

THE FREE SOUTH.

VOLUME II.

BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA, MARCH 26, 1864.

NUMBER 12.

THE THREE VISITS.

FROM THE FRENCH OF AUGUSTE VILU.

In the month of August, 1845, a column of French soldiers, composed of Chasseurs de Afrique, sappers and some battalions of infantry, crossed the beautiful valley of orange and guava trees which lies before Djebel Ammer, one of the principal chains of the Atlas. It was nine o'clock, and the column had set in clear and bright weather. They hastened, for they had to join as soon as possible the advanced guard which had been engaged since dawn in executing a raid against the mutinous tribes to compel to return to their allegiance. The field officer in command of this detachment, having stopped with another officer to see them defile before him, and then took his place in the rear guard. It had been very warm all day, and luminous exhalations arose from the earth, having a spectral appearance against the darkness.

"Look there, corporal Gobin," said a soldier—"look down there; I saw something that looked like a white-rag. That couldn't be a Bedouin, could it?"

"Imbecile!" said the corporal, gravely, "it is a cactus leaf, with the moon shining on it."

"Parbleu—I see that well enough. But I meant something else that I don't see now. Ah—hold—there's another!"

"It is heat lightning, my lad."

"Possibly, possibly, corporal. But it seems very queer, and I don't feel safe in this country." At this moment the General passed before the young soldier.

"What is it that scares you so much?" asked the corporal.

"Not as much as you would think—but all these things dancing backwards and forwards in the air—these plants which have great arms, sharp as sabres, these other green machines that look like melons armed with needles—all this don't seem to be natural, and the night is just such a one as would make one think it was haunted by evil spirits."

"Hold your tongue, conscript!" said the corporal. "Don't go and talk of ghosts now."

"Why shouldn't I talk of them? I am not afraid when you and all the rest are here; but ghosts of Arabs would be funny enough."

"One might know from what village you come, young man," said Gobin, sententiously—"to be so wanting, in fact, I may say sense. Know, then, he continued, lowering his voice, that no one must speak of ghosts before the General."

"Afraid! come, that is a good joke!—Gen. Vergamier afraid! A brave man who has won his rank by thrusting himself up to the cannon's mouth; who is commander of the Legion of Honor, and who has other crosses besides, enough to cover every seam in his coat! My friend Gobin, you will never be minister of war—I say so."

"Well, then, if your General is so brave, why don't he like to hear people talk of ghosts?"

"That's an idea of his. He says such stories weary him, especially at night. It is a weakness, conscript, I confess, weakness unworthy such a brave; but then he hides it so well no one suspects it."

"Then how do you know it, corporal?"

"An old friend of mine—Kabgeon, a sapper of the Twenty-second, who had been a servant of the General's, told me to me as a secret when he was drunk."

"Ah, you keep your secret finely. May I ask if the General—"

"Silence, Gabet, my friend; I think he suspects we are talking of him."

In fact the General had not lost a word of the conversation between the two soldiers, and the impression it had made upon him was so marked, that his companion, surgeon Edward Banis, could not help inquiring the reason.

"Do you believe in ghosts?" asked the General abruptly.

The Surgeon hesitated. "Why not?" he answered.

"So then, the body being dead the soul survives?"

"Stated on those terms it alters the question."

"Tell me your views on the subject."

"Ma foi, General, I hardly know. If life is manifestation, or better, the emanation of a principle general and eternal, under a form complete but perishable, as the Swedenborgians and others think, spiritual communications, are not only possible but natural."

"And your opinion, Surgeon?"

"Frankly, it is difficult for me to say—I never saw an apparition, consequently I have the right to doubt. My faith is like that of Thomas. I would wish to see and touch."

"I have seen one, my dear Edward," said the General in a hollow voice.

The brave officer—the brave General—who made this strange confession to M. Banis, was a man still young—hardly thirty-eight years old. His noble, handsome face had a melancholy grace, which was given it by the sad, tender look of his large blue eyes, which softened the effect of his bronzed complexion and immense moustache. With his large statue, broad shoulders, General Etienne Vergamier might have served as a model for one of the heroes of Ossian.

The Surgeon, a man of cold and methodical, but of unlimited research and knowledge, received the singular avowal of the General with much astonishment, but greater curiosity. Was he a thousand times physician and sceptic, the marvelous had for him a charm which surpassed everything else.

Vergamier put his horse to a trot, and was silent. The Surgeon finally yielded to his curiosity, which his intimate relations with the General warranted him in doing.

"We have a long ride before us," said he, "the road is rough and we must slacken our pace. Tell me the incident to which you alluded just now, General. Is not this just the hour for ghost stories?"

