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Volume 1 (of 2), by G. P. R. James**

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CORSE DE LEON:

OR,

THE BRIGAND.

A ROMANCE.

BY G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

**AUTHOR OF "THE ROBBER," "THE GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL,"
ETC.**

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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CORSE DE LEON;
OR,
THE BRIGAND.

CHAPTER I.

There are a thousand small and apparently accidental circumstances, which, in our course through life, bring a temporary gloom upon us, render our expectations from the future fearful and cheerless, and diminish our confidence in all those things whereon man either rashly relies or builds his reasonable trusts. Strength, youth, wealth, power, the consciousness of rectitude, the providence of God: all these will occasionally lose their sustaining influence, even upon the most hopeful mind, from causes too slight to justify such an effect.

These accidental circumstances, these mental clouds, resemble much those other clouds which sometimes, at the close of a bright day, come over a landscape previously warm and shining, cast a gray shade over its rich hues, shut out the redoubled glory of the setting sun, and make gloom and shadow spread over the summer scene. Though nothing is changed but the light in which things dwell, though the colour of the tree and the form of the rock are the same, yet the brightness of the whole is departed, and the lustre gone out as if for ever.

There are times, however, when a gloom, which seems to have no counterpart in the physical world, comes over the mind; when all has gone fairly with us; when every object around is full of brightness and hope; when the horses of Fortune's car have never once even stumbled on the way; and not a sorrow rough enough to rub the down from the wing of a butterfly has fallen upon our hearts for years; and yet a deep and shadowy despondence steals over our spirits, as if the immortal within us were telling the mortal of anxieties, and griefs, and dangers approaching—discovered by the fine sympathies of the higher part of our being with things undiscovered by the mere material creature.

Cares, sorrows, and perils, corporeal agony, and anguish of the heart, are often but as the fire which tempers the pure iron into the fine steel, at once proving and strengthening the spirit. The last grand lesson which leads generous youth to vigorous manhood, which confirms our powers, and gives the great man's mastery over Fate, is to endure; and I am inclined to believe that such sudden and unaccountable feelings of despondency—I do not mean the ordinary fits of gloom that haunt a moody and a wayward spirit, but, on the contrary, the dark impression, the heavy shadow that once or twice, in the midst of a bright lifetime, comes irresistibly upon a gay or placid mind—I am inclined to think, I say, that such despondence is only given to the highminded and the great: a prophetic voice, announcing, not to the ear, but to the heart, that the day of trial comes: the trumpet of Fate, calling on a champion, dauntless and strong, to rouse him to the battle, and arm his spirit for some awful strife.

The day had been as bright and beautiful as a summer day in the south of Europe can be, and yet

it had spared the traveller and the labourer many of the inconveniences and discomforts which those beautiful days of the south sometimes bring along with them: for the year was yet young, and with all the brightness of youth it had all the tenderness too. There had been a fresh breeze in the sky during the hotter part of the day; and one would have felt that it blew from the cool tops of snowy mountains, even had one not seen, from time to time, some of the distant peaks of the high Alps towering white over the greener hills below.

There was also a world of streams, and rivulets, and cascades about, which gave additional freshness and life to the air that blew heavy with the perfume of the flowers upon the banks; and the high swelling of the mountains round still gave a pleasant shade to one side of the valley. Each sense had something to delight it; and there was over every object which nature presented that aspect of peaceful enjoyment which is the greatest soother of man's heart.

The spot was in the extreme verge of Savoy, bordering upon France. It would little benefit the reader to say exactly where, for the aspect of the land has changed: the towns of that age and their laborious denizens would not be recognised by their successors of the present day; the castle, the fortress, and the palace are ruined and swept away, and even the roads themselves now wind through other valleys or climb over other hills. It was somewhere between Nice and St. Jean de Maurienne: that space is surely limited enough to afford the reader a definite idea of the scene. Let him take a map and a pair of compasses, he will find it but a span; and in reality it is less—with a universe around it.

Nevertheless, it was a very lovely scene, as I have said, with the hills tall and blue, and the snowy mountains looking down upon one through the long defiles; with the valleys green and fresh, and the streams bright and sparkling. Here and there, too, upon some rocky height which commanded the entrance of the gorges of the mountain, a feudal castle would raise its battlements, gray, and stern, and warlike; and either in the open plain—where such a thing was found—or in the warm valleys in the hills, were seen the villages and small towns of Savoy, with their grayish white walls and their graceful church towers crowning the loveliness of the whole with the aspect of human life. The period of the world's history whereof I speak was one of gorgeous pageantry, and gay wit and deeds of arms: a period when chivalry and the feudal system, just about to be extinguished for ever, blazed with a dying flame. Montmorency still lived, though Bayard and Francis had left the busy scene but a few years before, and Henry the Second had not yet closed his career in the last tournament which Europe was destined to witness. The songs of Marot and the wit of Rabelais still rang in the ear, and Ronsard, Dorat, and Montaigne were entering gayly upon the path of letters.

It was in the year 1558, then, and towards the close of the day, that a small party of horsemen wound along through the bright scenery of which we have spoken. It consisted only of four persons, two of whom were merely armed servants, such as usually attended upon a cavalier of those times, not exactly acting the part of soldier on ordinary occasions, but very well fitted so to do when any particular exigency required the exertion of the strong hand. The third was a youth of no very remarkable appearance, in the garb of a page; but the fourth was evidently the leader of the whole, and, as such, the person who merits the most accurate description. I will attempt to paint him to the eye of the reader, as I have myself seen him represented by the hand of an unknown artist in one of the palaces on the banks of the Brenta.

He was in person about the middle height, rather above it than below, and at this period was not more than twenty-three years of age. His forehead was broad and fine, with short dark hair curling round it: his features were small, except the eye and brow, the former of which was large and full, and the latter strongly marked. The mouth was very handsome, showing, when half open in speaking, the brilliant white teeth, and giving to the whole countenance a look of playful gayety; but, when shut, there was an expression of much thoughtfulness, approaching perhaps to sternness, about it, which the rounded and somewhat prominent chin confirmed. The upper lip was very short; but on either side, divided in the middle, was a short black mustache, not overhanging the mouth, but raised above it; and the beard, which was short and black like the hair, was only suffered to grow in such a manner as to ornament, but not to encumber, the chin.

In form the cavalier was muscular, and powerfully made, his breadth of chest and shoulders giving the appearance of a more advanced period of life than that at which he had yet arrived. He was evidently a soldier, for he was fully armed, as if having lately been or being still in scenes of strife and danger; and, to say the truth, a man fully armed in those days was certainly more loaded with weapons, offensive and defensive, than was probably ever the case before or since.

The picture I have spoken of represents him with not only the complete armour which was then still used to encase the person, with the long, heavy sword, the dagger, and the large pistols, but also with four short carbines—at least such they appear to be—one at each corner of the saddle. His head, indeed, is seen unencumbered by the steel cap, which usually completed the armour, but which is borne by the page at his saddlebow, while the cavalier himself appears wearing upon his head the somewhat cooler covering of a black velvet cap, without feather or any other ornament.

The horse that carried him, which was a tall, powerful charger, fared better in some respects than his master; for before this epoch, the heavy armour with which steed as well as man used at one time to be encumbered was lightened in favour of the quadruped, and the horse which bore the young gentleman of whom we speak was only covered with such pieces as might protect his head and chest in the shock of the charge.

The day, I have said, had been bright and sweet, and all nature had been as fresh and happy as a young heart upon a holyday. Similar, too, had been the mood of Bernard de Rohan as he rode along; not so much that the scene and its charms created, as that they found, sympathetic feelings in his bosom; for his disposition was naturally cheerful and bright, full of gay thoughts and happy enthusiasms. He was returning, too, from another country—from the midst of strangers, and perils, and fatigues—to enjoy an interval of tranquillity in his own bright land, and the society of those he loved.

