



The Last Communard: Adrien Lejeune, the Unexpected Life of a Revolutionary

Gavin Bowd

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The story of an unexpected hero

The Last Communard offers a brilliant, striking portrait of revolutionary Europe through a remarkable personal story.

In 1871, Adrien Lejeune fought on the barricades of the Paris Commune. He was imprisoned for treason when the Commune fell and narrowly avoided execution for his role in the struggle for a new future. In later life, he immigrated to Soviet Russia, finding fame as a revolutionary icon. In his native country, he was vaunted as a hero, a touchstone of revolutions past during France's interwar dramas.

Abandoned by the Soviet regime, he languished, fortunes foundering, in Russia. Having led a long and extraordinary life, he died in Siberia in 1942 while fleeing Moscow as the Nazi armies swept across western Russia. It was another thirty years before he returned to Paris, his ashes coming to rest in the Communards' plot of the Père Lachaise cemetery, on the centennial of the uprising, a symbol of France's undying radical tradition.

Gavin Bowd's stunning narrative shows how an individual can be swept up in the fierce tides of history, and at the same time be defined by his own efforts to force those tides into a different, and better, course. Lejeune's life captures war and revolution in a tumultuous period of European history.

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