, and defeated the French at nearby Bicocca in June 1522.

<sup>c</sup> Pierre du Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard (1476–1524), *le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche*, a French captain celebrated for his bravery in Italy; Charles II de Bourbon, Comte de Montpensier (1490–1527), who had a private quarrel with Francis I over lands and his lack of promotion, joined forces with Charles V and invaded Provence as far as Marseilles 1523–4.

<sup>d</sup> October 1524.

It was a few weeks after the opening of the siege, that I presented myself to my royal master.<sup>a</sup> He received me with those winning and impressive manners by which he was so eminently distinguished. He recollected immediately all that had passed at our interview in the Vale of Ardres, and warmly expressed the obligations which France had at various times owed to my ancestors. He spoke with earnest respect of the virtues and wisdom of my mother, and commended the resolution by which she had in former instances held me back from the public theatre. 'Young gentleman,' said the king, 'I doubt not the gallantry of your spirit; I see the impatience of a martial temper written / in your face: I expect you to act in a manner worthy of your illustrious race, and of the instructions of a woman who deserved to be herself a pattern to all the matrons of France. Fear not that I shall suffer your accomplishments to rust in obscurity. I shall employ you. I shall assign you the post of danger and of renown. Fill it nobly; and from that hour I shall rank you in the catalogue of my chosen friends.'

The siege of Pavia proved indeed to be a transaction, in the course of which military honour might well be acquired. It was defended by a small, but veteran garrison, and by one of the ablest captains that Europe at that time possessed.\* He interrupted the approaches of the besiegers by frequent and furious sallies. In vain, by the aid of our excellent artillery, did we make wide and repeated breaches in the fortifications. No sooner did we attempt to enter by the passage we had opened, than we found ourselves encountered by a body composed of the choicest and bravest soldiers of the garrison. The governor of the city, who, though grey-headed and advanced in years, was profuse of every youthful exertion, was ordinarily at the head of this body. If we deferred our attack, or, not having succeeded in it, proposed to commence it anew with the dawn of the following day, we were sure to find a new wall sprung up in the room of the other, as if by enchantment. Frequently the governor anticipated the success of our batteries; and the old fortification was no sooner demolished, than we beheld, to our astonishment and mortification, a new wall, which his prudence and skill had erected at a small interval within the line of the former.

One of these attacks took place on the second day after my arrival at the camp of our sovereign. Every thing that I saw was new to me, and inflamed me with ardour. The noise of the cannon, which had preceded the attack, and which was now hushed; the inspiring sounds of martial music which succeeded that noise; the standards floating in the air; the firm and equal tread of the battalion that advanced; the armour of the knights; the rugged, resolute, and intrepid countenances of the infantry; – all swelled my / soul with transport hitherto unexperienced. I had beheld the smoke of the artillery, in the midst of

\* Antonio de Leyva.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The siege of Pavia lasted October 1524–February 1525.

<sup>b</sup> Antonio de Leyva (d. 1536).



which every thing was lost and confounded; I had waited in awful suspense till the obscurity should be dissipated; I saw with pleasure and surprise the ruin of the wall, and the wideness of the breach. All that had been recorded of the military feats of Christian valour seemed then to stand crowded in my busy brain; the generosity, the condescension, the kindness, with which the king had addressed me the day before, urged me to treble exertion. I was in the foremost rank. We surmounted the ditch. We were resisted by a chosen body of Spaniards. The contention was obstinate; brave men, generous and enterprising spirits, fell on the one side and the other. I seized the cloth of a standard, as, in the playing of the wind, it was brought near to my hand. Between me and the Spaniard that held it there ensued an obstinate struggle. I watched my opportunity, and with my sword severed the flag from its staff. At this moment the trumpets of the king sounded a retreat. I had received two severe wounds, one in the shoulder and the other in the thigh, in the contest. I felt myself faint with the loss of blood. A French officer, of a rude appearance and gigantic stature, accosting me with the appellation of a boy, commanded me to surrender the standard to him. I refused; and, to convince him I was in earnest, proceeded to wrap it round my body, and fastened it under my arm. Soon after I became insensible, and in this situation was accidentally found by my uncle and his companions, who immediately took me and my prize under their care. As soon as I was a little recovered of my wounds, the king seized an opportunity, after having bestowed loud commendations upon my gallantry, of conferring the honours of knighthood upon me in the face of the whole army.