France was within his sight; the tongues that he heard around him spoke nearly the same language as that which he had used from infancy; and, though the nominal frontier of Savoy lay some fifteen miles before him, yet, in all but the name, he was in his own country. There was little of that cold restraint about him which is either acquired by harsh dealings with evil men, or is natural from some inward pravity of the heart, and the cheerful mood of his mind found its way forth in many an outward sign. From time to time he had turned round to speak to the page or to one of the servants with some light jest or gay inquiry. Now he would point out a distant spot in the landscape as they stood upon some beetling point half way up the mountain, and ask if they recognised this or that town in Dauphiné; now he would pat the proud crest of his stout horse, and talk to the noble animal as if he expected an answer; and now would even break forth into a snatch of song. His heart, in short, was as a fountain, so filled with happiness that it welled over, and the waters sparkled as they overflowed the brim.

The servants smiled to see their lord so gay, especially an elder one, who, commenting with the other, remarked that he might well look happy, bearing back home such glory as he had won.

Thus passed the earlier part of the day's journey; but towards the evening the mood of Bernard de Rohan changed. His open brow did not grow cloudy, it is true, but there came a look of gloom upon it: the lips no longer opened with a bland smile, and the teeth were shut together with that stern expression we have already noticed. His eyes gazed on upon the scene, but with somewhat of a vacant aspect, and everything told that the spirit was busy in its tabernacle dealing with high thoughts. Nor could any one who looked upon him suppose those thoughts were other than sad ones. Intense they certainly were, and certainly they were not gay.

Yet Bernard de Rohan had no remembered grief. Fate had indeed once struck him severely, but ever after had spared him altogether; had plucked not a flower from his bosom, nor cast a shadow on his path.

In early years he had lost both his parents, but that was the only misfortune which had befallen him, and it was long ago. He scarcely remembered them; and all that remained was a soft memory, affectionate but not painful. Since then his course had been from one bright thing to another. Wise and tender friends, the amusements, the sports, the studies of youth, virtue and honour, wealth and station, praise, success, and glory had been his. He had no thirst for power: so what could he want more? Had any one asked him that question, he would have replied, Nothing: nothing but what he might well hope to attain; and yet, about an hour before the sun reached the edge of the sky, a fit of gloom fell upon him, dark, vague, unaccountable, like one of those mists that in mountain lands suddenly surround the wayfarer, shutting out the beauty and the brightness, and leaving all around dull, chilly, vague, uncertain, and confused.

For nearly half an hour he gave way to the sensations that oppressed him. They seemed at first too mighty to be struggled with. It was what, in the language of Northern poetry, is called "having the cloud upon him," and he could not cast it off; till at length it seemed to rise gradually, and the power returned, first, of arguing with himself upon the unreasonableness of such feelings, and then of smiling—though with a mingled smile—at his own weakness in giving way to them.

The effect wore off; but he was still communing with himself on the sensations he had just experienced, when the page called his attention to the clouds that were gathering round the mountains. With that quick transition so common to hill countries, especially in the south, the sky was becoming rapidly obscured. The lurid masses of stormy vapour writhed themselves round the peaks; and, although beneath their dark canopy a gleam of intense red light was seen marking the far western sky on the side of France, the whole heaven above was soon covered with a thick expanse of deep gray cloud. At a considerable distance, in the more open part of the country, which lay beyond the mouth of the defile, stretching in long lines of dark purple towards the sunset, appeared a large square tower, with some other neighbouring buildings, cutting with their straight lines the rounded forms of the trees.

"That must be Voiron," said the cavalier, as if in answer to his page's observation regarding the coming storm. "We must quicken our pace and reach shelter, or we shall have to pass half the night in cleaning our arms, if yonder frowning cloud fulfil one half its menaces."

"Voiron must be ten leagues off, sir," replied one of the attendants; "we shall not reach it this night."

"Then we must find some other covering," replied the master, gayly; "but, at all events, put to your spurs, for the battle has already begun."

Even as he spoke the large drops fell slowly and heavily, denting the dusty covering of the road. Bernard de Rohan and his followers rode on at full speed, though the descent was steep, the way bad, and the gray twilight creeping over the scene. Five minutes more brought them to a turn where they could obtain a wider view; but, alas! no place of refuge was to be seen, except where

the same tall dark tower rose heavily across the streaks of red light in the west, marking the place of some distant town or village. The attendants, who had pictured to themselves during the morning's ride all the comforts of the cheerful inn, the good rich wine of Dauphiné, the stretching forth at ease of the strong, laborious limb, the easy gossip with the village girls, the light-hearted song in the porch, and all the relaxing joys of an hour's idleness, now begun to think of the long and tedious task of cleaning arms and clothing, and spending many an hour in rubbing the cold steel; and, to say sooth, their lord also would have been better pleased with fairer weather.

The road, as such roads ever must do, wound its way round many a turn and angle of the rock, so that it was very possible for several persons to be within a short distance of each other, without the one who followed ever seeing him who was but a few hundred yards before him. At the spot which we have mentioned, Bernard de Rohan paused for a moment to look round for some place of shelter, and the road before him seemed perfectly clear and free. He could see completely into the valley on his right, and across the plains beyond, while the path which he was following could be traced along the side of the hill, round two or three sharp angles of the rock, about two hundred yards apart from each other. All at first was clear, as I have said, when suddenly there emerged, at the salient point which cut that part of the sky where the light still lingered, the figure of a human being, which was lost again round the turn almost as soon as it was seen.

"There is a peasant on a mule," exclaimed the cavalier, gladly. "We cannot be far from some village."

"It looks more like a priest on an ass, my lord," replied the attendant who had spoken before.

"Well, well," said his master, "we shall find the better lodgings."

"And the better wine," rejoined his follower; "but, perhaps, not the better welcome."

"Oh, they are good men, these priests of Savoy," replied Bernard de Rohan, spurring on; "but we must not lose him again."

In a few minutes they again caught sight of the object of their pursuit. He was now much nearer, but still it was somewhat difficult to distinguish whether he were priest or peasant, till, coming up with him by dint of hard riding—for his long-eared charger was bearing him on at a rapid pace—they found that he was, as the attendant had supposed, a jovial priest; not, indeed, extravagantly fat, as but too many were in that day, but in good case of body, and bearing a countenance rosy with health, and apparently sparkling with a cheerful disposition. He seemed, indeed, to be of a character somewhat eccentric; for, contrary to all clerical rule, he had covered his head with one of the large straw hats of the peasantry, which accorded but ill with the rest of his habiliments. His features, which the young cavalier thought he had seen somewhere before, were good, with an expression of much sharpness; and, though undoubtedly he heard the tramp of horses' feet behind him, in a land and in times not famous for safe travelling, either his conscience or his courage were so good, that he turned not his head to see who followed him thus closely, but kept his ass at the same brisk canter, while the young cavalier rode up to his side, and gave him the ordinary salutation of the day.

"A good-evening to you, father!" said Bernard de Rohan, riding between him and the edge of the precipice.

"Pray let us have it quickly, my son," replied the priest; "for the one we have got seems likely to be as bad a one as ever I saw, at present."

"Indeed it is," answered the young gentleman, smiling at his somewhat cynical reply; "I am heartily glad to have met with you, my good father, for I trust you can show us some place of shelter."

"Good faith," replied the priest, turning for a moment to look at the cavalier's followers, "I cannot say I am so glad of the encounter; for where I am going we cannot be sure of finding too many of the good things of this life, and the lion's portion is always sure to go to the fighting men."

"Nay, nay! we will share alike!" rejoined Bernard.

"Ay! but I am a king in those matters," answered the priest; "I do not like to share at all. But come on, come on; I am only jesting. We shall find plenty, I doubt not; for, when last I passed that little inn, there was good meat and wine enough to have fed a refectory for a week, or an army for a year. Come on quick, I say, for yon foul-mouthed railer at the top of the hill is beginning to roar at us as well as spit at us. We have still far to go, and a storm in these mountains is like a dull jest, I can tell you, young gentleman; for one never knows what may come next."

"Why, what can come next," demanded the cavalier, "but fine weather after the storm?"

"A rock upon your head," replied the priest, "or an avalanche at your heels, which would smother you in your steel case like a lobster in his shell. Come on! come on! Sancta Maria! why, my small ass will out-run your tall charger now!" and, bestowing a buffet with his straw hat upon the flank of his bearer, the beast quickened his pace still more, and, with a malicious whisk of the tail and fling with his hind feet, set off into a gallop. But we must pause to change the scene, and precede the travellers on their way.

