# IN THE GRIP OF THE GREEN DEMON

Robert Barr

# Table of Contents

# IN THE GRIP OF THE GREEN DEMON

## Robert Barr



NEXT morning I was in Paris, and next night I attended the underground meeting of the anarchists, held within a quarter of a mile of the Luxembourg. I was known to many there assembled, but my acquaintance, of course, was not so large as with the London circle. They had half expected me the night before, knowing that even going by the Hook of Holland I might have reached Paris in time for the conclave. I was introduced generally to the assemblage as the emissary from England, who was to assist the bomb−throwing brother to escape either to that country, or to such other point of safety as I might choose. No questions were asked me regarding my doings of the day before, nor was I required to divulge the plans for my fellow−member's escape. I was responsible; that was enough. If I failed, through no fault of my own, it was but part of the ill luck we were all prepared to face. If I failed through treachery, then a dagger in the back at the earliest possible moment. We all knew the conditions of our sinister contract, and we all recognized that the least said the better.

The cellar was dimly lighted by one oil lamp depending from the ceiling. From this hung a cord attached to an extinguisher, and one jerk of the cord would put out the light. Then, while the main entry doors were being battered down by police, the occupants of the room would escape through one of three or four human rat holes provided for that purpose.

If any Parisian anarchist does me the honor to read these jottings, I beg to inform him that while I remained in office under the Government of France there was never a time when I did not know the exit of each of these underground passages, and could, during any night there was a conference, have bagged the whole lot of those there assembled. It was never my purpose, however, to shake the anarchists' confidence in their system, for that merely meant the removal of the gathering to another spot, thus giving us the additional trouble of mapping out their new exits and entrances. When I did make a raid on anarchist headquarters in Paris, it was always to secure some particular man. I had my emissaries in plain clothes stationed at each exit. In any case, the rats were allowed to escape unmolested, sneaking forth with great caution into the night, but we always spotted the man we wanted and almost invariably arrested him elsewhere, having followed him from his kennel. In each case my uniformed officers found a dark and empty cellar, and retired apparently baffled. But the coincidence that on the night of every raid some member there present was secretly arrested in another quarter of Paris, and perhaps given a free passage to Russia, never seemed to awaken suspicion in the minds of the conspirators.

I think the London anarchists' method is much better, and I have ever considered the English nihilist the most dangerous of this fraternity, for he is cool−headed and not carried away by his own enthusiasm, and consequently rarely carried away by his own police. The authorities of London meet no opposition in making a raid. They find a well−lighted room containing a more or less shabby coterie playing cards at cheap pine tables. There is no money visible, and, indeed, very little coin would be brought to light if the whole party were searched; so the police are unable to convict the players under the Gambling Act. Besides, it is difficult in any case to obtain a conviction under the Gambling Act, because the accused has the sympathy of the whole country with him. It has always been to me one of the anomalies of the English nature that a magistrate can keep a straight face while he fines some poor wretch for gambling, knowing that next race day (if the court is not sitting) the magistrate himself, in correct sporting costume, with binoculars hanging at his hip, will be on the lawn by the course, backing his favorite horse.