While our tents were pitched under the walls of Pavia, I was continually extending the circle of my acquaintance among the young gentry of France, who, like myself, had attended their sovereign in this memorable expedition. I had some enemies, made such by the distinctions I obtained during the siege. But they were few; the greater part courted me the more, the more I showed myself worthy / of their attachment. Envy is not a passion that finds easy root in a Frenchman's bosom. I was one of the youngest of those who attended on the siege; but my brothers in arms were generous rivals, who in the field obstinately strove with me for superior glory, but over the convivial board forgot their mutual competitions, and opened their hearts to benevolence and friendship. 'Let us not,' was a sentiment I heard often repeated, 'forget the object that led us from our pleasant homes to pour from the heights of the Alps upon the fields of Italy. It is to humble the imperious Spaniard<sup>a</sup> – to punish the disloyal Bourbon – to vindicate the honour of our beloved and illustrious monarch. Those walls cover the enemy; yonder mountains serve to hide them from our assault; let no Frenchman mistake him who marches under the same standard for an adversary.'

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<sup>a</sup> i.e. Charles V, King (Charles I) of Spain from 1516 following the death of his uncle Ferdinand II (1452–1516), King of Aragon from 1479, King (Ferdinand V) of Castile from 1474.

The trenches had not been opened before Pavia till about the beginning of November. The winter overtook us, and the siege was yet in progress; with some apparent advantage indeed to our side of the question, but by no means promising an instant conclusion. The season set in with unusual severity; and both officer and soldier were glad, as much as possible, to fence out its rigour by the indulgences of the genial board. My finances, as I have said, were at the commencement of the expedition in excellent order: I had brought with me a considerable sum; and it was not spared upon the present occasion.

There were however other things to be attended to, beside the demands of conviviality. The king became impatient of the delays of the siege. The garrison and the inhabitants were reduced to great extremities; but the governor discovered no symptoms of a purpose to surrender. In the mean time intelligence was brought, that Bourbon was making the most extraordinary exertions in Germany, and promised to lead to the enemy a reinforcement of twelve thousand men from that country; while the imperial generals, by mortgaging their revenues, and pawning their jewels, and still more by their eloquence and influence with those under their command, were able to keep together the remains of a disheartened and defeated army in expectation / of his arrival. There was some danger therefore, if the siege were not speedily terminated, that the king might ultimately be obliged to raise it with ignominy, or to fight the enemy under every disadvantage. Francis however was not to be deterred from his undertaking. He swore a solemn oath, that Pavia should be his, or he would perish in the attempt.

Thus circumstanced, he conceived a very extraordinary project. Pavia is defended on one side by the Tesino, the scene of the first of the four famous battles by which Hannibal signalled his invasion of Italy.<sup>a</sup> The king believed that if this river could by the labour of his army be diverted from its course, the town must instantly fall into his hands. He was encouraged to the undertaking, by recollecting a stratagem of a similar nature by which Cyrus formerly made himself master of the city of Babylon.<sup>b</sup> It was a thought highly flattering to the grandeur of his soul, to imagine that posterity would in this instance institute a parallel between him and Cyrus the Great.

The plan for diverting the course of the Tesino produced a new and extraordinary scene. It was, as may well be believed, a work of uncommon labour. A new channel was to be scooped out and deepened; and, while the stream was turned into this channel, piles were to be sunk, and an immense mound of earth created, as an effectual impediment to the waters resuming

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<sup>a</sup> Hannibal (247–182 BC), leader of the Carthaginians against Rome in the Second Punic War 218–202 BC; the four battles were on the river Tesino (Ticinus), on the river Trebia, on the river Arno, and at Lake Trasimene.

<sup>b</sup> Cyrus the Great (559–529 BC), founder of the Persian empire, took the city of Babylon by drying the channels of the Euphrates and marching his troops through the bed of the river.

their former course. This was a heavy burthen to the soldier, in addition to the disadvantage of being encamped during the course of a winter remarkably severe for the climate in which we fought. By any other army the task would have been performed with cloudiness and discontent, if not complained of with repining and murmurs. But here the gaiety of the French character displayed itself. The nobility of France, who attended their sovereign in great numbers, accompanied the infantry in their labour. We laid aside the indulgence of the *marquée*, of tapestry and carpets; we threw off our upper garments; and each seized a spade, a barrow of earth, or a mattock. We put our hands to the engines,<sup>a</sup> and refused no effort under pretence that it was sordid or severe. While the trees were leafless, and nature appeared bound / up in frost, sweat ran down our faces and bedewed our limbs. The army were encouraged by our example. An employment which, under other circumstances, would have been regarded as rigid, was thus made a source of new hilarity and amusement. It was a memorable sight to behold the venerable and grey-headed leaders of the French army endeavouring to exert the strength and activity of their early years. To me, who had but lately arrived at the stature of manhood, and who was accustomed to all the exercises which give strength and vigour to the frame, this new employment was in no degree burdensome. I felt in it the satisfaction that a swift man experiences when he enters the lists of the race; I congratulated myself upon the nature of my education; if it be a sin to covet honour, that guilt was mine; and, so great was my appetite for it, that I was inexpressibly rejoiced to observe the various ways in which it might be gratified.