CHAPTER II.

There are few situations in life which convey to the mind of man more completely the sensations of comfort, security, and repose, than when, after a long day's ride, he sits at ease by a glowing fire, and hears—while all the ready service of a well-conducted inn is in bustling activity to minister to his wants or satisfy his appetite—the rain patter and the tempest roar without. Nor is it from any selfish comparison of their own fate with that of others less happy that men derive this sensation, notwithstanding the dictum of the most selfish of would-be philosophers. It is, on the contrary, from a comparison of their own situation at the moment with what that situation sometimes has been, or might even then be, that the good and the generous experience such feelings; and, though the thought of others exposed to the tempest must naturally cross their minds, yet that thought is mixed with pity and regret.

The little inn towards which Bernard de Rohan and his companions were proceeding, under the guidance of the priest, when last we left them, though the village in which it stood contained not above nine or ten cottages, was good for the time and the country. Its only sitting-room, of course, was the great kitchen, into which the door opened from the road; but that kitchen was well fenced from the wind and rain; the windows were small, and cased in stone; the door was sheltered by a deep porch, where host and travellers sat and amused themselves in the summer daytime; and, as it was the first house met with after passing some of the steepest mountains between France and Piedmont, everything was done to make it attractive in the eyes of weary wayfarers.

The thunder had passed, the air had become cold and raw, the night was as dark as a bad man's thoughts, a fierce wind was blowing, and the heavy rain dashed in gusts against the clattering casements; but all those indications of the harsh and boisterous state of the weather without did but serve to make the scene within seem more comfortable to the eyes of a traveller, who sat in one of the large seats within the sheltering nook of the chimney, watching the busy hostess prepare more than one savoury mess for his supper on the bright wood fire that blazed upon the hearth. In the mean time, several attendants of various kinds might be seen in different parts of the wide kitchen, cleaning and drying harness, clothes, baldrics, and weapons, or preparing other matters for the service of their lord, with all the devices of courtly luxury.

Those attendants, however, were not the attendants of Bernard de Rohan, nor was the traveller that cavalier himself; he being yet upon his way thither, and enduring all the fury of the storm.

The one of whom I now speak was a man of about the same age, but rather older. He was decidedly a handsomer man also: his features were all finer in form; he was taller; his complexion was fairer, without, however, being effeminate; and it was evident, too, that he knew his personal advantages, and was somewhat vain of them. He was dressed with much splendour, according to the fashion of that day; and, though he seemed to have met with some part of the storm, it was clear that he had not been long exposed to it.

In short, as he sat there, he might well be pronounced one of the handsomest and most splendid cavaliers of his day; but there was a something which a closely-observing eye might detect in the hanging brow and curling lip that was not altogether pleasant. It could scarcely be called a sneer; yet there was something supercilious and contemptuous in it too. Nor was it altogether haughty, though pride undoubtedly had its share. It was a dark and yet not gloomy expression. It seemed as if the heart beneath was full of many an unfathomable idea, and proud of its impenetrability. The thoughts might be good or bad; but it was evidently a countenance of much thought under a mask of lightness: a deep lake beneath a ripple.

The stranger had, as we have said, been looking on while the hostess, with a bustling maid, prepared manifold dishes for his supper; and he added, from time to time, a gay jest to either of them upon the progress of the work. His tone was familiar and easy; but it might be remarked that his jest always arose from something that came beneath his eye, and that, in general, he took no notice whatever of the reply, scarcely seeming to hear that any one else spoke, and making no rejoinder, but letting the matter drop till he thought fit to jest again.

At length, however, he said, "I prithee, dame, double yon portion of steaks from the roe-deer, and add me some twenty eggs to the omelet. You will have more visitors shortly."

The good woman started up with a look of some surprise, and might, perhaps, have thought her guest a conjuror, had not his words been followed so closely by the noise of horses' feet, that the source of his knowledge was evident at once. A moment after voices were heard calling, and the aubergiste, who had been aiding some of the servants at the other side of the kitchen, opened the door carefully and looked forth. The cold wind rushed in fiercely, like a besieging army into a stormed city, and the yellow wax flambeau which the host carried to the door, and which, in that land of bees, was in those days common to every country inn, was extinguished in a moment, notwithstanding the fierce flame wherewith it burned.

All on that side of the wide, dingy room was now in darkness; but voices were heard as of many persons speaking, with cries for horseboys and hostlers, in the easily-distinguished tongues of attendants, while the landlord assured the travellers again and again that he would bestow upon them a thousand-fold better accommodation and entertainment than there was the least chance of their obtaining in reality.

At the same time, a full, rich, merry voice was heard chuckling at the boasts of mine host, and

exclaiming, "Ay, ay, landlord! is it not so? We shall have dolphins and mullets, ortolans and beccaficos, musk sherbet from Constantinople, true Roman Falernian mingled with honey, and, to crown all, a Pythagorean peacock! Nothing less will serve us in this cold night; though, methinks, a good capon and a tankard of mulled Avignon claret^[1] would warm me well, were it but ready this minute."

While the jovial priest, whom I have described in the first chapter of this true history, descended from his ass, joking at every movement with the host, Bernard de Rohan, smiling at his new companion's merriment, sprang to the ground and entered the kitchen of the inn, leaving his attendants to lead round the horses to the stables at the back of the building. It might not, it is true, be very satisfactory to him to find that the inn was so fully tenanted as he soon saw that it was; but he was one of those who fail not to enjoy what may fall to their lot as far as possible; and, as he advanced towards the fire, he thanked Heaven for a place of shelter from the rude buffeting of the storm.

In the mean while, the first occupant of the inn continued, with that air of self-satisfied indifference which has been a part of the affectation of the pampered and insolent in all ages, to look at nothing but the proceedings of some rebellious sticks upon the hearth, which resisted all the soft persuasions of the woman whom the hostess had left to tend the savoury messes at the fire, while she herself aided her husband in receiving, like Hope, her new visitors with false promises. The occupant of the chimney-corner looked neither to the right nor to the left; and, to have judged by his countenance, one would have supposed that he heard not one sound of all the many that were stirring around him, nor had a greater interest in anything on earth than in the cooking of a steak of roe venison. Even when Bernard de Rohan advanced with his arms jingling as he trod, and, after a momentary glance at him, laid hold of his arm with a friendly smile, the stranger merely turned round, with a look of perfect unconcern, to see who it was that, either in enmity or good-fellowship, thus called his attention.

When he saw who it was, however, he became more animated, and, rising with a smile, shook hands with him warmly. "Ha! Bernard de Rohan!" he exclaimed, "I can hardly believe my eyes. Why, baron, who would have thought to meet you thus in a Savoyard inn? Have you then quitted Italy to follow Guise, and meet the enemy in the North? You have not thrown by the spear and sword, I see! But, in a word, say what do you here?"

"Why, to say truth," replied the other, "nothing is now to be done beyond the Apennines; and though, as you might well know, after all that occurred at Civita, I am as little likely to follow Guise as a greyhound is to hunt in company with a lion, yet there is no use in staying behind when he has not only left the field himself, but taken all his forces with him. I am tired of this warfare, too! I long for some repose. I have now been three years absent from France, and I have a yearning to see my own land once more."

"Yes, and some fair dame therein," rejoined his companion. "Is it not so, De Rohan? I remember well you seemed to have but small delight in the bright eyes of the young Italians, and I often thought that it must be some remembered love of the past that kept you thus heart-whole."

"It may be so, count," replied Bernard, gayly. "What man is there without a lady-love? If there be one, he is neither fit for war nor peace: he wants the great excitement to glory, and courtesy, and great deeds. But, even had it not been for that, Meyrand," he added, more seriously, "I love the ladies of my own land best. Bright looks are little to me without true hearts, and beauty but a frail substitute for goodness."

"Pshaw, Sir Moralizer!" cried his companion; "beauty is a woman's best possession till she be old; and then, when she has done with the Graces, let her take up with the Virtues, or the Muses, or anything else she likes."