"For what purpose, Surgeon? You will not believe me."

"I believe in all sensations, only I permit myself to discuss those principles of yours."

"You are going to carry the scalpel of my physiology into the most secret recesses of my heart. Cost what it may, I will ratify your wish; but, I beg of you, do not laugh! All I am going to tell you is true."

"At twenty years old," said the General, "I left St. Cyr at the same time as my best friend, George Marcel, a young man, pale and slender, dreamy as a poet, strong as a Kabyle, brave as a lion. We were intimate from our first year at St. Cyr, and in those brutal quarrels which are so common there, he had often undertaken my defence and fought for me, as I fought for him. We loved each other dearly, and I only regretted the approaching separation which was to see our entrance into the service."

More fortunate than we had hoped, we found ourselves together at the taking of the Fort de l'Empereur, sub-lieutenants both of us, joyous in war and full of ardor. A few days after Algiers was taken by assault, and George was one of the first to penetrate into the city. I saw him fall, struck in the breast by a ball. I raised him and bore him on my shoulders to a little house which had been abandoned by the fugitives in the first cannonading. I laid my poor George upon a bed and endeavored to staunch the wound, but it was in vain. He died, and only had commenced to breathe by the loss of blood. He could scarcely open his eyes to look at me, but he said to me in his dying breath, 'I am his own and press it to my breast, when his pain became insupportable. He had, however, a few moments of ease.'

"Etienne," he said, "I die very young, and regret it; life has been very sweet to me with my friendship. We must part, but who can say if it is for ever. Not one can tell what waits for us beyond the tomb; perhaps more suffering, perhaps more happiness, or nothingness. But if my soul is immortal, if it preserves in those unknown regions the affections and memories which filled it in its passage on earth, blessed be God! And if it is true that we can visit those whom we tenderly love, be sure that I will return to thee some evening in the spring. I hope. I feel death closer now. My dear mother said to me, when dying, 'I will return,' and she did return—this night—ah!—there—look—she smiles at me—now she is weeping. Etienne—adieu. He sighed and expired."

The General paused, overcome with grief; then resumed in a saddened voice: "I cannot depict my grief; 'twas terrible and when they buried George to the sound of the drum and songs of victory, I was shedding bitter tears, for I felt that my youth was buried in the tomb, side by side with my young friend. The strange farewell of George had singularly affected me. At night I had the nightmare; hid-

eous visions surrounded me. For six months I was as nervous as a woman, and, to you, Surgeon, alone I confess it that at night only, in the dark, I am afraid.

But a year, two years, rolled away, and the remembrance of George, deeply engraven on my heart, yielded, without being effaced; to the preoccupation of the war, to my anxiety for the future. My puerile fears fled of themselves, I was myself once more, my mind free, my brain sound, when the event I am about to tell you happened. I was first lieutenant. After rough and glorious campaigns I came to Algiers with my regiment. Young and impetuous, rich with gold from our first captures, I threw myself headlong into the pleasures of garrison life; day and night were for me but one interminable round of pleasure. I gambled with a perfect frenzy, as one always for the first time. I gained always and then fortune became contrary. One night in a cafe, in the street Bab Byounn, I lost fourteen thousand francs, all that was left of my money and my share of the booty. The loss was great, and they talked of nothing else in Algiers. Towards ten o'clock the next day, a message reached me from the Colonel. I repaired to his headquarters, pale and uneasy, without knowing why. I found my worthy Colonel, as pale and sad as myself.

"Lieutenant," he said, "my military chest has been broken open this morning and fourteen thousand francs are gone—fourteen thousand francs! do you hear, sir?"

I recoiled with a cry of indignation. "Here is a handkerchief lost by the thief, and found under the chair of the paymaster. Look, sir, it belongs to you; there are your initials—E. V."

I took the handkerchief mechanically. It was mine—my limbs trembled under me, I could not speak.

"And now, sir," resumed the Colonel, "go and blow your brains out."

I went out without a word—crashed and branded like a thief—as a robber. I did not attempt to justify myself—no, I went to my room, and taking a horse pistol loaded it; at that moment I paused, and in one glance I recalled my happy childhood, my first feat of arms, my mother, George!

"To die! I groaned; to die dishonored!" "Thou shalt not die!" said a voice clear and ringing, but which did not sound human. The pistol fell from my hand—George stood before me, his eyes shining with an unearthly light which illuminated his whole face, white as alabaster.

Explain this, Surgeon. While I am telling you this, I feel my hair rise, my teeth chatter, and my voice tremble. In the presence of George, I experienced only serene joy and unmingled happiness. My youth, my radiant dreams of glory, rose before me. Weighed down an instant before under the burden of the most inconceivable fatality, I felt myself now under a powerful protection, almost divine. The apparition of George did not astonish me. I accepted it as a fact, simple and natural. We talked to each other, like brothers, like friends that had been separated for a long time.