After my reception at the anarchists' club of Paris, I remained seated unobtrusively on a bench, waiting until routine business was finished, after which I expected an introduction to the man selected to throw the bomb. I am a very sensitive person, and sitting there quietly I became aware that I was being scrutinized with more than ordinary intensity by some one, which gave me a feeling of uneasiness. At last, in the semi−obscurity opposite me, I saw a pair of eyes, as luminous as those of a tiger, peering fixedly at me. I returned the stare with such composure as I could bring to my aid, and the man, as if fascinated by a look as steady as his own, leaned forward, and came more and more into the circle of light. Then I received a shock which it required my utmost self−control to conceal. The face, haggard and drawn, was none other than that of Adolph Simard, who had been my second assistant in the Secret Service of France during my last year in office. He was a most capable and rising young man at that time, and, of course, he knew me well. Had he, then, penetrated my disguise? Such an event seemed impossible; he could not have recognized my voice, for I had said nothing aloud since entering the room, my few words to the president being spoken in a whisper. Simard's presence there bewildered me; by this time he should be high up in the Secret Service. If he were now a spy, he would, of course, wish to familiarize himself with every particular of my appearance, as in my hands lay the escape of the criminal. Yet, if such were his mission, why did he attract the attention of all members by this open−eyed scrutiny? That he recognized me as Valmont I had not the least fear; my disguise was too perfect; and, even if I were there in my own proper person, I had not seen Simard, nor he me, for ten years, and great changes occur in a man's appearance during so long a period. Yet I remembered with disquietude that Mr. White recognized me, and here to−night I had recognized Simard. I could not move my bench farther back because it stood already against the wall. Simard, on the contrary, was seated on one of the few chairs in the room, and this he periodically hitched forward, the better to continue his examination, which now attracted the notice of others besides myself. As he came forward, I could not help admiring the completeness of his disguise so far as apparel was concerned. He was a perfect picture of the Paris wastrel, and, what was more, he wore on his head a cap of the Apaches, the most dangerous band of cutthroats that have ever cursed a civilized city. I could understand that even among lawless anarchists this badge of membership of the Apache band might well strike terror. I felt that before the meeting adjourned I must speak with him, and I determined to begin our conversation by asking him why he stared so fixedly at me. Yet even then I should have made little progress. I did not dare to hint that he belonged to the Secret Service; nevertheless, if the authorities had this plot in charge, it was absolutely necessary we should work together, or, at least, that I should know they were in the secret, and steer my course accordingly. The fact that Simard appeared with undisguised face was not so important as might appear to an outsider. It is always safer for a spy to preserve his natural appearance if that is possible, because a false beard or false mustache or wig runs the risk of being deranged or torn away. As I have said, an anarchist assemblage is simply a room filled with the atmosphere of suspicion. I have known instances where an innocent stranger was suddenly set upon in the midst of solemn proceedings by two or three impetuous fellow−members, who nearly jerked his own whiskers from his face under the impression that they were false. If Simard, therefore, appeared in his own scraggy beard and unkempt hair, it meant that he communicated with headquarters by some circuitous route I realized, therefore, that a very touchy bit of diplomacy awaited me if I was to learn from himself his actual status. While I pondered over this perplexity, it was suddenly dissolved by the action of the president, and another substituted for it.

"Will Brother Simard come forward?" asked the president.

My former subordinate removed his eyes from me, slowly rose from his chair, and shuffled up to the president's table.

"Brother Ducharme," said that official to me in a quiet tone, "I introduce you to Brother Simard, whom you are commissioned to see into a place of safety when he has dispersed the procession."

Simard turned his fishy goggle−eyes upon me, and a grin disclosed wolf−like teeth. He held out his hand, which, rising to my feet, I took. He gave me a flabby grasp, and all the time his inquiring eyes traveled over me.

"You don't look up to much," he said. "What are you?"

"I am a teacher of the French language in London."

"Umph!" growled Simard, evidently in no wise prepossessed by my appearance. "I thought you weren't much of a fighter. The gendarmes will make short work of this fellow," he growled to the chairman.

"Brother Ducharme is vouched for by the whole English circle," replied the president firmly.

"Oh, the English! I think very little of them. Still, it doesn't matter," and with a shrug of the shoulders he shuffled to his seat again, leaving me standing there in a very embarrassed state of mind, my brain in a whirl. That the man was present with his own face was bewildering enough, but that he should be here under his own name was simply astounding. I scarcely heard what the president said. It seemed to the effect that Simard would take me to his own room, where we might talk over our plans. And now Simard rose again from his chair, and said to the president that if nothing more were wanted of him we would go. Accordingly we left the place of meeting together. I watched my comrade narrowly. There was now a trembling eagerness in his action, and without a word he hurried me to the nearest cafe, where we sat down before a little iron table on the pavement.

"Garcon," he shouted harshly, "bring me four absinths. What will you drink, Ducharme?"

"A cafe−cognac, if you please."

"Bah!" cried Simard; "better have absinth."