"Let her take up with anything, in short," said the jolly priest, coming forward to the fire, and shaking his gown to dry it; "let her take up with anything but a libertine, a fop, or a courtier. Let her bear age, or ugliness, or anything but children to fools—so shall she do well in this world and the next! Is it not so, gay sir?"

The Count de Meyrand stared at him with a look of haughty surprise; but he found that the priest was as indifferent as he could be, and he relapsed for a minute or two into silence, while the page of Bernard de Rohan came up to disarm his lord. The operation was somewhat long, and, by the time it was accomplished, the trestles had been brought forth from their corner, the long wooden boards which, joined up the middle, served for a table, had been taken from the wall against which they stood and laid upon those trestles, and over all a fine white tablecloth had been spread, with the salt in the midst.

Plate after plate of well-cooked viands, emitting an odour most savoury to hungry men, was next placed on the board by the neat hostess, and the count, with Bernard de Rohan in the buff jerkin he had worn under his armour, moved to take their seats at the head of the table. The priest sat down beside his young travelling companion, while a sneering smile curled the lip of Meyrand, and he could not refrain from saying, in a low but not inaudible voice, "Why, baron, what a princely youth you have become, to travel with your fool, and in canonicals too."

Bernard did not reply; and the priest, though he heard every word, said nothing till, the attendants having all ranged themselves at the lower end of the table, together with the host and hostess, he proceeded to bless the meat. He had scarcely concluded, however, when the door of

the inn suddenly opened, and a person rushed in in the garb of a servant. He was without hat or cloak, and there was a cut, though but a slight one, upon his forehead. "Help! help!" he cried, gazing eagerly around the circle; "help! help! they are carrying away my Lord of Masseran and my young lady to murder them in the mountains."

These words produced a very different effect upon the persons who heard them. The Count of Meyrand sat perfectly still and indifferent, listening with his usual air of cool self-possession to all that the man said, and never ceasing to carve with his dagger the meat that was before him, on which he had just commenced when the interruption took place.

On the other hand, Bernard de Rohan and each of his servants, as if moved by the same impulse, started up at once. The young gentleman's left hand fell naturally to grasp the scabbard of his sword, and, before the man had done speaking, he had taken three steps towards the door of the inn.

Two or three circumstances, however, occurred to interrupt him for a moment. There were various confused movements on the part of many persons present, and a clamour of several tongues all speaking at once.

At the same time the count exclaimed, "Stay one moment, baron! Stay and drink one cup of wine with me before you go out in this sweet stormy night to help one of the greatest scoundrels that Savoy can produce, or France either. Stay, stay one moment! Well," he added, seeing Bernard de Rohan turn from him with a look of impatience, "well, go and help Masseran, if you will! Heaven send the rogues may have cut his throat before you reach them!"

"Your horse, my lord!" cried one of the attendants.

"Your armour, sir!" said another.

"No, no, on foot! on foot!" cried Bernard de Rohan; "on foot as we are! Time is everything. Lead on, fellow! lead on! Send us out torches, mine host!"

The jovial priest had started up almost at the same time as his travelling companion. "By our Lady, I will go with you!" he cried, "to shrive the dying. It is a part of a priest's trade; though, I confess, if I were knight, and noble and gallant cavalier, I would stay where I am, like this brave count, and exercise my chivalry upon venison and tankards of wine."

While he was speaking, there drew out from some dark corner of the inn-kitchen—where he had remained unnoticed by any one—a tall, thin, gaunt man, with a straw hat on his head, and a large, coarse brown cloak enveloping almost the whole of his figure. He took three steps forward into the full light, and certainly there had seldom been seen a more striking, if not a more handsome countenance, or a more remarkable and even graceful bearing, than that which the stranger presented. He was a man apparently about five-and-thirty years of age, with aquiline features, large, black, flashing eyes, the bronze of sun, and wind, and storm upon his face, and five or six deep scars upon his cheek and brow. He was remarkably erect in person, and, though certainly meager, was broad-shouldered and muscular, or rather, perhaps, I may say, sinewy; for the hand that grasped his cloak, and the part of the arm and wrist seen above it, displayed the strong markings of the muscles like cords under the skin.

He came directly in the way of Bernard de Rohan as the young cavalier advanced towards the door; and it must be confessed that there was something strange and startling in the sudden apparition of the stranger, which made the other pause, and, with an involuntary motion, advance his right hand towards the hilt of his sword.

He drew it back again instantly, however, somewhat ashamed of the movement, while the new personage thus brought upon the stage said, in a deep but melodious voice, "I will go with you too, young gentleman, and may do you better service than our good friend the priest here."

"But, Master Leon," exclaimed the landlord of the inn, advancing towards him with an entreating look.

"Hush!" cried the stranger, holding up his hand; and, at the same moment, the jovial priest turned also upon the host, exclaiming, "Fry your eggs, fry your eggs, Gandelot, and leave other people to fry theirs. Don't be afraid! we'll not toss the omelet into the fire, nor spill the grease, nor set the chimney in a blaze. You know me and I know him; and, though he is the last man that should say I can't do good service when I like it, yet I will go with him without a quarrel!"

When every one is speaking at once, a conversation which would be otherwise long is very rapidly brought to a conclusion; and though, as we have seen, there were here two or three interlocutors, all that we have described scarcely interrupted Bernard de Rohan half a minute. "Lead on, lead on, then!" he exclaimed impatiently, addressing the servant who had made the appeal for assistance, and to whom the Count de Meyrand had been addressing a few words in a low tone. "Lead on, I say, quick!" and in another moment they were all beyond the door of the inn, and standing upon the mountain-side in the cold air of night.

The count remained at the table; and, shaping their conduct upon that of their lord, not one of his servants attempted to move. Meyrand, however, did not, upon the whole, seem particularly well satisfied with what had taken place. Perhaps he might not be quite contented with the inactive part he was playing; and it is certain he asked himself whether Bernard de Rohan could attribute his conduct to want of courage. He recollected, however, that they had mounted to the assault of

many a well-defended breach together, and he felt sure that there could be no doubt of that kind on his companion's mind. He remained in thought, however, for a minute or two longer, forgetting even the supper that was before him, and the air of indifference which he usually bore; but at length he beckoned one of his men to his side, and spoke a few words to him in a very low tone, only suffering the last two to be heard: they were, "You understand!"

The man bowed his head in reply, called three of his companions away from the table, sought hastily in the different corners of the inn kitchen for various offensive weapons, and then left the place, as if to follow and assist Bernard de Rohan and his party.

CHAPTER III.

It had nearly ceased raining, but the night, as we have said, was cold and chilly, the sky was still covered with thick clouds, and the air was full of thick darkness; to use the expressive words of Scripture, a darkness that could be felt. Bernard de Rohan and his companions paused for a moment before the door of the little inn, listening to catch any sounds of the conflict from which the servant seemed so freshly to have come.

All was silent, however. The rushing sound of the mountain torrents, swelled by the late rains; the sighing of the night winds among the gorges of the mountains and through the deep pine forests; the distant cry of a wolf, and the whirring scream of the night-hawk, as it flitted by, were all heard distinctly; but no human voice mingled with the other sounds.

This silence, however, gave no assurance to the heart of Bernard de Rohan that the persons for whom the servant had appealed to his chivalry had escaped from their assailants. It was well known at that time that every part of Savoy was infested with bands of brigands, which had rather increased than diminished in number since France had taken possession of the country; so that, unable to put them down, the famous Maréchal de Brissac, in order to restrain their indiscriminate ravages in some degree, had been obliged to give them occasional employment with his own forces. When not thus employed, however, they were known to lay wait in all the principal passes, both of Piedmont and Savoy, and take toll of all travellers with a strong hand. Enormous barbarities were from time to time charged against them; and, if one might judge from general rumour, no scheme was too wild, no act too violent and desperate for them to devise and execute. The only conclusion, therefore, which Bernard de Rohan drew from the absence of all sounds of conflict was, that the banditti had prevailed, and either murdered their victims or carried them off.