Strange as it may seem, this scene of a winter-camp, in the midst of blood and sweat, surrounded with dangers, and called on for unparalleled exertions, appears to me, through the vista of years that is now interposed between, to have been one of the happiest of my life. The gay labours and surprises of the day were succeeded by a convivial evening, in which we did not the less open our hearts, though frequently liable to be interrupted in our midnight revels by the inexhaustible activity and stratagems of the enemy. In this various and ever-shifting scene, I forgot the disasters that occurred, and the blood that flowed around me. All sense of a large and impartial morality was, for the time at least, deadened in my breast. I was ever upon the alert. The diversity of events neither suffered my spirits to flag, nor reflection to awake. It is only upon such occasions, or occasions like these, that a man is able fully to feel what life is, and to revel in its exuberance. Above all, I was delighted with the society and friendship of my brother-officers. They honoured me; they loved me. I seemed to feel what sympathy was; and to have conscious pleasure in making one in a race of beings like myself. Such were my sensations. /

It must not, however, be imagined, that all about me felt in these respects as I

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<sup>a</sup> Tools, implements.

did. I was deeply indebted in this particular to my youth and my fortune. The old endeavoured to brace themselves in vain; they sunk under the continual pressure. The poor soldier from the ranks laboured incessantly, and I laboured as much as he; but he had little opportunity to recruit his vigour and renovate his strength. There was yet another class of persons in the camp, whose gaiety was much less interrupted than mine. These were, the king, and the generals who commanded under him. They could not be entirely devoid of thought and consideration. They suffered much anxiety from the length of the siege; and felt that every period of delay increased the doubtfulness of the event.

Antonio de Leyva, governor of the city, necessarily felt himself alarmed at the extraordinary project in which we were engaged, and made every exertion to prevent it. One evening the king sent for me to his tent, and told me in confidence that the enemy intended that very night to make three several attacks upon our mound, one on each side of the stream, and one by means of boats in the centre. Two of these, he said, were merely intended as feints; the west bank of the Tesino was the point against which their principal exertions would be directed. On that side he was resolved to command in person; the boats with which he proposed to resist their *flota*<sup>a</sup> he confided to one of the most famous and valuable officers of his army; the detachment on the east bank he purposed to intrust to my uncle and myself. He observed, that the detachment he could spare for that purpose, after having formed the other two bodies, and reserved a sufficient number for the defence of the camp and the works, would be small; and he warned me to the exertion of a particular vigilance. It would be doubly unfortunate, if a body, the attack upon which was to be merely a feigned one, should nevertheless be routed. 'Go,' added he, 'fulfil my expectations; deport yourself answerably to the merit of your first achievement; and depend upon it that you will prove hereafter one of the most eminent supporters of the martial glory of France.' /

The Marquis de Villeroy divided our little force into two bodies: with the larger he lay in wait for the enemy near the scene of the expected attack: the smaller he confided to my direction, and placed so that we might be able to fall upon the rear of the garrison-troops as soon as they should be fully engaged with our comrades. In the situation assigned me I took advantage of the skirts of a wood, which enabled me to approach very near to the expected route of our assailants, without being perceived by them. The night was extremely dark, yet the vicinity of my position was such, that I could count the numbers of the adversary as they passed along before my hiding-place. I was alarmed to find that they amounted to at least the triple of what we had been taught to expect. They were no sooner past, than I despatched to the king a young knight, my particular friend, who happened to be with me, to urge the necessity of a

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<sup>a</sup> Fleet.

reinforcement. At the same time I sent a messenger to my uncle, by a circuitous route, to inform him of what I had observed, and the step I had taken, and to entreat him to defer the attack as long as consistently with propriety it should be possible. The enemy, however, had no sooner arrived at the place of his destination, than the troops of the marquis, no longer capable of restraint, rushed to engage. The Spaniards were at first surprised, but a short time led them to suspect the weakness of their assailants; nor was the assistance I brought to my uncle sufficient to turn the fortune of the fight. We lost many of our men; the rest apparently gave ground; and it was a vain attempt, amidst the darkness of the night, to endeavour to restore order and rally them to the assault. We were already almost completely overpowered, when the succours we expected reached us. They were, however, unable to distinguish friend from enemy. A storm of mingled rain and snow had come on, which benumbed our limbs, drove fiercely in our faces, and rendered every object alike viewless. The carnage which in this situation took place was terrible. Our blows were struck at random. A Frenchman was not less dreadful than a Spaniard. When the battle ceased, scarcely one of the enemy was left alive; but we observed with astonishment and horror the number / of the besiegers who had probably, in the midst of the confusion, been cut to pieces by their own countrymen.

