

THE EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD. Now the Brigadier held the King. BY A. CONAN DOYLE.

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CHAPTER III.

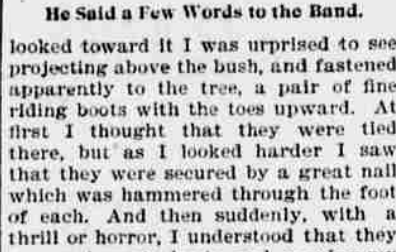
"You buried him alive?" For a moment I was too stunned at. Then I hurled myself upon the man, as he sat, with that placid smile of his upon his lips, and I would have torn his throat out had the three wretches not dragged me away from him. Again and again I made for him, panting and cursing, shaking off this man and that, straining and wrenching, but never quite free. At last, with my jacket nearly torn off my back and the blood dripping from my wrists, I was hauled backwards in the light of a rope and cords passed around my ankles and my arms. "You speak loud," I cried. "If ever I have you on my swordpoint I will teach you to maltreat one of my men. You will find, my bloodthirsty beast, that my emperor has long arms, and, though you lie here like a rat in its hole, the time will come when he will tear you out of it, and you and your vermin will perish together." My faith, I have a rough side to my tongue, and there was not a hard word that I had learned in fourteen campaigns which did not let fly at him, but he sat with the hands of his pen tapping against his forehead and his eyes squinting up at the roof as if he had conceived the idea of some new stanza. It was this occupation of his which showed me how I might get my life into him. "You speak," said I, "you think that you are safe here, but your life may be as short as that of your absurd verses, and God knows it could not be shorter than that."

be the last." I began eagerly to glance about for some chance of escape, and as I did so I saw something which filled me with great astonishment. I have already told you that a large fire was burning in the center of the glade. What with its glare and what with its moanlight everything was as clear as possible. On the other side of the glade there was a small tall fir tree which attracted my attention because its trunk and lower branches were discolored, as if a large fire had recently died in its arms. A clump of bushes grew in front of it which concealed the base. Well, as I



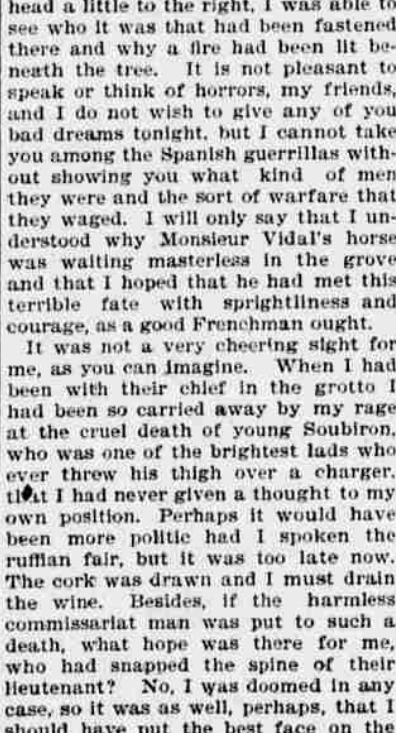
He Said a Few Words to the Band.

looked toward it I was surprised to see projecting above the bush, and fastened apparently to the tree, a pair of fine riding boots with the toes upward. At first I thought that they were tied there, but as I looked harder I saw that they were secured by a great nail which was hammered through the foot of each. And then suddenly, with a thrill or horror, I understood that they were not empty boots, and, moving my head a little to the right, I was able to see who it was that had been fastened there and why. It was a Frenchman, and he was looking at me with a look of intense interest. It is not pleasant to speak or think of horrors, my friends, and I do not wish to give any of you bad dreams tonight, but I cannot take you among the Spanish guerrillas without showing you what kind of men they were and what they were capable of. I will only say that I understood why Monsieur Vidal's horse was waiting masterless in the grove and that I hoped that he had met this terrible fate with sprightliness and courage, as a good Frenchman ought.