"Quick! quick!" he cried, after that momentary pause. "Lead on, lead on, good fellow! Where are your lord and lady? Which is the way?"

"This way, noble sir, this way," cried the man, advancing at once along the road which led more immediately into the mountains. "They cannot have gone far: I could hear the voices of the brigands from the inn door."

Thus saying, he led the way onward with great speed; but, as Bernard de Rohan followed with the same quick pace, the clear, deep voice of the man whom the host had called Master Leon sounded in his ear, saying, "There is some mistake here, and I think some villany; but fear not."

"Fear!" replied Bernard de Rohan, turning his head towards him. "Do you suppose I fear?"

"No, I suppose not," replied the man; "but yet there was no common interest in your eye, good youth, when this knave talked of his young mistress, and one may fear for others, though not for themselves. But hark! I hear a noise on before. Voices speaking. Some one complaining, I think. Quick, quick! Run, Sir Varlet, run!"

At the rapid pace at which they now proceeded they soon heard the sounds more distinctly before them. There was a noise of horses, and a jingling as of the bells of mules. The murmuring of a number of voices, too, came borne upon the air down the pass, and some four or five hundred yards farther up the servant, who was now running on as fast as possible, stumbled over a wounded man, who uttered a cry of pain. But the young man and his companions slackened not their pace, for by this time they could plainly hear some sharp and angry voices pouring forth oaths and imprecations, and urging what seemed to be a band of prisoners to hurry forward more rapidly. At the same time the light of a torch, or more than one, was seen gleaming upon the gray rocks and green foliage, and on one occasion it threw upon the flat face of a crag on the other side of the ravine the shadow of a large body of men with horses and other beasts of burden.

"Now out with your swords," cried the personage named Leon, in a tone of authority, "for we are gaining on them quick, and I doubt not shall have stout resistance."

Bernard de Rohan's sword was already in his hand before the other spoke, and, hurrying on, the next moment he reached an angle of the rock, from which he could plainly discern the whole party that he was pursuing. He paused for an instant as he saw them, and well might that sight make him do so, for the torchlight displayed to his eyes a body of at least fifteen or sixteen armed men, some of them mounted, some of them on foot, driving on in the midst of them two or three loaded horses, and seven or eight men and women, several of them apparently having their hands tied. The party was about two hundred yards in advance; and, though the torchlight was

sufficient to show him the particulars which we have mentioned, yet it did no more than display the gleaming of the arms and the fluttering of the women's garments, without at all giving any indication of the rank or station to which the prisoners belonged.

The young cavalier, it must be remembered, was accompanied by only five persons, and the greater part of those five were, like himself, but lightly armed. His momentary pause, however, was only to reconnoitre the enemy, without the slightest hesitation as to what his own conduct was to be. He knew the effect of a sudden and unexpected attack, and calculated upon some assistance also from the prisoners themselves; but, had he had nothing but his own courage in his favour, his conduct would have been the same. He was again hurrying on, when the powerful grasp of the man named Leon was laid upon his arm, and stayed him.

"Hush!" he said: "do not be too quick! Do you not see that these men are no brigands, as you thought?"

"How should I see that?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, turning sharply upon him. "Who but brigands would commit an act like this?"

"Think you that brigands would have torches with them?" said his companion, calmly. "Pause a moment, pause a moment: let them get round yon point of the rock; for, if they hear us coming, and see how few we are, we shall be obliged to do things that we had better not. Beyond the rock they will be cooped up in a little basin of the hills, where they can be attacked with advantage."

"You seem to know the country well," said Bernard de Rohan, gazing upon him with some suspicion, as the light of the torches, faintly reflected from the other side of the valley, served partially to display his dark but fine countenance.

"Ay! I do know it well!" replied the other: "so well, that from the foot of that rock which they are now turning, I will guide you up by a path over the shoulder of the hill till we meet them in front, at the same time that some of your people attack them in the rear."

Bernard de Rohan did now hesitate, but it was only for a moment. His mind was not naturally a suspicious one; and, of course, had the proposal been made by any one whom he knew, the advantages of such a plan would have instantly struck him, and he would have followed it at once. But the man who suggested it was unknown to him: nay, more, there was something in his tone, his manner, in his whole appearance, which, to say the best, was strange and unusual. His garb, as far as it had been seen, was unlike that of the peasantry of Savoy; and, in short, there was that about him which naturally tended to create a doubt as to his ordinary pursuits and occupations.

Bernard de Rohan hesitated then, but it was with the hesitation of only one moment. He had been accustomed to deal with and to command fierce and reckless men; and, though his years were not sufficient to have given what may be called the *insight of experience*, he had by nature that clear discernment of the human character which is the meed of some few, and may be called the *insight of instinct*.

During his momentary pause, then, he saw that the dark eye of his companion was fixed upon him as if reading what was passing in his mind. The jovial priest also seemed to penetrate his thoughts, and said, in a low voice, "You may trust him! You may trust him! He never betrayed any one."

"I do trust him," cried Bernard de Rohan, turning round and grasping the stranger's hand; "I trust him entirely. You and I," he continued, "will go over the hill alone. If I judge right, we have both been in many a hot day's strife, and can keep that narrow road without much assistance. It is better that there should be a show of more people behind."

As he spoke, the faint flash of the receding torches showed him a smile upon his companion's countenance. "Come on slowly," said Corse de Leon, "and keep near the rock; we shall soon get up with them, for they are encumbered, and we are free."

Thus saying, he led the way, remaining, as far as possible, under the shadow of the crags till the last of the party before them had turned the angle beyond, and the whole valley was again in darkness. The cavalier and those who were with him then hurried their pace till they reached a spot where a point of rock jutted out into the valley. There the stranger paused, bidding the attendants of the young nobleman pursue their way along the road till they came up with the rear of the other party, and then attack them as suddenly and vehemently as possible. "Make all speed," he said, "for we shall be there before you, cutting off the corner of the hill. Here, priest!" he continued, "here's a pistol and a dagger for you. You'll need something to work with. Now quick on your way, for the moon will be out in a few minutes, if one may judge by the paleness of that cloud's edge, and her light would betray our scanty numbers. Follow me, baron! Here! Upon this rock! Catch by that bough! Another step, and you are in the path!"

As he spoke, he himself sprang up, seeming well acquainted with every stock and every stone in the way; Bernard de Rohan followed with less knowledge of the path, but all the agility of youth and strength, and they had soon nearly reached the brow of the hill.

"Out upon the pale moon!" cried Bernard de Rohan's companion, pausing and gazing up towards the sky. "She shines at the very moment she should not. See how she is casting away those clouds, as if she were opening the hangings of her tent! We may go slow, for we shall be far before them."

He now led the way onward with a slower pace; and, after ascending for somewhat more than a quarter of a mile, the path began to descend again as if to rejoin the road. Every step was now clear, for the moon was shining brightly; and though no one, probably, could see Bernard de Rohan and his companion as they took their way among the rhododendrons and junipers which were thickly mingled with the fragments of rock around, yet they themselves, from time to time, caught a distinct view of the valley. An occasional flash of light upon their left hand, too, but a good deal in the rear, soon showed Bernard de Rohan that his guide had told him the truth in regard to the shortness of the path he had taken, though he could not absolutely see the road, or those who were travelling along it. At length, however, they reached a spot where the path which they were following wound along within ten yards of the chief road itself, and, choosing a small break nearly surrounded with tall shrubs and broken masses of crag, Corse de Leon stopped, saying, "It will be well to stay for their coming here. They will take full ten minutes to reach this place. You wait for them here; I will climb a little farther up, to watch them as they come, and will be back again in time."

If Bernard de Rohan entertained any suspicion in regard to his guide's purposes, he knew that it would be vain to show it, and therefore he made no opposition to the plan that his companion proposed, but let him depart without a word; and then, choosing a spot among the trees where he could see without being seen, he gazed down into the little basin formed by the surrounding hills. The clear light of the moon was now streaming bright and full into the valley, only interrupted from time to time for a single moment by fragments of the clouds driven across by the wind; but at first Bernard de Rohan could see nothing of the party which he was pursuing; for the road, as usual, wound in and out along the irregular sides of the mountain, being raised upon a sort of terrace some two hundred feet above the bottom of the valley. In a moment or two, however, he caught sight of them again, coming slowly on, but with their torches now extinguished, and presenting nothing but a dark mass, brightened here and there by the reflection of the moon's light from some steel cap or breastplate.

