

**VITTORIA COLONNA: A
TALE OF ROME, IN THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY. IN
THREE VOLUMES. VOL. I**

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CHARLOTTE A. EATON

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IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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VITTORIA COLONNA.

CHAPTER I.

" Solo il Tevere levava alto la testa,
E all'elmo polveroso la sua donna
In Campidoglio rimettea la cresta.
E divina guerriera, in corta gonna,
Il cor, più che la spada, all'ire e all'onte
Di Rodano opponeva e di Garonna."

La Basvilliana.

It was early in the month of February, that the unusual sight of an armed force was seen to crown the heights and occupy the road leading from Civita Castellana, the ancient Veii, to Rome. A considerable body of cavalry were already pretty far advanced in the Campagna, half hidden from their comrades

behind by the pernicious vapour which, even in that winter month, steamed from the fens and stunted brushwood of the Roman desert. In vain the eager eye of the French soldier sought as yet the ruins of grandeur, the fallen towers and broken aqueducts, which, he had been told, strewed the country around Rome. The troop had descended the mountainous and winding road from Civita Castellana in the darkness of early morning, and in the silence which military precaution rendered necessary; and this silence had not a little contributed to swell the enthusiasm natural to those approaching the Eternal City.

The French soldiers, then the heroes of Lodi, of Arcole, and of Rivoli, were not yet the vain-glorious, though still gallant soldiers of the empire. They had been called from all stations of life, from palace and hovel alike, to defend their homes and independence.—They had taken up arms for the republic on principle, and had served it without participating in its crimes. And although towards

this period of the Italian wars, most of the superior officers began to be corrupted by that love of rapine which afterwards became the general character of the troops, yet friends and enemies alike bear witness to the orderly, the noble, and disinterested behaviour of the French soldier previous to his Egyptian campaigns.

The enthusiasm of these soldiers was great upon approaching Rome. The laurels of Rivoli were yet fresh upon their brows, and they deemed themselves, without arrogance, conquerors worthy of ascending to the Capitol. Nor were they so ignorant as one merely acquainted with modern soldiers might suppose. Not a few in those ranks had studied in classical seminaries the works of Tacitus and Livy; many, without having enjoyed such advantages, had contemplated the characters of ancient heroism, on the stage and in the classic drama of their country; while the rest had caught an enthusiasm as great, if not as learned, from the proclamations of the Directory, and from those of their

General, Buonaparte. Such were the troops, that, on the ninth of February, seventeen hundred and ninety-eight, awoke the slumbers of the Campagna, as they trode the Flaminian way towards Rome.

On the approach of morn the fog became less dense, quitting entirely the higher grounds, and coiling its retreat along the lower, towards the scattered groves of oak and birch that skirt the desert, and mark its junction with the rising Appennine. To the left of their march lay Soracte, displaying few or no vestiges of classic snow, which, nevertheless, abundantly covered the Tiburtine hills beyond, though of far inferior height. From among these the sun had already risen, and, still behind Soracte, his rays were seen to pour across the Campagna as over a still and sullen ocean. The eyes of the troop were turned towards the rising luminary, which, as it surmounted Soracte's ridge, changed the purple night-hue of the hills at once to a brilliant orange. The sun here " carries the heavens by a *coup de*

main ;” and so instantaneously was the dark mass of mountain lit up, that it seemed almost the effect of magic.

“*Que c'est beau !*—how beautiful !” exclaimed the young officer that commanded the demi-brigade, as he turned to contemplate the classic hill, which, from the days of Horace to our own, has attracted the gaze of many a pilgrim.

If this exclamation of Duvivier was intended for any one save himself, it was for a very unmilitary looking personage that rode at his side. He was habited in black—not as a cleric exactly, but *en abbé*, save that the black silk strip, or long narrow manteau, no longer flowed down his back ; and that, instead of the neat periwig that should have appeared beneath his three-cornered hat, he had adopted the revolutionary, and not uncomfortable substitute of a red night-cap. Though young he bordered upon the corpulent, without however any of that air of heavy contentedness which obesity produces on the visages of the