I am now arrived at the period which put an end to the festivity and jocundness of the campaign. All after this was one continued series of disaster. About the close of January, our work, though not wholly interrupted, was considerably retarded by a succession of heavy rains. This was injurious to us in many ways; our project, which was executed in the midst of waters, rendered additional damp a matter of serious consideration. We were also seized with an apprehension of still greater magnitude, which was speedily realised. The snows being at length completely dissolved, and the quantity of water continually increasing, we perceived one afternoon strong symptoms that our mound, the principal subject of our labour and source of our hope, was giving way in various places. The next morning at daybreak, it rushed down every where at once with wonderful violence and noise. It is difficult to describe the sensation of anguish which was instantly and universally diffused. The labour of many weeks was overthrown in a moment. As we had proceeded in our work, we every day saw ourselves nearer the object to which we aspired. At this time our project was almost completed, and Pavia was in imagination already in our hands, to gain possession of which had cost us such unremitted exertions, the display of so much gallantry, and the loss of so many soldiers. We were confounded at the catastrophe we saw. We gazed at each other, each in want of encouragement, and every one unable to afford it.

Still, however, we were not destitute of advantages. The garrison began to be in want both of ammunition and provisions. They were in a general state of discontent, almost of mutiny, which scarcely all the address and authority of the governor were able to suppress. If the town continued longer unrelieved, it was

sure to fall into our hands. But even this our last hope was considerably diminished by the intelligence we received the very day after the destruction of our mound, that the imperial army, after having received large reinforcements, was approaching in considerable force. The king had some time before, in the height of his confidence, / and elation of his heart, sent off a detachment of six thousand men to invade the kingdom of Naples; for upon that, as well as the Milanese, he had inherited pretensions from his immediate predecessors.<sup>a</sup>

But, though the enemy was superior in numbers, and a part perhaps of their forces better disciplined than ours, they laboured under several disadvantages to which we were not exposed. The emperor, though his dominions were more extensive, did not derive from them a revenue equal to that of Francis. As he did not take the field in person, the war appeared to his subjects only a common war, proceeding upon the ordinary motives of war. But my countrymen were led by their sovereign, were fresh from the recent insolence of an invasion of their own territory, and fought at once for personal glory and their country's honour. The king, who commanded them, seemed expressly formed to obtain their attachment and affection. His nobles became enthusiastic by the example of his enthusiasm, and willingly disbursed their revenues to give prosperity and éclat to the campaign.

The first question that arose upon the approach of the enemy was, whether we should break up the siege, and attend in some strong post the slow, but sure, effect of their want of money, and the consequent dispersion of their troops, or wait their attack in our present posture. The former advice was safe; but to the gallant spirit of Francis it appeared ignominious. He was upon all occasions the partisan of rapid measures and decisive proceedings; and his temper, with the exception of a few wary and deliberate counsellors, accorded with that of our whole army. For some days we congratulated ourselves upon the wisdom of our choice; we presented to the enemy so formidable an appearance, that, notwithstanding the cogent motives he had to proceed, he hesitated long before he ventured to attack us. At length, however, the day came that was pregnant with so momentous expectation.

If through the whole limits of our camp there was not a man that did not feel himself roused upon this glorious occasion, to me it was especially interesting. The scene accorded with the whole purpose of my education, and / novelty made it impressive. I lived only in the present moment. I had not a thought, a wish, a straggling imagination, that wandered beyond the circuit of the day. My soul was filled; at one minute wild with expectation, and at another awed into solemnity. There is something indescribably delicious in this concentration of

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<sup>a</sup> Francis's obscure claims to Naples and Milan were inherited from Charles VIII (1470–98), King of France from 1483, who invaded Italy and took Naples without a battle in 1495, and from Louis XII, who took possession of Milan 1499, but quarrelled with Ferdinand II over the partition of Naples and renounced his claim by the Treaty of Blois 1505.

the mind. It raises a man above himself; and makes him feel a certain nobleness and elevation of character, of the possession of which he was to that hour unconscious. Fear and pain were ideas that could find no harbour in my bosom: I regarded this as the most memorable of days, and myself as the most fortunate of mortals. Far indeed was I from anticipating the disgraceful event, in which this elation of heart speedily terminated.

