

good in the Legion, was his good genius, just as Werde who summed up in himself all the evil, was his evil genius.

An hour later he was taking his place at the dinner table in the saloon. He had no fear at all now, passed by Oran there was nothing to dread from Marseilles.

But it was surprisingly strange, the table where he was seated with its spotless linen, the menu before him, the wine card that had just been handed to him by a steward, the flowers. This time yesterday he was in the barracks at Sidi preparing to go out with Lacoste after a sweltering day, and still half-sick with the work he had been put to cleaning out those sewers.

And the people at table were talking about him. These inspections of the ship by the police always give rise to talk amongst the passengers. They were actually talking about his chance of escape.

"They are generally caught or else they come back," the second officer was saying, as he helped himself to cutlets and green peas.

CHAPTER XXXII

AND SURELY ALL IS RIGHT NOW?

AT Marseilles there was no difficulty at all, even the Customs gave no trouble, just glancing at the contents of the suit-case and chalking it.

There was just time to catch the Rapide for Ventimile, the train was not crowded and he easily found a seat. And now as he sat looking at that wonderful vineyard that lies between Marseilles

and Toulon, he gave his mind over to the immediate future, and took toll of his money.

From Ventimile he would have to find his way to Venice, and from Venice by boat to Ragusa, that was the best way, but how much would it cost? That was absolutely impossible to say. There might be delay at Venice waiting for a boat, he did not even know the train fares, nor did he bother his head about the matter. Luck was with him. The fantastic idea had come to him that the clothes he wore, belonging to the aristocrat, had brought him luck, just as they had brought him the thousand-franc note, and Luck had certainly been his. As a fact, he had more than enough money to reach Ragusa.

All the same, flown with this feeling of luck and not too certain of his resources, he came to a determination that urged him to the most fantastic act of his life.

On board ship he had met a Frenchman named Bertin, who though he had never been to Monte Carlo had talked much of the money to be won there. He had given Jean his card, and the card gave him an idea.

It came to him as he sat at luncheon in the dining-car, and he carried it out when the train drew up at Monte Carlo.

At Monte Carlo he left the train, found that he could get an evening train to Ventimile, and leaving his suit-case in charge of the railway people, came into the town.

Three years ago on a sketching expedition he had come here, put up at a little inn at La Condamine and had admired the Casino from outside. No instinct had urged him to go in and try his luck.

It was different now. He knew the game of

roulette which, though prohibited in France, is played in a small way, at all events in Montmartre, and he had come to the determination to risk just a few hundred francs and no more. He felt that he could not lose. It was just like going in and picking up the money that was surely waiting for him.

The facts that, though Monte Carlo was safe as far as the Legion was concerned, Mentone was not, and that any delay in reaching Italy was ill advised ; these facts did not occur to him.

Marseilles passed, he felt safe.

As he made his way to the Casino he noted the name of a hotel which would stand him in good stead if they asked his address, for though he had not booked a room nor left his luggage there, he could say he intended to do so, if there was any bother.

He got his ticket of admission without difficulty, presenting Bertin's card, and next minute was in the temple of luck.

When money is waiting for you it doesn't matter which table you pick it up from. He stopped at the first table on the left. It was surrounded by the usual crowd and the usual atmosphere.

Jean watched the play for two or three spins of the wheel. Then he placed the maximum allowed—180 francs—on a number—thirty-three.

Three was his lucky number, and double three ought to be luckier. At all events, it was in this case. Thirty-three turned up, he had won six thousand three hundred francs.

The maximum allowed for a simple chance is six thousand francs. Jean put his six thousand on red. Red turned up. He put it on black. Black turned up. He had now made eighteen thousand, three hundred francs. Yes, luck was with him, and she remained,

for he stopped playing, put his money in his pocket and left the Casino.

It had taken him less than half an hour to collect that money which was waiting for him.

And now outside, watching the strutting pigeons and the crowd before the Café de Paris, the strangest feeling came to him as though he were suddenly lost, as though he had entered some trap prepared for him, and the door had closed behind him.

Such an amazing run of luck might make the boldest gambler in events pause. He had escaped from the Legion, and instead of being hauled back at the tail of an Arab policeman's horse or being caught at one of the ports, he had walked right into a disguise that fitted him—and owing to that disguise, umbrella included, he had gone free of suspicion—in the pocket of that disguise he had found a thousand-franc note. Of all men in his company Lacoste had been sent for the purpose of identification, and now look! Eighteen thousand francs in less than half an hour.

And now the "luck feeling" that had been sustaining him had suddenly vanished, and given place to a profound depression and anxiety.

Something said to him: "You are not clear of the Legion yet. You have strained your luck to breaking point, has it broken?"

It was nerves no doubt, reaction; there was nothing to fear, how could there be? Oran and Marseilles both safely passed, how could the hounds of pursuit nose him out here?

All the same, the last lap of the journey to freedom had still to be covered, and that lap was just the little stretch of territory that lay between Monte Carlo and Ventimile.

There were still some hours before the train

started, and he spent them walking about the town and buying some things, shirts and so forth. He bought another suit-case to contain them, and then, nearly an hour before the train was due to start, drove to the station. Waiting on the platform with his luggage he became aware of a gendarme, who seemed to be casting a watchful eye over the passengers.