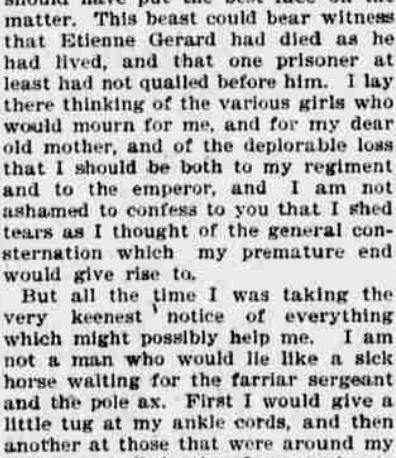
Help, Comrades, Help!

"Very good, colonel. You have said enough," he cried, in a choking voice. "You say that you have had a very distinguished career; I promise you also a very distinguished ending. Colonel Etienne Gerard, of the Third Hussars, shall have a death of his own."



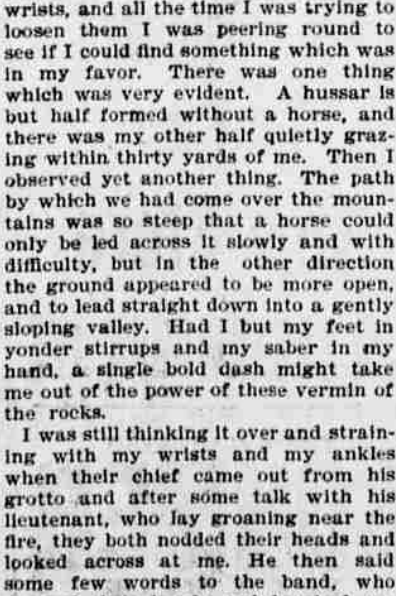
Colonel Gerard Shall Have a Death of His Own.

"And I only beg," said I, "that you do not commemorate it in verse." I had one or two other little jokes to utter, but he cut me short with a furious gesture which caused my three guards to drag me from the cave. Our interview, which I have told you as nearly as I can remember it, must have lasted some time, for it was quite dark when we came out, and the moon was shining very clearly in the eastern sky. The brigadier had lit a great fire of the dried branches of the fir trees; not of course for warmth, since the night was already very sultry, but to cook their evening meal. A huge copper pot hung over the blaze, and the rascals were lying all around in the yellow glare, so that the scene looked like one of those pictures which Junot stole out of Madrid. There are some soldiers who profess to care nothing for art and the like, but I have always been drawn toward it myself, in which respect I show my good taste and my breeding. I remember, for example, that when they were selling the plundered after the fall of Danzig, I



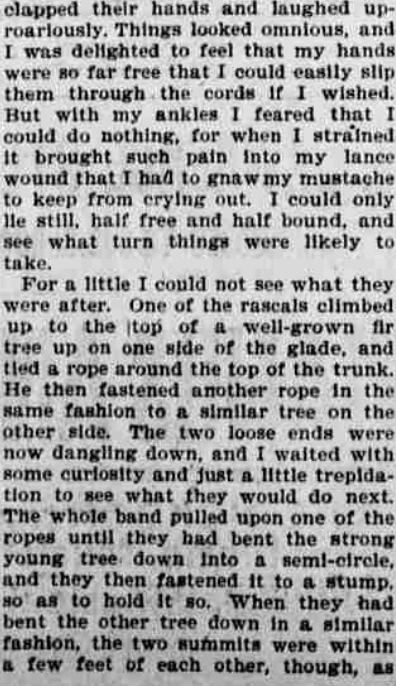
He Nearly Severed His Head from His Shoulders.