Then he cursed the waiter for his slowness. When the absinth came he grasped the half−full glass and swallowed the liquid raw, a thing I had never seen done before. Into the next measure of the wormwood he poured the water impetuously from the carafe, another thing I had never seen done before, and dropped two lumps of sugar into it. Over the third glass he placed a flat perforated plated spoon, piled the sugar on this bridge, and now quite expertly allowed the water to drip through, the proper way of concocting this seductive mixture. Finishing his second glass, he placed the perforated spoon over the fourth, and began now more calmly sipping the third, while the water dripped slowly into the last glass.

Here before my eyes was enacted a more wonderful change than the gradual transformation of transparent absinth into an opaque opalescent liquid. Simard, under the influence of the drink, was slowly becoming the Simard I had known ten years before. Remarkable! Absinth, having in earlier years made a beast of the man, was now forming a man out of the beast. His staring eyes took on an expression of human comradeship. The whole mystery became perfectly clear to me without a question asked or an answer uttered. This man was no spy, but a genuine anarchist. However it happened, he had become a victim of absinth, one of many with whom I was acquainted, although I never met any so far sunk as he. He was into his fourth glass, and had ordered two more when he began to speak.

"Here's to us! " he cried, with something like a civilized smile on his gaunt face. "You're not offended at what I said in the meeting, I hope?"

"Oh, no," I answered.

"That's right. You see, I once belonged to the Secret Service, and if my chief was there to−day, we would soon find ourselves in a cool dungeon. We couldn't trip up Eugene Valmont."

At these words, spoken with sincerity, I sat up in my chair, and I am sure such an expression of enjoyment came into my face that, if I had not instantly suppressed it, I might have betrayed myself.

"Who was Eugene Valmont?" I asked, in a tone of assumed indifference.

Mixing his fifth glass he nodded sagely.

"You wouldn't ask that question if you'd been in Paris a dozen years ago. He was the Government's chief detective, and he knew more of anarchists, yes, and of Apaches, too, than either you or I do. He had more brains in his little finger than that whole lot babbling there to−night. But the Government, being a fool, as all governments are, dismissed him, and because I was his assistant, they dismissed me as well. They got rid of all his staff. Valmont disappeared. If I could have found him, I wouldn't be sitting here with you to−night; but he was right to disappear. The Government did all they could against us who had been his friends, and I for one came through starvation, and was near throwing myself in the Seine, which sometimes I wish I had done. Here, garcon, another absinth! But by and by I came to like the gutter, and here I am. I'd rather have the gutter and absinth than the Luxembourg without it. I've had my revenge on the Government many times since, for I knew their ways, and often have I circumvented the police. That's why they respect me among the anarchists. Do you know how I joined? I knew all their passwords, and walked right into one of their meetings, alone and in rags.

"'Here am I,' I said; 'Adolph Simard, late second assistant to Eugene Valmont, chief detective to the French Government.'

"There were twenty weapons covering me at once, but I laughed.

"'I'm starving,' I cried, 'and I want something to eat, and more especially something to drink! In return for that I'll show you every rat hole you've got. Lift the president's chair, and there's a trapdoor that leads to the Rue Blanc. I'm one of you, and I'll tell you the tricks of the police.'

"Such was my initiation, and from that moment the police began to pick their spies out of the Seine, and now they leave us alone. Even Valmont himself could do nothing against the anarchists since I have joined them."

Oh, the incredible self−conceit of human nature Here was this ruffian proclaiming the limitations of Valmont, who half an hour before had shaken his hand within the innermost circle of his order! Yet my heart warmed toward the wretch who had remembered me and my exploits.

It now became my anxious and difficult task to lure Simard away from this cafe and its absinth. Glass after glass of the poison had brought him up almost to his former intellectual level, but now it was shoving him rapidly down the hill again. I must know where his room was situated, yet if I waited much longer the man would be in a state of drunken imbecility which would not only render it impossible for him to guide me to his room, but likely cause both of us to be arrested by the police. I tried persuasion, and he laughed at me; I tried threats, whereat he scowled and cursed me as a renegade from England. At last the liquor overpowered him, and his head sank on the metal table and the dark blue cap fell to the floor.

## THE FATE OF THE PICRIC BOMB

I WAS in despair, but now received a lesson which taught me that if a man leaves a city, even for a short time, he falls out of touch with its ways. I called the waiter, and said to him: "Do you know my friend here?"