The time seemed long, and their advance slow, to Bernard de Rohan; for, although he had lain in many an ambush against the foe, and had taken part in many an encounter where the odds against him were scarcely less than those which were now presented, yet, of course, he could not but feel some emotion in awaiting the result—that deep and thrilling interest, in fact, which has nothing to do with fear, and approaches perhaps even nearer to joy—the interest which can only be felt in the anticipation of a fierce but noble strife, where, knowing the amount of all we risk, we stake life and all life's blessings upon the success of some great and generous endeavour. He felt all this, and all the emotions which such a state must bring with it; and thus, longing to throw the die, he found the moments of expectation long.

Now seen and now lost to his sight, the party continued to advance, and yet his strange companion did not make his appearance. The young nobleman judged that he could not be far, indeed, for once or twice he heard the bushes above him rustle, while a stone or two rolled down into the bottom of the valley; and he thought he distinguished Leon's voice murmuring also, as if talking to himself. At length there was a clear footfall heard coming down the steepest part of the mountain, and in another moment the stranger stood once more by Bernard de Rohan's side. As he came near, he threw off the cloak which he had hitherto worn, and cast it into one of the bushes, saying to it as he did so, "I shall find you, if I want you, after this is over."

His appearance now, however, left Bernard de Rohan scarcely a doubt in regard to the nature of his usual occupation. When his cloak was thus thrown off, his chest and shoulders were seen covered with that peculiar sort of corslet or brigantine, which originally gave name to the bands called Brigands. His arms were free, and unencumbered with any defensive armour; and over his right shoulder hung a buff baldric, suspending his long, heavy sword. This was not all, however; another broad leather belt and buckle went round his waist, containing, in cases made on purpose for them, a store of other weapons if his sword blade should chance to fail; among which were those long and formidable knives which, in the wars of the day, were often employed by foot soldiers to kill the chargers of their mounted adversaries. Daggers of various lengths were there also, together with the petronel or large horse pistol, which was so placed, however, as to give free room for his hand to reach the hilt of his sword.

In this guise he approached Bernard de Rohan, saying, "You see, baron, I am better prepared for this encounter than you are. You have nothing but your sword: you had better take one of these," and he laid his finger upon the butt of a petronel.

"My sword will not fail me," replied Bernard de Rohan, with a smile. "I see, indeed, you were better qualified to judge whether these were brigands or not than I was."

"They are no brigands," replied the other; "brigands know better what they are about;" and, as he spoke, he threw away his hat, and tied up his long black hair, which fell over his ears and shoulders, with a piece of riband. "I cannot very well understand," he continued, in the same low tone, "what has become of your people and the priest: I could see nothing of them from the height, and I almost fear that these villains, fearing pursuit, have broken down the little wooden bridge behind them, at what we call the Pas de Suzzette, where the stream falls into the river."

"Hark!" said Bernard de Rohan. "They are coming up;" and, grasping his sword, he took a step forward.

"Wait," said the brigand, laying hold of his arm. "Give your people the last minute to attack them in the rear. By Heavens, they ought to have been here by this time."

The sound of horses' feet and human voices now became distinct from below, and oaths and imprecations were still heard loud and vehemently, as the captors hurried on their prisoners.

"Get you on, get you on!" exclaimed one voice: "don't you see how quietly your lord is going."

"He is not my lord," cried another, in a faint tone. "I am wounded and hurt, and cannot go faster."

"Get on, get on, villain!" reiterated the other voice. "You would fain keep us till the fools behind mend the bridge and come up with us. Get on, I say! If he do not walk faster, prick him with your dagger, Bouchart. We will skin him alive when we get to the end of the march! Drive it into him!"

A sharp cry succeeded: Bernard de Rohan could bear no more, but, bursting away from the hand of the brigand, he sprang into the road. Leon followed him at once; but, even before he was down, the young cavalier's sword had stretched one of the advancing party on the ground, and was crossed with that of another.

"Hold, hold!" shouted the loud voice of the brigand. "Hold, and throw down your arms! Villains, you are surrounded on all sides!"

For a moment their opponents had drawn back; but the scanty number of the assailants was seen before Corse de Leon uttered what seemed so empty a boast.

"Cut him down," cried a voice from behind, "cut him down!" and one of the horsemen spurred on towards him. Another, at the same moment, aimed a blow at the head of Bernard de Rohan from behind, which struck him on the shoulder and brought him on his knee, while a shot was fired at the brigand, which struck his cuirass, but glanced off harmless.

"It is time we should have help," said Corse de Leon, in a cool tone; and while, with his right hand, he drew a pistol from his girdle, levelled it at the head of one of those who were contending with Bernard de Rohan, fired, and saw the man fall over into the valley below, with the left he applied a small instrument to his lips, producing a loud, long, shrill whistle, which those who have heard it will never forget. It is like the scream of a bird of prey, but infinitely louder; and the moment it proceeded from the lips of the brigand, similar sounds echoed round and round from twenty different points above, below, and on the opposite side.

When Bernard de Rohan staggered up from his knee, the scene was completely changed. Corse de Leon stood no longer alone, but with three stout men by his side armed to the teeth. The fragments of rock and large stones that were rolling from above showed that rapid footsteps were coming down the side of the mountain. Up from the rocky bed of the stream five or six other men were seen climbing with the activity of the chamois or the izzard, and, to complete the whole, the whistle was still heard prolonged up the valley, while, from the same side, the ear could distinguish the galloping of horse coming down with furious speed.

The party of the adversary, however, was large. All were well armed; all evidently accustomed to strife and danger; and had all apparently made up their minds to struggle to the last. They accordingly made a fierce charge along the road, in order to force their way on; and the strife now became hand to hand, and man to man, while, above the contest, the loud voice of the brigand leader was heard shouting, "Tie them! Tie them! Do not kill them if you can help it!"

Nor was his assumption of certain success unjustified. Every moment fresh numbers were added to the party of Corse de Leon. The adversaries were driven back along the road, dragging the prisoners with them some way, but were stopped by fresh opponents, dropping, as it were, from the mountains, and cutting them off in their retreat. They were still struggling, however, when at length eight or nine horsemen, the sound of whose approach had been heard before, reached the scene of combat; and then, seeing that farther resistance was vain, several of them uttered a cry of "Quarter! quarter! We will throw down our arms."

"Here, take my sword, Doland," said the brigand leader to one of his men. "Wipe it well, and go back for my hat and cloak, which I left among the bushes by the cross of St. Maur. Well, baron," he continued, turning to Bernard de Rohan, "I am afraid you have to regret the want of your armour: that was a bad blow on your head."

"No, it struck my shoulder," replied Bernard de Rohan, "where my buff coat is doubled. There is no great harm done."

"You had better keep behind," continued Corse de Leon, in a low voice. "I wished not to have displayed my men at all had it been possible to avoid it, but it could not be helped. However, you had better not show yourself with us. It may make mischief."

"But the lady," said Bernard de Rohan, "the lady: let me go and speak to her and set her free: I have no fear of being seen."

"Leave it to me, leave it to me," said the brigand. "You shall have opportunity enough to speak with her, and she shall know who is her deliverer. Will you not trust me after all this night's work?"

"Entirely," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but it is natural, when one aids a lady in scenes like these, to wish to speak with her, to sooth and tranquillize her."

"Especially when one loves her," replied the brigand, laughing. "But you shall speak with her in a moment, only keep back for the present."

Bernard de Rohan had neither the will nor the power to resist. The brigand, indeed, might well assume the tone of command, for at that moment there could be no successful opposition to his will; but, besides this consideration, there were other feelings in the bosom of the young cavalier which inclined him to yield at once.