bought a very fine picture called "Nymphs Surprised in a Wood," and I carried it with me through two campaigns until my charger had the misfortune to put his hoofs through it. I only tell you this, however, to show you that I was never a mere rough soldier like Rapp or Lefebvre. As I lay in that brigadier's camp I had little time or inclination to think about such matters. They had thrown me down under a tree, the three villains squatting round and smoking their cigarettes within hand's touch of me. What to do I could not imagine. In my whole career I do not suppose that I have ten times been in as hopeless a situation. "But courage," thought I, "courage, my brave boy, you were not made a colonel of hussars at 28 because you could dance a cotillon. You are a picked man, Etienne, a man who has come through more than 200 affairs and this little one is surely not going to



French Injection Compound.

understand, they would each spring back to their original position the instant that they were released. I already saw the diabolical plan which those miscreants had formed. "I presume that you are a strong man, colonel," said the chief, coming toward me with a malicious smile. "If you will have the kindness to loosen these cords," I answered, "I will show you how strong I am."



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CHAPTER IV. It is astonishing—and I have heard many make the same remark—how acute one's senses become at such a crisis. I am convinced that at no moment is one living and fully so acutely, as at the instant when a violent and unforeseen death overtakes one. I could smell the resinous fagots, I could see every twig upon the ground, I could hear every rustle of the branches, and I saw at such times of danger, and so I was that night, before anyone else, before even the time when the chief had addressed me, I had heard a low, monotonous sound, far away, indeed, and yet coming nearer at every instant. At first it was but a faint, indistinct sound, but by the time he had finished speaking, while he was still saying to me, "Help, comrades, help!" I shrieked, and though they struck me across the mouth and tried to drag me up to the tree, I kept on yelling, "Help, my brave boys! Help me, my children! They are murdering your colonel!" For the moment my wounds and my troubles had brought on a delirium, and I looked for nothing less than my five hundred rattle-drums and all, to appear at the opening of the cave.

as snap a pistol at me I was beside the English officer. "I surrender to you, sir," I cried, though I dare say my English was not much better than his French. "If you will look at that tree to the left you will see what these villains do to the honorable gentlemen who fall into their hands."

There was poor Vidal before them. Each of the four troopers, which is the same as with us when we cry "Mon Dieu!" Out rasped the five swords and the four men closed up. One who wore a sergeant's chevrons laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. "Fight for your skin, froggy," cried he. "Ah! it was so fine to have a horse between my thighs and a weapon in my grip. I waved it above my head and shouted in my exultation. The chief had come forward, with that odious smiling face of his. "Your excellency will observe that this Frenchman is our prisoner," he said. "You are a rascally robber," said the Englishman, shaking his sword at him. "It is a disgrace to us to have such a scoundrel in the ranks. If the general were of my mind we should swing you up to the nearest tree."

It was not until we had left the ravine far behind us and were right out in the open fields that we ventured to halt and see what injuries we had sustained. For me, weary and wounded as I was, my heart was beating proudly and my chest was nearly bursting with the thought that I, Etienne Gerard, had left this gang of murderers so much by which to remember me. My faith, they would think twice before they ventured again to lay hands upon one of the Third Hussars. So I tried away was I that I made a small oration to these brave Englishmen and told them who it was that they had helped to rescue. I would have spoken of glory also and of the sympathies of brave men, but the officer cut me short. "At least of right," said he, "any injuries, sergeant?"

So these three jingled away together, while the officer and I, followed at some distance by the trooper whose charger had been wounded, rode straight down in the direction of the English camp. Very soon we had opened up the road, and we saw in the look of the other from the beginning. He was of the nobility, this brave lad, and he had been sent out scouting by Lord Wellington to see if there were any signs or our advancing

through the mountains. It is one indeed of a wandering life like mine, that you learn to pick up those bits of knowledge which distinguish the man of the world. I have, for example, hardly ever met a Frenchman who could repeat an English title correctly. If I had not traveled I should not be able to say with confidence that this young man's real name was Milor Hon. Sir Russell Bart, this last being an honorable distinction, so that it was as the Bart that I usually addressed him, just as in Spanish one might say "the Don."

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