"I do not know his name," replied the garcon, "but I have seen him many times at this cafe. He is usually in this state when he has money."

"Do you know where he lives? He promised to take me with him, and I am a stranger in Paris."

"Have no discontent, monsieur. Rest tranquil; I will intervene."

With this he stepped across the pavement in front of the cafe, into the street, and gave utterance to a low, peculiar whistle. The cafe was now nearly deserted, for the hour was very late, or, rather, very early. When the waiter returned I whispered to him in some anxiety: "Not the police, surely?"

"But no!" he cried in scorn; "certainly not the police."

He went on unconcernedly taking in the empty chairs and tables. A few minutes later there swaggered up to the cafe two of the most disreputable, low−browed scoundrels I had ever seen, each wearing a dark blue cap, with a glazed peak over the eyes, caps exactly similar to the one which lay in front of Simard. The band of Apaches which now permeates all Paris has risen since my time, and Simard had been mistaken an hour before in asserting that Valmont was familiar with their haunts. The present Chief of Police in Paris and some of his predecessors confess there is a difficulty in dealing with these picked assassins, but I should very much like to take a hand in the game on the side of law and order. However, that is not to be; therefore the Apaches increase and prosper.

The two vagabonds roughly smote Simard's cap on his prone head, and as roughly raised him to his feet.

"He is a friend of mine," I interposed, "and promised to take me home with him."

"Good! Follow us," said one of them; and now I passed through the morning streets of Paris behind three cutthroats, yet knew that I was safer than if broad daylight was in the thoroughfare, with a meridian sun shining down upon us. I was doubly safe, being in no fear of harm from midnight prowlers, and equally free from danger of arrest by the police. Every officer we met avoided us, and casually stepped to the other side of the street. We turned down a narrow lane, then through a still narrower one, which terminated at a courtyard. Entering a tall building, we climbed up five flights of stairs to a landing, where one of the scouts kicked open a door, into a room so miserable that there was not even a lock to protect its poverty. Here they allowed the insensible Simard to drop with a crash on the floor, and thus they left us alone without even an adieu. The Apaches take care of their own−−after a fashion.

I struck a match, and found part of a bougie stuck in the mouth of an absinth bottle, resting on a rough deal table. Lighting the bougie, I surveyed the horrible apartment. A heap of rags lay in a corner, and this was evidently Simard's bed. I hauled him to it, and there he lay unconscious, himself a bundle of rags. I found one chair, or, rather, stool, for it had no back. I drew the table against the lockless door, blew out the light, sat on the stool, resting my arms on the table, and my head on my arms, and slept peacefully till long after daybreak.

Simard awoke in the worst possible humor. He poured forth a great variety of abusive epithets at me. To make himself still more agreeable, he turned back the rags on which he had slept, and brought to the light a round black object, like a small cannon ball, which he informed me was the picric bomb that was to scatter destruction among my English friends, for whom he expressed the greatest possible loathing and contempt. Then sitting up, he began playing with this infernal machine, knowing, as well as I, that if he allowed it to drop that was the end of us two.

I shrugged my shoulders at this display, and affected a nonchalance I was far from feeling, but finally put an end to his dangerous amusement by telling him that if he came out with me I would pay for his breakfast, and give him a drink of absinth.

The next few days were the most anxious of my life. Never before had I lived on terms of intimacy with a picric bomb, that most deadly and uncertain of all explosive agencies. I speedily found that Simard was so absinth−soaked I could do nothing with him. He could not be bribed or cajoled or persuaded or threatened. Once, indeed, when he talked with drunken affection of Eugene Valmont, I conceived a wild notion of declaring myself to him; but a moment's reflection showed the absolute uselessness of this course. It was not one Simard with whom I had to deal, but half a dozen or more. There was Simard sober, half sober, quarter sober, drunk, half drunk, quarter drunk, or wholly drunk. Any bargain I might make with the one Simard would not be kept by any