The sun rose bright in a cloudless sky. The cold of the season was such, as only to give new lightness and elasticity to the muscles and animal spirits. I saw few of those objects of nature, which in this delightful climate gave so sacred a pleasure to the human soul. But in my present temper there was no object of sight so ravishing, as the firm and equal steps of the martial bands, the impatience of the war-horse, and the display of military standards; nor any music so enchanting, as the shrillness of the pipe, the clangor of the trumpet, the neighing of steeds, and the roaring of cannon. It is thus that man disguises to himself the real nature of his occupation; and clothes that which is of all things the most nefarious or most to be lamented, with the semblance of jubilee and festival.

The Imperialists were at first unable to withstand the efforts of French valour. They gave way on every side; we pursued our advantage with impetuosity. To the slaughter of whole ranks mowed down with tremendous celerity, to the agonies of the dying, I was blind; their groans had no effect on my organ, for my soul was occupied in another direction. My horse's heels spurned their mangled limbs, and were red with their blood. I fought not merely with valour, but with fury; I animated those around me by my example and my acclamations. It may seem contrary to delicacy to speak with this freedom of my own praises; but I am at my present writing totally changed / and removed from what I was, and I write with the freedom of a general historian. It is this simplicity and ingenuousness that shall pervade the whole of my narrative.

The fortune of the day speedily changed. The cowardice and desertion of our Swiss allies gave the first signal of adversity. The gallant commander of the garrison of Pavia sallied out in the midst of the fight, and suddenly attacked us in the rear. A stratagem of the Imperial general effected the rout of our cavalry. The whole face of the field was utterly reversed.

It would be in vain for me to attempt to describe even the small part that I beheld of the calamity and slaughter of the French army. At this distance of time, the recollection of it opens afresh the almost obliterated wounds of my heart. I saw my friends cut down, and perish on every side. Those who, together with myself, had marched out in the morning, swelled with exultation and hope, now lay weltering in their blood. Their desires, their thoughts, their existence, were brought to a fatal termination. The common soldiers were hewed and cut to pieces by hundreds, without note and observation. Many of the first nobility of France, made desperate by the change of the battle, rushed

into the thickest of the foe, and became so many voluntary sacrifices; choosing rather to perish, than to turn their backs with dishonour.

In the battle I had two horses killed under me. The first of them suffered a sort of gradual destruction. He had already received one wound in the nostrils, and another in the neck, when a third shot carried away two of his feet, and laid him prostrate on the earth. Bernardin, my faithful attendant, observed what was passing, and immediately brought me a fresh charger; but I had not long mounted him, when he received a wound which killed him on the spot. I was myself hurt in several places, and at length the stroke of a sabre brought me to the ground. Here I remained for a long time insensible. When I recovered, and looked around me, I found myself in entire solitude, and could at present perceive no trace either of the enemy or of my own people. Soon, however, I recollected what had passed, and was but too well assured of the / defeat my countrymen had sustained. Weak and battered as I was, I attempted to retire to a place of greater security. I had scarcely changed my ground, before I saw a trooper of the enemy rushing towards me, with the intention to take away my life. Fortunately I observed a tree at hand, to the shelter of which I hastened; and, partly by moving the branches to and fro, and partly by shifting my position, I baffled my adversary, till he became weary of the attempt. A moment after, I saw one of my most intimate and familiar companions killed before my eyes. It was not long, however, before a party of fugitive French came up to the spot where I stood, and I, like the rest, was hurried from the field. My uncle perished in the battle.

It is wonderful how men can harden their hearts against such scenes as I then witnessed. It is wonderful how they can be brought to co-operate in such demoniac fury, and more than demoniac mischief, barbarity, and murder. But they are brought to it; and enter, not from a deplorable necessity, but as to a festival, in which each man is eager to occupy his place, and share the amusements. It seemed to me at that time, as it seems to me now, that it should be enough for a man to contemplate such a field as I saw at Pavia, to induce him to abjure the trade of violence for ever, and to commit his sword once more to the bowels of the earth, from which it was torn for so nefarious a purpose.

These sensations, though now finally established in my mind, were, at the time of which I am writing, but of fleeting duration. The force of education, and the first bent of my mind, were too strong. The horror which overwhelmed me in the first moments of this great national defeat subsided; and the military passion returned upon me in its original ardour. My convictions, and the moral integrity of my soul, were temporary; and I became myself a monument of that inconstancy and that wonder, to which I have just alluded.

Various circumstances, however, prevented this passion from its direct operation. The character of France was altered by the battle of Pavia, though mine remained the same. It was in the fullest degree decisive of the fortune / of the war. Milan, and every other place in the duchy, opened their gates to the