They were the usual crowd that waits for the evening train. Tourists, gamblers from San Remo, Bordighera or Mentone returning to their hotels, generally with empty pockets; Monegasques; Mentone shopkeepers and a few Italians.

The train drew in and Jean, getting into a first-class compartment, placed his luggage in the rack, then he sat looking out at the people on the platform, only a few now, since the carriages had filled up.

The Monegasque gendarme was still there, he was walking along now with a man in a tall hat and frock coat, a man who might have been a railway official, a Casino official or an agent of police.

Outside the carriage they stopped, and the man with the tall hat got into the train. He came along the corridor, looked into Jean's compartment, came in, and took a seat in a corner diagonally opposite to Jean.

He looked Jean all over, glanced up at the luggage in the rack, and then settled himself down and taking some papers from his breast pocket, glanced over them. It was as though he were contrasting Jean with some written description of him.

The train started and the man in the corner leaned forward.

"Excuse me, monsieur," said he; "but I seem to have had the pleasure of meeting you before."

"I do not remember," said Jean.

"Monsieur is a Frenchman?"

"Partly."

"Well, monsieur, to be quite frank, I am attached to the Mentone police force, and we have had a very urgent message from Oran with regard to a gentleman of the Legion des Etrangers now supposed to be in France, and who would be without doubt travelling towards Italy at this moment."

"Why towards Italy?" asked Jean, amazed at his own coolness and making his reply as though some logician in his brain had prepared it to be uttered.

"Well, as a matter of fact," said the other, "our légionnaires when they are taking leave of their regiment make for the nearest frontier, which is the Italian."

"Oh, is this gentleman running away from the Legion?"

"Yes, monsieur, and as his description tallies with yours I have taken the liberty to speak to you, which is only my duty."

"Of course," said Jean, "you are perfectly right to make inquiries, but I know nothing of the Legion, except what I've read of it in the papers now and then. I have come from Paris, I came by the Rapide from Paris to-day, and I stopped an hour or two at Monte Carlo to look at the place and to buy some things, as I lost some luggage at the Gare de Lyon. I had to buy a new suit-case, that is it up there, and I got it at Garniers, I noted the name of the shop, also some shirts and things to supply the place of those I had lost."

Absolute truthfulness up to a certain point can't be beaten, and the extraordinary instinct that made Jean tell all this instead of trumping up some lie about having stayed at Monte Carlo, shook the position of his questioner.

For, as a matter of fact, Jean had drawn attention to himself by leaving his old suit-case at the station and then returning with a new one ; and here was an explanation, pat.

The truth is that the Marseilles-Ventimile route is one of the Legion's nets for deserters. It is the quickest way to the nearest frontier. And at the neck of the net are Monte Carlo and Mentone.

Jean had drawn suspicion on himself at the station of Monte Carlo, and Mentone had come over to inquire into him.

The official was almost convinced by his story which tallied so closely to fact. Still, there was a point.

"Monsieur has doubtless some documents, some papers to prove himself ?"

"Lots," said Jean, with a burst of laughter.

He put his hand in his pocket and produced the bundle of bank notes.

"I am going for a two months' tour in Italy, and there are my credentials. My banker is Lafitte in the Rue de la Paix, my address is No. 10 Rue Helder, my cousin is an attaché at the British Embassy. I will be staying at Rome with my wife's uncle, Baron Stein, and I am to meet my wife this evening at Bordighera. I don't think I can tell you anything more about myself."

"It is enough," said the other, as Jean put the notes back into his pocket ; "and you will excuse me, monsieur, for having questioned you—but it was my duty."

"Of course," said Jean. "And now tell me about the Legion des Etrangers, are men often running away from it ?"

"Well, one cannot say often, but we now and then have trouble. You see, monsieur, they are

generally caught before leaving Africa, but some escape, though indeed if they make good they never can go far, because they never have any money to speak of. Cases have been known where they just come back of themselves, finding it impossible to get a living."

"Poor devils!"

"Well, it is their own fault, as a rule—gambling, drink or women. There are the three gateways to the Legion, but a gateway is no harm if a man does not choose to go through it."

"That's true," said Jean.

They were drawing up at Mentone. The official saying good-bye, left the carriage, and Jean leaned back in his seat.

The train was emptying itself. The usual crowd was meeting the usual crowd. Consumptive parsons, parson's wives, an American woman squabbling about lost luggage. Then the train moved on, and sure now that he was safe, Jean nearly collapsed.

The strain had been terrific, yet he had not felt it in the least till now.

He recovered himself at Menton Garavan where they stopped for a minute, and at Ventimile (blessed name!) he was himself again.

Having passed the Customs he took a trap and ordered the driver to take him to Bordighera. He had been here before on that holiday years ago, and restful little Bordighera recalled itself to him, and appealed to him in his tiredness and nerve-wrecked state. He would stop a day or two to take breath and then on—

"What hotel, monsieur?" asked the driver of the trap.

"I don't know," said Jean, "take me to whichever you think the best."