

AT THE SIGN OF THE GUILLOTINE

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At the Sign of the Guillotine by Harold Spender

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HAROLD SPENDER

**AT THE SIGN OF
THE GUILLOTINE**

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SIGN OF THE GUILLOTINE

BY
HAROLD SPENDER



NEW YORK
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1895
to

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AT THE SIGN OF THE GUILLOTINE.

CHAPTER I.

FLYING FROM THE TERROR.

IN was the afternoon of a March day in the year 1794—bright, but cold. The sun was sinking into a great bank of heavy storm cloud, boding little but evil for the following morning, when a big, unwieldy coach lumbered heavily along a muddy road in a department of the Vendée, in Western France. The two horses were being driven at their topmost speed, and every now and then a young man, clean-shaven and sharp-visaged, thrust his head out of the window on the left side, and incited the old coachman in no measured terms to quicken his pace. The wheels were richly plastered with mud; the horses were covered with sweat and foam; and the great springless vehicle jolted and jarred in every rut of the primitive track that served for a road. Besides the restless young man, the coach contained one other occupant—old, deeply lined, and white-

haired. His years could not be less than three-score and ten, and his face was stamped with an indefinable air of ecclesiasticism.

Not that the wildest surmise could have found in the clothing or external outfit of either passenger a trace of anything removed from the secular. Their long riding-coats were cut in the latest fashion of Revolutionary Paris. Their American beavers, the mark of orthodox Jacobinism, were adorned with the brightest tricolor cockades; their necks were enswathed in red mufflers, and they had already replaced the old-fashioned knee-breeches with the latest Republican trouser; their hair was destitute of powder, and cut short, close to the head, in the manner affected only by the most rigid patriots. Such travellers, in such costume, you might have seen in many parts of France at this moment.

But their movements soon began to indicate that these were very far from being ordinary, commonplace travellers. The young man suddenly pushed his head yet further out of the window, and, shading his eyes, peered forward into the far distance. His glance travelled over long stretches of bare country, covered here and there with a sparse undergrowth, ending suddenly in thick wood. From that point great waves of trees went rolling down dale and up hill, until the horizon closed with the blue distances of a mighty forest. On the far left there rose into the still air a heavy, thick column