

The Adventures of Gerard: Illustrated



THE ADVENTURES OF GERARD

ILLUSTRATED

ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

I hope that some readers may possibly be interested in these little tales of the Napoleonic soldiers to the extent of following them up to the springs from which they flow. The age was rich in military material, some of it the most human and the most picturesque that I have ever read. Setting aside historical works or the biographies of the leaders there is a mass of evidence written by the actual fighting men them-selves, which describes their feelings and their experiences, stated always from the point of view of the particular branch of the service to which they belonged. The Cavalry were particularly happy in their writers of memoirs. Thus De Rocca in his *Memoires sur la guerre des Francais en Espagne* has given the narrative of a Hussar, while De Naylies in his *Memoires sur la guerre d'Espagne* gives the same campaigns from the point of view of the Dragoon. Then we have the *Souvenirs Militaires du Colonel de Gonneville*, which treats a series of wars, including that of Spain, as seen from under the steel-brimmed hair-crested helmet of a Cuirassier. Pre-eminent among all these works, and among all military memoirs, are the famous reminiscences of Marbot, which can be obtained in an English form. Marbot was a Chasseur, so again we obtain the Cavalry point of view. Among other books which help one to an understanding of the Napoleonic soldier I would specially recommend *Les Cahiers du Capitaine Coignet*, which treat the wars from the point of view of the private of the Guards, and *Les*

Memoires du Sergeant Bourgoyne, who was a non-commissioned officer in the same corps. The Journal of Sergeant Fricasse and the Recollections of de Fezenac and of de Segur complete the materials from which I have worked in my endeavour to give a true historical and military atmosphere to an imaginary figure. ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE. I have seen a great many cities, my friends. I would not dare to tell you how many I have entered as a conqueror with eight hundred of my little fighting devils clanking and jingling behind me. The cavalry were in front of the Grande Armee, and the Hussars of Conflans were in front of the cavalry, and I was in front of the Hussars. But of all the cities which we visited Venice is the most ill-built and ridiculous. I can-not imagine how the people who laid it out thought that the cavalry could manoeuvre. It would puzzle Murat or Lassalle to bring a squad-ron into that square of theirs. For this reason we left Kellermanns heavy brigade and also my own Hussars at Padua on the mainland. But Suchet with the infantry held the town, and he had chosen me as his aide-de-camp for that winter, because he was pleased about the affair of the Italian fencing-master at Milan. The fellow was a good swordsman, and it was fortunate for the credit of French arms that it was I who was opposed to him. Besides, he deserved a lesson, for if one does not like a prima donnas singing one can always be silent, but it is intolerable that a public affront should be put upon a pretty woman. So the sympathy was all with me, and after the affair had blown over and the mans widow had been pensioned

Suchet chose me as his own galloper, and I followed him to Venice, where I had the strange adventure which I am about to tell you. You have not been to Venice? No, for it is seldom that the French travel. We were great travellers in those days. From Moscow to Cairo we had travelled everywhere, but we went in larger parties than were convenient to those whom we visited, and we carried our passports in our limbers. It will be a bad day for Europe when the French start travelling again, for they are slow to leave their homes, but when they have done so no one can say how far they will go if they have a guide like our little man to point out the way. But the great days are gone and the great men are dead, and here am I, the last of them, drinking wine of Suresnes and telling old tales in a cafe. But it is of Venice that I would speak.

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