

THE AUTHENTIC HISTORY
OF
CAPTAIN CASTAGNETTE

NEPHEW OF THE
"MAN WITH THE WOODEN HEAD"

From the French of Manuel
Directeur de l'École Supérieure de Médecine, Paris 1853
BY

AUSTIN DOBSON

ILLUSTRATED WITH FORTY-THREE PICTURES

BY

GUSTAVE DORÉ

"OF ARMS AND LEGS, NOSE, EAR, AND EYE,
RELENTLESS MARS BEREFT HIM,—
MAIMED EVERY PART EXCEPT HIS HEART,
AND THAT THE WAR-GOD LEFT HIM."

DERBY, LEICESTER, AND NOTTINGHAM
FRANK MURRAY

1892

CHAPTER XVII.

Departure for the Island of Elba; Return from Elba; Waterloo.

20TH APRIL, 1814; 1ST MARCH, 1815; 18TH JUNE, 1815.

You may read in more serious books the story of this campaign of France, so much more glorious for the conquered than for the conquerors: you will be moved, as we have been, by this recital of disasters, and you cannot fail to admire Napoleon in his decline.

Castagnette would have followed his former leader to the island of Elba; but Daumesnil made him understand that he would be more of a hindrance than an assistance—that Napoleon needed hale and hearty servants, who were ready for anything. Our captain resigned himself to fate, and shut himself up until the day he heard that Napoleon had landed (1st March) at Gulf Juan.

“Zounds! I knew that it was n’t all over,” cried our friend, with tears of joy in his eyes. “Come out, old uniform, and see the sun. You have been hidden for a long time now.”

On the 6th, Napoleon left Gap for Grenoble, where the enthusiastic inhabitants brought him the gates in lieu of keys; on the 10th he entered Lyons at the head of the army sent to check him; on the 20th, at nine in the evening, the exile entered Paris as Emperor, borne in triumph by the multitude.

In a few months Napoleon had formed an army, and prepared to fall upon the allied forces, who were concentrating themselves in Belgium.

When he learned the Emperor’s departure, all Castagnette’s old warlike instincts revived. Here was an assortment of English, Prussians, Dutch, and Saxons, enough to make a man’s mouth water! It was impossible to resist the temptation. But,



Castagnette in the Jardin des Plantes.

mutilated as he was, of what service could he be? A visit to the Jardin des Plantes furnished him with the solution of this riddle.

For an hour he had been watching the animals, envying the trunk of the elephant, the legs of the ostrich, and the wings of the eagle. At last he stopped in front of a rhinoceros, newly arrived from Africa, and which shared public favour with the giraffe.

"Do you see, Madame Potin," said an honest citizen to his neighbour, "these creatures have all their strength in their noses, as the bull has his in his neck, the horse his in his loins. This is a very savage brute, and that's why he's called the *rhinoferocious*. As he has neither arms nor legs to fight, our kindly mother, Nature, has provided him with the little instrument on his nose, so that he may strike his enemies in the stomach."

The explanation was like a flash of intelligence to Castagnette.

"Like the rhinoceros, I have neither arms nor legs to attack my enemies: what fails me I can surely procure. *En avant* the rhinoceros of the *Grande Armée!*"



Castagnette at Waterloo.

And thereupon he repaired to an armourer, saying,

“Measure my head carefully; make me a nice light little helmet that shall fit exactly, pad it well inside, put a lip-strap to it, and surmount the whole with a triangular spike like a lightning-conductor, as sharp as you can make it, and about seven inches long.”

When he was fully equipped, Castagnette sought out his old Kowno acquaintance, Marshal Ney, and applied for permission to follow him as an amateur. The brave captain was well received, and on the 15th of June he arrived at Quatre Bras, five leagues from Charleroy.

“Well, one must confess that Fate is very fanciful,” thought Castagnette. “If I go off in the next battle, they will cut upon my grave—

‘HERE LIES
CAPTAIN CASTAGNETTE,
A CRIPPLE,
KILLED AT QUATRE BRAS.’”

At Ligny, our friend, to get his hand in, disembowelled in his rhinoceros fashion six Englishmen, three Prussians, and a Saxon. He was never so pleased in his life.

A few days later the disastrous battle of Waterloo took place. Never did the enthusiasm of the troops promise a more brilliant success; and had not treason and fatality lent their aid to our enemies, the days of Wellington and of Blücher had been numbered. The former, in particular, was the pet aversion of Castagnette, and an exploit of our hero had all but changed the face of things. At the attack of the farm of *La Haie Sainte*, he managed in the *mêlée* to approach the English general, and, gliding under his horse, buried his spike in the animal's belly. The creature sprang in the air, and unseated Wellington. General Perch disengaged him, or we should have lost our most mortal enemy. But Castagnette sprang upon the general, and laid him dead by the side of the horse of that famous duke, who filled the place which had, for so long a period, been held by Marlborough in the Pantheon of England.

A few hours later, thanks to the inaction of Grouchy, the tide had turned. Blücher, at the head of thirty thousand Prussians, had joined Wellington, the French



Castagnette's last interview with the Emperor.

ranks fell into the most terrible disorder, and the fatal cry of "*Sauve qui peut!*" raised by a handful of traitors, completed the confusion. The eight battalions of the Guard led by Ney and Cambronne were swept away by the sea of fugitives. In vain Napoleon flung himself among them: the darkness prevented his being recognized, and the tumult drowned his voice. Then Prince Jerome cried out, "Here should end all who bear the name of Bonaparte!" The Emperor understood, and, sword in hand, sought the death which his generals turned from him. Nevertheless, a wounded English soldier who saw him pass dragged himself up, and, seizing a pistol, aimed it full and fired. But the ball did not reach the mark — Castagnette had just time to cover the Emperor with his body. He received the shot in his leathern stomach, from which he instantly extracted it, offering it to the Emperor with a smile.

"Will you accept it, Sire? The gift was meant for you."

"Willingly," returned the Emperor. "I shall not pay for it too dearly if I give you this in return."

So saying, he extended to our friend the cross which glittered on his breast. The queer helmet of the captain then for the first time caught Napoleon's eye.

"But what regiment do you belong to, then?"

"Don't try to guess, Sire. I am all the regiment. Call it, if you will, the Cripples of the Guard. It never turned tail, this one."

The Emperor recognized his old friend of Egypt and the Directory, and attached the cross upon his chest.

"No longer your Castagnette of former days, Sire," said the poor captain: "they have cut him up sadly. There's nothing but his heart left, and that is entirely yours."

"If better days return, my brave Castagnette, we shall meet again — if Heaven hears me, if Death does not join himself with those who to-day betray me, and strike me on this battle-field.—Farewell!"

Never again on earth did Castagnette see the Emperor Napoleon I.