The Hero of the People: A Historical Romance of Love, Liberty and Loyalty

Alexandre Dumas

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PRICE, 25 CENTS. No. 80.

THE SUNSET SERIES. By Subscription, per Year, Nine Dollars. February 22, 1894. Entered at the New York Post-Office as second-class matter.

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The Hero Of The People.

BY Alex. Dumas.

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THE HERO OF THE PEOPLE.

A HISTORICAL ROMANCE
OF
LOVE, LIBERTY AND LOYALTY.

BY ALEX. DUMAS. Author of “The Queen’s Necklace,” “The Three Musketeers,” “Balsamo the Magician,” “Monte Cristo,” “Taking the Bastile,” “Chicot the Jester,” etc.

TRANSLATED FROM THE AUTHOR’S REVISED LATEST EDITION.

BY HENRY LLEWELLYN WILLIAMS

NEW YORK:
J. S. OGILVIE PUBLISHING COMPANY,
57 ROSE STREET.

Entered according to act of Congress in the year 1892, by A. E. Smith & Co., in the office of the Librarian of Congress, at Washington.

THE HERO OF THE PEOPLE.

CHAPTER I.

LOCKSMITH AND GUNSMITH.

The French Revolution had begun by the Taking of the Bastile by the

people of Paris on the Fourteenth of July, 1789, but it seemed to have reached the high tide by King Louis XVI, with his Queen Marie Antoinette and others of the Royal Family, leaving Versailles, after some sanguinary rioting, for the Capital, Paris.

But those who think, in such lulls of popular tempests, that all the mischief has blown over, make a mistake.

Behind the men who make the first onset, are those who planned it and who wait for the rush to be made and, then, while others are tried or satisfied, glide into the crowds to stir them up.

Mysterious agents of secret, fatal passions, they push on the movement from where it paused, and having urged it to its farthest limit, those who opened the way are horrified, at awakening to see that others attained the end.

At the doorway of a wine saloon at Sevres by the bridge, over the Seine, a man was standing who had played the main part, though unseen, in the riots which compelled the Royal Family to renounce an attempt to escape out of the kingdom like many of their sycophants, and go from Versailles Palace to the Tuileries.

This man was in the prime of life: he was dressed like a workingman, wearing velveteen breeches shielded by a leather apron with pockets such as shinglers wear to carry nailes in, or blacksmith-farriers or locksmiths. His stockings were grey, and his shoes had brass buckles; on his head was a fur cap like a grenadier’s cut in half or what is called nowadays an artillerist’s busby. Grey locks came straggling from under its hair and mingled with shaggy eyebrows; they shaded large bulging eyes, keen and sharp, quick, with such rapid changes that it was hard to tell their true color. His nose was rather thick than

medium, the lips full, the teeth white, and his complexion sunburnt.

Without being largely built, this man was well formed: his joints were not course and his hands were small and might have seemed delicate but for their being swart like those of workers in metal.

Despite the vigor of the biceps muscle shown from his having rolled up his shirt sleeves, the skin was remarkable for its whiteness, and almost aristocratically fine.

Within his reach was a richly gold-inlaid double-barrelled fowling piece, branded with the name of Leclere, the fashionable gunsmith of Paris. You may ask how could such a costly firearm come into the hands of a common artisan? In times of riot it is not always the whitest hands which grasp the finest weapons.

This man had only arrived from Versailles since an hour, and perfectly well knew what had happened there: for to the landlord’s questions as he supplied him with a bottle of wine which he did not touch, he had answered as follows:

“The Queen is coming along with the King and the Dauphin. They had started at half afternoon, having at last decided to live at the Tuileries; in consequence of which for the future Paris would no longer want for bread, as it would have in her midst, the Baker, the Baker’s Wife and the Baker’s Boy, as the popular slang dubbed the three ‘Royals'.”

As for himself, he was going to hang round to see the procession go by.

This last assertion might be true, although it was easy to tell that his glance was more often bent on the side towards Paris than Versailles,

which led one to surmise that he did not feel obliged to tell Boniface exactly what his intentions were.

In a few seconds his attraction seemed gratified, for he spied a man, garbed much like himself, and appearing of the same trade, outlined on the ridge of the road. He walked heavily like one who had journeyed from afar.

His age appeared to be like his awaiter's, that is, what is called the wrong side of forty. His features were those of a common fellow with low inclinations and vulgar instincts.

The stranger's eye was fastened on him with an odd expression as if he wished with a single scrutiny to measure the gold, if any, and the alloy in his composition.

When the wayfarer from the town was within twenty steps of this man lounging in the doorway, the latter stepped inside, poured the wine from the bottle into two glasses and returning to the doorstep with one tumbler held up, he hailed him:

"Hello, mate! it is pretty cold weather, and the road is a long one. What do you say to our having a drop of the red to cheer us up and warm us?"

The workman from town looked round to make sure that he was alone and that the greeting was addressed to him.

"Speaking to me, are you?"

"Who else, as you are alone?"

"And offering me a go of wine?"

"Why not, as we are brothers of the file and bossing-hammer alike?

or some at nigh."

"Anybody can belong to a trade," said the other looking hard at the speaker; "but the point is, are you a greenhand or a master of the craft?"

"I reckon we shall tell how far we have learnt the trade while drinking and chatting together."

"All right then!" said the other, walking up to the door, while the inviter showed the table set out with the wine. The man took the tumbler, eyed the contents as if he had doubts, but they disappeared when the stranger poured himself out a second brimmer.

"Why, hang it all, are you getting so proud that you will not drink with a shopmate?"

"No, dash me if I am--here is Good Luck to the Nation!"

The workman's grey eyes were fixed on the toast-giver's.

He tossed off the glass at a draft, and wiped his lips on his sleeve.

"Deuse take it, but it is Burgundy wine," he remarked.

"And good liquor, too, eh? the vintage was recommended to me; and happening along I dropped in, and I am not repenting it. But why not sit down and be at home? there is some more in the bottle and more in the cellar when that is gone."

"I say, what are you working at here?"

"I have knocked off for the day. I finished a job at Versailles and I am going on to Paris with the royal procession as soon as it comes along."

“What procession?”

“Why, the King and the Queen and the little Prince, who are returning to the city with the Fishmarket women and two hundred Assemblymen, all under protection of Gen. Lafayette and the National Guard.”

“So the fat old gentleman has decided to come to town?”

“They made him do it.”

“I suspected so when I started for Paris at three this morning.”

“Hello! did you leave Versailles at three without any curiosity about what was going off?”

“No, no, I itched to know what the gent was up to, being an acquaintance, a chum of mine, by the way, though I am not bragging; but you know, old man, one must get on with the work. I have a wife and children to provide for, and it is no joke now. I am not working at the royal forge.”

The listener let what he heard pass without putting any questions.

“So, it was on a pressing job that you went back to Paris?” he only inquired.

“Just that, as it appears, and handsomely paid too,” said the workman, jingling some coin in his pocket, “though it was paid for by a kind of servant, which was not polite, and by a German, too, which blocked me from having any pleasant chatter during the work. I am not one for gab, but it amuses one if no harm is spoken of others.”

“And it is no harm when harm is spoken of the neighbors, eh?”

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