Everything that he had seen was calculated to surprise and perplex him. The knowledge which his strange companion seemed to have of his history and circumstances; the state of active preparation in which he had found him, as if he had been aware, long before, of all that was about to occur, and had taken measures to meet every contingency; the interest which he had shown in an enterprise that seemed not to concern him at all, and the active and vehement opposition he had evinced to persons apparently engaged in the same trade of violence with himself, were all unaccountable to Bernard de Rohan; and he paused with some anxiety to see what would be the next act in the strange drama in which he himself was bearing a part.

While the brief conversation which I have narrated took place between the brigand and the young cavalier, the successful party had drawn closer and closer round their adversaries, and were busily disarming and tying them. This operation, being carried on with great dexterity and rapidity, had advanced considerably, when Leon again strode forward into the midst of them to give farther directions.

"Not so tight! not so tight, Antoine!" he said: "you'll cut his wrists with those thongs. Take off his corslet, Pierre. You cannot get it off when his arms are tied. If he resists, pitch him over into the stream. That horse will break away and be lost. Some of you come and untie my Lord of Masseran and his people. Noble signior," he continued, and Bernard de Rohan thought that he heard a good deal of bitter mockery in his tone, "I pray you tell me what is to be done with these insolent villains, who have dared to lay violent hands upon you and your lady wife's fair daughter. Shall we either put them to death on the spot—which, perhaps, would be the wisest plan, as the dead are very silent—or shall we send them, bound hand and foot, to your chateau, that you may give them your own directions as to what they are to say and do?"

These words were addressed to a tall, graceful man, somewhere between forty and fifty years of age, who had appeared as one among the prisoners of the party just overthrown. He seemed not particularly well pleased with the brigand's speech, and replied in a tone somewhat sullen, "You must do with them as you please, sir, and with us also, though from your words I suppose that you mean us good and not evil."

"Oh, certainly, my good lord," replied the other; "I am here to free you, and you shall be safely conducted by my people to your own abode. Am I, by your authority, then, to treat these men as they deserve?"

The Lord of Masseran seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then replied sharply, "By all means! By all means! They well deserve punishment."

"Oh! spare them! spare them!" cried a lady's voice. "They have done evil, certainly; but they might have treated us worse. Do not hurt them, sir."

"Lady," replied the brigand, "I will only punish them as they deserve, and you yourself shall hear the sentence. Strip off every man's coat. Take off the bridles of their horses, and therewith flog them down the valley to Gandelot's inn. When they are there, they will know what to do with themselves. Now, lady, this is but small measure of retribution for bad acts. Quick, my men, quick. You must take them over the hill, for the bridge is broken."

He then spoke a few words to one of his companions in a low tone; after which he returned once more to Bernard de Rohan, who had remained behind, asked particularly after the wounds he had received, and inquired whether he were fit to escort a lady some two leagues that night. He spoke with a smile, and there was no hesitation in the young cavalier's reply. Before their short conversation was ended, the brigand's orders in regard to his prisoners were in the act of execution; and certain it is that the discipline to which they were subjected was sufficiently severe, if one might judge by many a piteous cry which echoed up the valley for some minutes after they were driven in a crowd down the road. The young lady covered her eyes with her hands and remained silent; but a grim smile came upon the countenance of the Lord of Masseran, as if there was something pleasant to him in the music of human suffering.

There were still some ten or twelve of Leon's band around, and their next task was to untie the hands of such of the Lord of Masseran's people as were still bound. "Now, sir," continued the brigand, as soon as this was accomplished, "you shall have good escort back to your chateau. But we must go in separate parties. You and your four servants under the careful protection of Elois here, by the mountain path you know of. The young lady I myself will escort by the longer, but the smoother road."

"Nay! nay!" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, quickly. "Why separate us? If you mean well by her, why not let—"

"Because it pleases me not," replied the brigand, in a stern tone. "Who is lord here upon the side of the mountain but I? You are lord in your chateau, and none dare answer you. But I am lord in the moonlight and on the hillside, and none shall answer me."

"Oh! in pity, in pity!" exclaimed the young lady, holding out her hands with a gesture of entreaty. But the brigand advanced to her horse's side, and spoke a word to her in a low tone. She let her

hands drop again without reply, and Bernard de Rohan, who had remained in the shade, while the moonlight fell full upon her, could see her eyes suddenly turn towards the spot where he stood.

"Lead on the Lord of Masseran, Elois," said the voice of Corse de Leon. "Leave that poor fellow who seems wounded with the lady, and take the rest with you."

There was no reply, and the Savoyard nobleman, with his companions, was led on by a strong party of the brigands up the valley, and then across the stream. As he passed Bernard de Rohan, he fixed his eyes upon him for a moment, but made no observation; and, at the same time, the brigand held up his finger to the young cavalier, as if directing him still to forbear for a time.

As soon as the hill hid the other party from their sight, Bernard de Rohan, unable to bear the restraint any longer, sprang forward to the lady's side, and threw his arms around her. His head was bare, and, as he looked up towards her, the moonlight fell full upon his face. As if still doubtful, however, she gazed wildly and eagerly upon him; parted the curls of his hair with her hands back from his forehead; then threw her arms round his neck, and, bending her head, wept upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER IV.

"At length! at length! Bernard," said the voice of the young lady; and the heart of Bernard de Rohan echoed the words "At length! at length!" as he pressed her hand in his.

"At length! at length! Bernard," she said, "you have come back to me."

"Did you not send me from you yourself, Isabel?" he said, thinking there was something almost reproachful in her tone. "And have I not returned the moment you told me I might; the moment you called me to aid, and, I trust, to deliver you? Would I ever have quitted you but at your own word?"

"It is true! it is all true!" she said, in a gentle tone: "but I knew not, dear Bernard, all that was to befall me; all the painful, the anxious circumstances in which I was to be placed. We were then too young, far too young, for me to press my father's promise. I had no right to rob you of so many years of glory. My brother, too, wanted protection and guidance in the field. At that time, everything looked bright, and I thought that you, Bernard, would lead him forth to honour and bring him back in safety. I knew you would, and you have done it. But in those days I little dreamed that my mother, in her widowhood, would willingly wed a stranger, and make her hand the hire of this Savoyard, to serve the cause of France against his native prince. But you have returned to me, Bernard," she continued, in a more joyful tone; "you have returned to me, and all will be well again."

So ever thinks the inexperienced heart of youth, when, even for a single moment, the dark clouds break away, and a ray of sunshine, however transient, brightens up a day of storms.

"Be not too sure of that, lady!" said the deep voice of the brigand; "be not too sure of that! There have been more dangers around you already than you know of. They have not yet passed away, and, perchance, may fall upon him as well as you."

"Heaven forbid!" she cried, turning her eyes first upon the countenance of the man who spoke, and then with a softer and a tenderer look upon her lover. "If it is to be so, I shall wish you back again, Bernard."

"Not so," said the brigand, "not so! We are fools to think that life is to be a bright day, uncheckered with storms or misfortunes. There is but one summer in the year, lady: the winter is as long; the autumn has its frosts and its sear leaves; and the spring its cold winds and its weeping skies. In the life of any one the bright portion is but small, and he must have his share of dangers and sorrows as well as the rest. They will be lighter if you share them, and if he shares yours. Let us go forward on our way, however. Will you mount one of these horses, baron, or walk by the lady's side? Oh, walk, will you? Then follow the onward path. We will come on some hundred yards behind, near enough to guard you, but not to interrupt."

Bernard de Rohan and the lady proceeded on their way. Nor did they fail to take advantage of the moments thus afforded for conversing alone, though no one in such circumstances does take sufficient advantage of the moments. Our minds are so full of thoughts, our hearts so full of feelings, that they crowd and confuse each other in seeking to make their way forth. But a small part is ever spoken of that which might be spoken; and, had the time of their journey been more than doubled, there would still have been questions to ask, and plans to arrange, and hopes, and wishes, and fears to express; and Love, too, would have had a world to tell and to hear; and many a caress would have remained to be given, and many a vow would yet have required to be renewed.