of the other six. The only safe Simard was Simard insensible through overindulgence. I had resolved to get Simard insensibly drunk on the morning of the procession, but my plans were upset at a meeting of the anarchists, which luckily took place on an evening shortly after my arrival, and this gave me time to mature the plan which was actually carried out. Each member of the anarchists' club knew of Simard's slavery to absinth, and fears were expressed that he might prove incapable on the day of the procession, too late for a substitute to take his place. It was therefore proposed that one or two others should be stationed along the route of the procession with bombs ready if Simard failed. This I strenuously opposed, and guaranteed that Simard would be ready to launch his missile. I met with little difficulty in persuading the company to agree, because, after all, every man among them feared he might be one of those selected, which choice was practically a sentence of death. I guaranteed that the bomb would be thrown, and this apparently was taken to mean that if Simard did not do the deed, I would.

This danger over, I next took the measurements, and estimated the weight, of the picric bomb. I then sought out a most amiable and expert pyrotechnist, a capable workman of genius, who with his own hand makes those dramatic firework arrangements which you sometimes see in Paris. As Eugene Valmont, I had rendered a great service to this man, and he was not likely to have forgotten it. During one of the anarchist scares a stupid policeman had arrested him, and when I intervened the man was just on the verge of being committed for life. France trembled in one of her panics, or, rather, Paris did, and demanded victims. This blameless little workman had indeed contributed with both material and advice, but any fool might have seen that he had done this innocently. His assistance had been invoked and secured under the pretense that his clients were promoting an amateur firework display, which was true enough, but the display cost the lives of three men, and intentionally so. I cheered up the citizen in the moment of his utmost despair, and brought such proof of his innocence to the knowledge of those above me that he was most reluctantly acquitted. To this man I now went with my measurement of the bomb, and the estimate of its weight.

"Sir," said I, "do you remember Eugene Valmont?"

"Am I ever likely to forget him?" he replied, with a fervor that pleased me.

"He has sent me to you, and implores you to aid me, and that aid will wipe out the debt you owe him."

"Willingly, willingly," cried the artisan, "so long as it has nothing to do with the anarchists or the making of bombs!"

"It has to do exactly with those two things. I wish you to make an innocent bomb which will prevent an anarchist outrage."

At this the little man drew back, and his face became pale.

"It is impossible," he protested; "I have had enough of innocent bombs. No, no, and in any case how can I be sure you come from Eugene Valmont? No, monsieur, I am not to be trapped the second time."

At this I related rapidly all that Valmont had done for him, and even repeated Valmont's most intimate conversation with him. The man was nonplused, but remained firm.

"I dare not do it," he said.

We were alone in his back shop. I walked to the door and thrust in the bolt; then, after a moment's pause, turned round, stretched forth my right hand dramatically, and cried: "Behold Eugene Valmont!"

My friend staggered against the wall in his amazement, and I continued in solemn tones: "Eugene Valmont, who by this removal of his disguise places his life in your hands as your life was in his. Now, monsieur, what will you

do?"

He replied: "Monsieur Valmont, I shall do whatever you ask. If I refused a moment ago, it was because I thought there was now in France no Eugene Valmont to rectify my mistake if I make one."

I resumed my disguise, and told him I wished an innocent substitute for this picric bomb, and he at once suggested an earthenware globe, which would weigh the same as the bomb, and which could be colored to resemble it exactly.

"And now, Monsieur Valmont, do you wish smoke to issue from this imitation bomb?"

"Yes," I said, "in such quantity as you can compress within it."

"It is easily done!" he cried, with the enthusiasm of a true French artist. "And may I place within some little design of my own which will astonish your friends the English, and delight my friends the French?"

"Monsieur," said I, "I am in your hands. I trust the project entirely to your skill." And thus it came about that four days later I substituted the bogus globe for the real one, and, unseen, dropped the picric bomb from one of the bridges into the Seine.

On the morning of the procession I was compelled to allow Simard several drinks of absinth to bring him up to a point where he could be depended on, otherwise his anxiety and determination to fling the bomb, his frenzy against all government, made it certain that he would betray both of us before the fateful moment came. My only fear was that I could not stop him drinking when once he began, but somehow our days of close companionship, loathsome as they were to me, seemed to have had the effect of building up again the influence I held over him in former days, and his yielding more or less to my wishes appeared to be quite unconscious on his part.

