

**THE JACQUERIE: A
NOVEL, IN TWO
VOLUMES, VOL. II**

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The Jacquerie: A Novel, in Two Volumes, Vol. II by G. P. R. James

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THE JACQUERIE.

A NOVEL.

BY

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THE JACQUERIE.

CHAPTER I.

"HOLLA, my masters, holla!" said the page; "come forth and speak to my noble lord the Captal de Buch."

Morne gazed at him sullenly without reply; but the old man, who in his day had seen something both of courts and camps, replied, with a lowly intonation of the head, "What would the noble captal! we are ever his humble slaves and bondmen."

"Who have you there, Maurice!" inquired the voice of the captal. "Anybody who can give us information!"

"One seems a dull swine enough," replied the boy, with all the insolence of presumptuous youth; "a mere Jacques Bonhomme; but the other is civil. Come hither, come hither and speak to my lord—him who has a tongue in his head, *i swear*."

"What would my noble lord, the renowned Captal de Buch!" demanded the old man, advancing with a courtly air, which he could well assume even towards those whom he most bitterly detested.

"Simply," replied the Captal de Buch, "to know my best way towards Clermont; for I have spent so much time needlessly by misdirection, that I would fain lose no more, if it be possible to help it; you are doubtless of this country, and can therefore afford the information that I want."

"Good faith, my noble lord," answered Thibalt, "I fear that I should make you but a sorry guide, for I am even now inquiring my way of this good swineherd; but from the directions he has given me, I doubt not that I can guide you to the next small village, where certainly you will find some one to conduct you onward gladly."

The words had scarcely passed his lips, however, when the old man suddenly started and turned pale; for a personage rode up to the side of the captal from behind, whom Thibalt had not before seen, and who gazed upon him with an inquiring and somewhat doubtful air, till at length the voice of Walleran Urgel exclaimed, "How

now, old Thibalt la Rue, how now! Do you pretend not to know the road to Clermont, you who have lived here for so many years?"

"I speak truth, noble sir, upon my word," replied the white-haired villain: "this forest puzzles and confounds me, and I was even now inquiring of my good friend the swineherd here the nearest way home."

"Pshaw, pshaw!" cried Walleran Urgel, "thou knowest the way right well, whatever it was that brought thee hither. Lead on, lead on! I remember thee of old, Thibalt."

"Ay, but it is many years since we have met, noble sir," said Thibalt, "and my memory has sadly failed me."

"Forward, without more words!" exclaimed the old man, impatiently. "I beseech you, my good Lord Captal, let him be sent forward: he will guide us well enough if he be compelled, for it is as cunning an old slave as ever lived. There is some cause to think that to him is owing the death of more than one noble gentleman in years long gone. He is here in the forest for no right purpose, I will warrant, and his anxiety to remain behind us does but increase suspicion. Send him on before, my lord, and believe not his tale of want of knowledge: he knows well enough whatever he will know."

"Come, mount thy best, old man," cried the captal: "you see you have established no good character for truth, and therefore I must not credit your affected ignorance. Lead on, then, and quickly. What wouldst thou have from me?"

As he spoke, Thibalt approached close to his horse's side, saying, in a low tone, "I will do my best to guide you, my noble lord; but put not implicit faith in what your honourable friend tells you. You know he was always reputed somewhat wanting here," and he laid his finger significantly on his forehead; "some fancied injury done to his brother in days long past has made him always hate me, though I call Heaven to witness it was not I that betrayed the count: how could I?"

"Enough, enough," cried the captal; "I want no defence, good man. So that you lead me honestly on my way, that is all that I have to do with thee. Mount thy beast and go on: thou shalt be rewarded for thy pains; so, now, prattle no more, but be quick, for it is late in the day, and we must reach Clermont this night."

"Not by my help," murmured Thibalt to himself, "not by my help, proud captal." He took care, however, to give no vent to such feelings, but proceeded to the side of his ass, and spent a few moments in arranging his saddle, calling upon Morne to help him, and whispering with him eagerly as he did so.

This continued so long that the captal grew impatient, and he exclaimed, "Come, come, no more of this, old sir, lest I ask why thou speakest below thy breath; mount thy beast, and lead on at once, or worse will befall thee. I am not one to be trifled with. Ride behind him, Hardman, and if it should turn out that his whisperings have been to evil effect, send thy spear through him. Methinks I never saw a less honest face," he continued, speaking to Walleran Urgel: "you tell me you know him well, and that he did some evil in other days; and I can easily believe it."

"It is true, my Lord Captal," said Urgel, riding on beside him, "it is true, that we should never condemn without proof, and there is no absolute proof against this old man; but yet there are moral convictions beyond all evidence, which come in when our reason fails us; and how often does it do so in every stage of our journey through life! An instinctive feeling of love or antipathy will suddenly rise up, we know not why or wherefore, and God himself will seem to point out to us our enemies or our friends. All that is proved is, that the master of that old villain trusted, confided in, consulted him, found in him much cunning, much experience, and in the end was betrayed, no one clearly knew by whom, dying without trial, by the act of a brutal king; that all his relations and followers being proscribed, this man alone was suffered to enjoy wealth and freedom, and has since become a freeman, having obtained his franchise by long living in a town, protected by the very monarch who slew his master. Where his riches come from, no one can tell, but it is known that he is wealthy; and few entertain a doubt that his wealth, like that of Judas, is the price of blood."

"The case seems very clear," replied the captal; "and we must watch him narrowly; for it is not unlikely that he may think fit, by his whisperings with that dull villain, to sell our blood too to any body of adventurers he may know of; and my head would certainly be prized at some gold among them."