"Etienne," he said gently, "what are you going to do?"

"I came to save you. Your servant is the thief; he stole the fourteen thousand francs as he stole the handkerchief found by the Colonel. You had confidence in this man, and he was worthy of it until now, but he has a mistress, a morisca, and it is for her he has stolen. They will find two thousand francs in his mattress, and twelve thousand at the dwelling of the girl. Go quickly and tell the Colonel. I have said all I have to say. Adieu."

George vanished, and I found myself alone.

The result verified all that the spectre had revealed to me. The thief confessed his crime and the money was found. My brave Colonel, in his regret for his unjust suspicion, was ready to kill himself in my place. All the officers came and called on me in a body, as a mark of their regret at what had happened. A few days after, I was appointed, at the solicitation of the Colonel, a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor. The reparation was complete.—The surgeon seemed lost in thought.

"You do not believe; is it not so my friend? I have seen George, I am sure of that; it must be so, surgeon, or am I a lunatic?"

"Did this apparition never appear to

you again? asked the surgeon, whom this recital had singularly affected.

"I saw George again," said the General, with a gloomy air; "I saw him the night before I killed, in a duel, the Commandant Bernard de Ris. That evening, I was returning from parade, tired and sad. I entered my room suddenly, which was lit only by the flames of a large fire of dry bran lies. George was seated in my leather arm chair. He rose, grave and solemn."

"I was waiting for you," he said. "You fight to-morrow with Commandant Bernard de Ris, who is a bully. You have neglected greatly your sword exercise." George leaned against the wall, and I saw he had a sword in his hand.

I took down a foil and put myself on guard. "Pay attention," said George—"I am going to give you what Irisier gallantly calls a lesson in duello. Look, this is an irresistible thrust. Well done, but you do not thrust hard enough."

"I dare not," I said, with a cold sweat on my brow.

A faint smile passed over George's lips. We commenced again, and this time I thrust with so much violence that my sword broke against the wall. I had pierced George through, but my sword had met with no resistance.

"Well done," said George. "A keen eye, a steady hand and coolness, and you will conquer."

"George," I cried, with a reproachful accent, "you are going to leave me.—What is there above that keeps you from me? Stay!"

George shook his head, and I said earnestly, "Will you return again?"

"I will return once more, Etienne, but that time we will depart together."

And the vision vanished into the air.

"I am sane," said the General with increasing exaltation, "I am sure of what I tell you. I, Vergamier, took a lesson of a spectre, and the next day I killed a man in a duel—surgeon—it is a long time ago, and I wait the third visit of George."

Banis could not control a movement of uneasiness; the feverish state of the General alarmed him.

"Come, General," he said, "be yourself again. You have been telling me dreams and wild fancies. Is it not so? You must think no longer of them. You have need of rest and quiet. See, the day is breaking."

"Surgeon," said the General, a prey to profound depression, "it is a long time since I have seen George—"

The column here turned to the left to avoid the turbulent river which bounded the plain. Gen. Vergamier, shivering under his thick burnous, broke the silence at intervals to give brief commands to an officer. As day broke fires could be seen on the flanks of Djebel Ammer. These fires indicated the bivouac of the first column of the expedition, which Vergamier had ordered to halt there. The conjunction was promptly made, and they stacked their arms. At the command, "Break ranks," given by Gen. Vergamier, and repeated by all the officers, the soldiers scattered over the plain, shouting and laughing.

"Look, conscript," said Corporal Gobin, throwing to Gabet a bunch of chemical matches, "you are going to make your first shot."

"One cent a bunch! two cents a box!" cried another soldier, who had formerly been a 'gamin' of the Boulevard du Temple.

Already the plain was on fire, a crackling was heard among the bushes, and then rose a spiral column of smoke and flame. These chemical matches, harmless in Paris, became a terrible and devastating weapon in Africa, in the hands of the soldiery. When the harvest was all on fire, the column rallied to ascend the mountain—it glided across ravine and valley into a gorge formed by a gigantic fissure in the rock and descended the south flank of Djebel, shouting hurrahs. The French had only to run down the slope, and already the Arab village burned like a heap of straw. Some of the Arabs came out of the burning houses and exchanged shots with the sappers, without much damage being done on one side or the other. However there were two or three men wounded, and Surgeon Banis made them his first care, while the column, arriving at the foot of Djebel Ammer, reached the valley and sheltered themselves under a natural wall of granite. The flame followed the soldiers so closely that it seemed to pursue, twisting and writhing like a