The procession was composed entirely of carriages, each containing four persons−−two Englishmen sat on the back seats, with two Frenchmen in front of them. A thick crowd lined each side of the thoroughfare, cheering vociferously. Right into the middle of the procession Simard launched his bomb. There was no crash of explosion. The missile simply went to pieces as if it were an earthenware jar, and there arose a dense column of very white smoke. In the immediate vicinity the cheering stopped at once, and the sinister word "bomb" passed from lip to lip in awed whispers. As the throwing had been unnoticed in the midst of the commotion, I held Simard firmly by the wrist, determined he should not draw attention to himself by his panic−stricken desire for immediate flight.

"Stand still, you fool!" I hissed into his ear, and he obeyed, trembling.

The pair of horses in front of which the bomb fell rose for a moment on their hind legs, and showed signs of bolting, but the coachman held them firmly, and uplifted his hand so that the procession behind him came to a momentary pause. No one in the carriages moved a muscle, then suddenly the tension was broken by a great and simultaneous cheer. Wondering at this, I turned my eyes from the frightened horses to the column of pale smoke in front of us, and saw that in some manner it had resolved itself into a gigantic calla lily, pure white, while from the base of this sprang the lilies of France, delicately tinted. Of course, this could not have happened if there had been the least wind, but the air was so still that the vibration of the cheering caused the huge lily to tremble gently as it stood there marvelously poised; the lily of peace, surrounded by the lilies of France! That was the design, and if you ask me how it was done, I can only refer you to my pyrotechnist, and say that whatever a Frenchman attempts to do he will accomplish artistically.

And now these imperturbable English, who had been seated, immobile, when they thought a bomb was thrown, stood up in their carriages to get a better view of this aerial phenomenon, cheering and waving their hats. The lily gradually thinned, and dissolved in little patches of cloud that floated away above our heads.

"I cannot stay here longer," groaned Simard, quaking, his nerves, like himself, in rags. "I see the ghosts of those I have killed floating around me."

"Come on, then, but do not hurry."

There was no difficulty in getting him to London, but it was absinth, absinth, all the way, and when we reached Charing Cross I was compelled to help him, partly insensible, into a cab. I took him direct to the Imperial Flats, and up into my own set of chambers, where I opened my strong room, and flung him inside to sleep off his intoxication, and subsist on bread and water when he became sober.

I attended that night a meeting of the anarchists, and detailed accurately the story of our escape from France. I knew we had been watched, and so skipped no detail. I reported that I had taken Simard directly to my compatriot's flat; to Eugene Valmont, the man who had given me employment, and who had promised to do what he could for Simard, beginning by trying to break him of the absinth habit, as he was now a physical wreck through overindulgence in that stimulant.

It was curious to note the discussion which took place a few nights afterwards regarding the failure of the picric bomb. Scientists among us said that the bomb had been made too long; that a chemical reaction had taken place which destroyed its power. A few superstitious ones saw a miracle in what had happened, and they forthwith left our organization. Then again, things were made easier by the fact that the man who constructed the bomb, evidently terror−stricken at what he had done, disappeared the day before the procession, and has never since been heard of. The majority of the anarchists believed he had made a bogus bomb, and had fled to escape their vengeance rather than to evade the justice of the law.

Simard will need no purgatory in the next world. I kept him on bread and water for a month in my strong room, and at first he demanded absinth with threats, then groveled, begging and praying for it. After that a period of depression and despair ensued, but finally his naturally strong constitution conquered, and began to build itself up again. I took him from his prison one midnight, and gave him a bed in my Soho room, taking care in bringing him away that he would never recognize the place where he had been incarcerated. In my dealings with him I had always been that old man, Paul Ducharme. Next morning I said to him: "You spoke of Eugene Valmont. I have learned that he lives in London, and I advise you to call upon him. Perhaps he can get you something to do."

Simard was overjoyed, and two hours later, as Eugene Valmont, I received him in my flat, and made him my assistant on the spot. From that time forward, Paul Ducharme, language teacher, disappeared from the earth, and Simard abandoned his two A's−−anarchy and absinth.