"Thank God," answered the old man, "I have not yet murdered a sufficient number of my fellow-creatures to be worth the purchase. My ransom would not buy you a pair of gauntlets, captal; and yours would, at any time, enrich the families of all those that you have slain. Such is the difference, in the world's estimation, between the man of peace and the man of bloodshed."

"Nay, now, tell me," said the captal, smiling, "supposing that you were able and had the right to educate you youth"—and he pointed to Albert Denyn—"exactly as you would, tell me, you who cry out so much against the noble vocation of arms, what would you make him? the singer of dull canticles in the chapel of a monastery? or the solitary teacher of some country church? or the vain priest of some city congregation, the corrupter of citizens' wives, the hypocritical preacher of temperance and chastity, little followed by himself?"

"No, no, no!" exclaimed the old man, vehemently; "I would have him none of these things; but I would make him what knights were in other times, before bloodshed was a trade and knighthood but an office. I would make him the defender of the wronged and the oppressed; the man to whom, under God, the widow and the orphan might look up for help against tyranny; one who should shed the blood of the oppressor, but of none other, and should not lend his sword to selfish quarrels. I would make him, in short, in everything like the Lord of Mauvinet, except in not serving a tyrant, and fancying that he is serving his country. Such would I make him, if I had power to make, but I have no power; and though I do believe he deserves well, and to be something better than a mere sworder, yet he must take his chance, even as the rest do, and turn out what fortune will."

The captal smiled. "In this world, my good friend," he said, "we must follow the current of the world; and all that we can do, I fear, is to take the top wave and swim above our fellows. As for that good youth, I will do the best for him that I can, the rest he must do for himself; but I doubt much whether whatever he or I can do will make him one of those same errant knights whereof the fabliaux talk so prettily. But let us be sure this old man is leading us right. Do you yourself know the country?"

"Very slightly," answered Walleran Urgel; "and yet,

it seems to me, he is following the road honestly enough. But see, here comes a peasant on a mule; we can get tidings from him, doubtless. Look, the villain stops to talk with him himself."

The Captal de Buch touched his horse with the spur, and the animal darted forward at a bound, bringing him up to the side of the peasant with whom Thibalt had been speaking in a moment. "What did he ask you?" demanded the captal, sternly.

"He asked me the way to Clermont, noble lord," replied the man; "he asked me nothing more."

The answer, perhaps, might have satisfied the captal, had his suspicions been only slightly awakened; but, as it was, he turned at once sharply towards Thibalt, and detected at one glance a quiet, satisfied, sneering smile, which made him conclude that the question he had put to the peasant had been asked merely to deceive him, and to make the story which had been told regarding ignorance of the road the more credible. "And which, then, is the way to Clermont?" he demanded.

"It is a long way, sir," answered the peasant; "it will be much nearer for you, noble sir, to go to St. Leu; for you will not arrive at Clermont till after midnight."

"And how far is St. Leu?" demanded the captal.

"Not above four leagues, sir," replied the man; "it is but a little distance to St. Leu; and at the hostelry there you will find all that any one can desire."

"Indeed," answered the captal; "that must be an abundant place. I have been in many a hostelry in my life without finding one of these much-boasted lodgings, where nothing remained to be desired. However, once more lead on! We will try this hostelry at St. Leu; for certainly midnight is somewhat too late to arrive at Clermont. You will go with us, my good friend," he continued, addressing Walleran Urgel: "you know that we have much to talk about."

"We have, we have," answered the old man; "I seek not to quit you yet, captal; for my mission is not fulfilled, and I must not leave you till it be done."

The captal gave the signal for marching forward again, and the band, with Thibalt at its head, once more resumed its progress through the long glades of the forest.

By the side of the captal rode Walleran Urgel; but it must be remarked that by this time his external appearance was very greatly altered. The goatskins which

had formerly enveloped him had been exchanged at the town of Mans for other garments of a kind less liable to excite remark; and he now appeared habited simply, but well, and as might become a person fitted by station to ride in company with the Captal de Buch. Nor did his air and manner belie his dress in the least, but, on the contrary, were still above it; and the rough men-at-arms, who saw him managing his fiery horse with ease and dignity, and dressed in the clothing of a nobleman of that day, felt somewhat ashamed of the rude jests which they had poured forth when they had first beheld him, and acknowledged that, though contorted and deformed, the old man had a princely air, and must have been brought up in no mean school of knightly graces, where such an air and movements had been communicated to a form like his.

For the rest of the way the captal and his misshapen companion continued in eager conversation; and it became clear that, although the attendants of the English leader marked with reverence the eager and confidential tone in which their lord's conversation was carried on, and kept at some distance behind, the old man Thibalt, on the contrary, was eager to catch the words that were spoken, and for that purpose suffered his ass to lag in its pace till forced to go on. He then, pretending to have dropped something, slipped off the beast suddenly, and, ere the captal and his companion perceived him, was close to their horses' feet.

For this last act, the motive of which the dwarf seemed well to understand, Walleran Urgel struck him a sharp stroke with a willow wand which he carried in his hand, saying, "Get thee on, traitor! Thou canst hear nothing here that will profit thee. Get thee on, I say, and remember that thou art known and understood."

Thibalt made no reply, but crept forward and mounted his beast again, murmuring something to himself, the substance of which, however, no one could distinguish. The conversation between the captal and his companion was at once resumed, and proceeded in a low tone, but with evident eagerness, on both parts. Those who came behind distinguished only three words, which were spoken by Walleran Urgel: "This very night, this very night;" but it would seem that Thibalt had heard more, for two or three times he laughed, with a low, quiet, peculiar laugh, unpleasant in its sound; and several times