Thus, when at length, after advancing for nearly two hours, several distant lights were seen upon the side of a dark hill beyond, as if issuing from the windows of some building, they found that they had not said half that they might have said, and wished that the minutes could come over again. It is not, indeed, in such circumstances alone that man casts away opportunities. It is all

his life long, and every moment of his life. Those opportunities are like the beautiful wild flowers that blossom in every meadow and in every hedge, while, heedless or careless, unseeing or unknowing, man passes them by continually, or walks upon his way, and tramples them under his feet.

When they reached that spot, however, and the castle of Masseran was before their eyes, the brigand came up at a quick pace, saying, "Let us pause a moment, and see whether our companions have arrived before us. It might be dangerous for his deliverers to come too near the Lord of Masseran's gates without sufficient numbers."

As he thus spoke, he put the peculiar whistle which he carried to his lips, producing a lower sound than before, but sufficiently loud to be heard around, and call forth many an answer up to the very gates of the castle itself.

"They are here," continued the brigand, "and the good lord is in his hold. Now, lady, you have doubtless promised things which you may find it difficult to perform. You have promised to see this noble cavalier, and give him—if needs must be, by stealth—the happiness of your presence; but I know better than you do how things will befall you. You will be watched; you will never be suffered to leave that castle's gates without a train, which will cut you off from speaking with any one. The gardens of the castle, however, will doubtless be free, for the walls are high, the gates securely locked, and the way up to them watched. Nevertheless, there is the small postern in the corner of the lowest terrace, hid by a tall yew-tree: lay your hand upon the handle of the lock at any time of the day you please. If it open not at the first trial, wait a moment, and try it again. You shall never try it three times without finding that door give way to your hand."

"But he tells me," said the lady, speaking more directly to what was passing in the brigand's thoughts than to what he actually expressed, "but he tells me that he is actually on his way to visit my mother's husband, charged with messages of import to him from the noble Marquis of Brissac, and that to-morrow morning he will be there, openly demanding admittance."

"See him in the evening also, lady, whatever befall," replied the other. "There are more dangers round you than you wot of. But I will speak to him farther as we return. Now you had better go on."

A few minutes more brought them nearly to the gates of the castle. The brigand had remained behind to wait the coming up of his people. Bernard de Rohan turned to see if they were approaching; but he could now perceive no one upon the road but a single figure coming slowly on at some distance, and leading a horse by the bridle. It was a moment not to be lost. Once more he threw his arms round the lady beside him, and she bent her head till their lips met. There were no farther words between them but a few unconnected names of tenderness, and in a minute or two after they were joined by the wounded servant, who had remained behind with the lady and those who accompanied her when the Lord of Masseran and the rest were sent on.

"Ah! my lord," he said, looking wistfully in the face of the young cavalier, "you have forgotten me, but I have not forgotten you; and if it had not been for my love and duty to my young mistress, I would have been with you in Italy long ago, especially when the countess sold herself to her stranger husband."

"No, indeed, Henriot, I have not forgotten you," replied Bernard de Rohan; "and I beseech you, for love of me as well as your young mistress, stay with her still, and be ever near her. I much doubt this Lord of Masseran, and have heard no little evil of him. She may want help in moments of need, and none can give her better aid than yourself; but I fear you have been much hurt," he added, "for you walk feebly even now."

"It will soon pass, my lord," replied the man; "but I see a light at the gate: we had better go on quickly, if, as I judge, you would not be recognised."

Bernard de Rohan took one more embrace, and then parted with her he loved. He paused upon the road till, by the light which still shone from the gate of the castle, he saw her and her follower enter and disappear beneath the low-browed arch. He then turned away, and retraced his steps along the side of the hill. He was left to do so for some way in solitude, though he doubted not that the hillside and the valley below him were both much more replete with human life than they seemed to be. At the distance of little more than half a mile from the castle he was forced to pause, for the moon had now sunk behind the mountain, and there were two roads, one branching to either hand.

"Keep to the right," said a deep voice near him, as he stopped to choose his path; and the next moment the brigand, coming forth from the bushes among which he had been sitting, walked on upon his way beside him.

"Ours is a busy life, you see," he said; "but yet it is not every night that we have so much business to do as we have had lately."

"Nor, I should think," replied Bernard de Rohan, "is it every night that you have upon your hands business which can leave so much satisfaction behind."

"I know not," answered the brigand, "and yet, in some sort, what you say is true. For I have had pleasure in what I have done: I have had pleasure in serving that bright lady; why, it matters not: I have had pleasure in serving you; why, it matters not: I have had pleasure in frustrating a base and villanous scheme; why, it matters not. But you must not think, baron, that in the ordinary

business of my everyday life there are any of those weak thoughts about me which poison its enjoyments and make the memory of each day bitter. You and I are different beings, born for a different course."

"We are both men," said Bernard de Rohan.

"Ay!" answered the brigand; "and so are the dove and falcon both birds. As well might that dove think that the life of the falcon must be miserable because it is a bird of prey, as you judge of my feelings by your own. I am a bird of prey; I am the brother of the eagle on the rock. Our joys and our pursuits are the same; and they leave no more regret with me than they do with that eagle, when he folds his wings in his eyrie after the day's chase is done."

The comparison was one which, as Bernard de Rohan very well understood, was pleasant and satisfactory to his companion's feelings, but he could not admit its justice to any great extent. He cared not to point out, however, where it failed, and merely replied, "But there is a difference between men and brutes. Man has his reason to guide him, and must be governed by laws. The eagle has no law but the instinct which God has given him."

"Is not God's law the best?" exclaimed the brigand. "God gave the eagle his law, and therefore that law is right. It is because man's law is not God's law that I stand here upon the mountain. Were laws equal and just, there would be few found to resist them. While they are unequal and unjust, the poor-hearted may submit and tremble; the powerless may yield and suffer: the bold, the free, the strong, and the determined fall back upon the law of God, and wage war against the injustice of man. If you and I, baron," he continued, growing excited with the heat of his argument, "if you and I were to stand before a court of human justice, as it is called, pleading the same cause, accused of the same acts, would our trial be the same, our sentence, our punishment? No! all would be different; and why? Because you are Bernard de Rohan, a wealthy baron of the land, and I am none. A name would make the difference. A mere name would bring the sword on my head and leave yours unwounded. If so it be, I say—if such be the world's equity, I set up a retribution for myself. I raise a kingdom in the passes of these mountains: a kingdom where all the privileges of earth are reversed. Here, under my law, the noble, and the rich, and the proud are those that must bow down and suffer; the poor, and the humble, and the good those that have protection and immunity. Go ask in the peasant's cottage: visit the good pastor's fireside: inquire of the shepherd of the mountain, or the farmer on the plains. Go ask them, I say, if under the sword of Corse de Leon they lose a sheep from their flock or a sheaf from their field. Go ask them if, when the tyrant of the castle—the lawless tyrant; or the tyrant of the city—the lawful tyrant, plunders their property, insults their lowliness, grinds the face of the poor, or wrings the heart of the meek, ask them, I say, if there is not retribution to be found in the midnight court of Corse de Leon, if there is not punishment and justice poured forth even upon the privileged heads above."

Bernard de Rohan felt that it would be useless to argue with him; for it was evident that he was not one of those who are doubtful or wavering in the course they pursue. There was some truth, too, in what the man said: truth which Bernard de Rohan ventured to admit to his own heart, even in that age, when such sentiments could only be looked upon as treasonable. He was silent, then, considering how to reply, when the brigand himself went on.

"Think not," he continued, "that I have chosen my part without deep thought. There are some—and perhaps you think me one of them—who are driven by circumstances, led by their passions, or their follies, or their vices, to a state of opposition with the rest of mankind, and who then, when cast out from society, find a thousand specious reasons for warring against it. But such is not my case. Ever since my youth have such things been dwelling in my mind. I had pondered them long. I had fully made up my mind as to what was right and what was wrong, years before injustice and iniquity—years before the insolence of privileged tyranny drove me forth to practise what I had long proposed. Here I exercise the right that is in man. I take the brown game upon the mountain, which is mine as much as that of any noble in the land. I pay no tax to king or to collector. There is no duty on the wine I drink. There is no toll upon the roads I follow. You will say that I do more than this: that I take from others what is not mine and what is theirs; but I have told you why I do so. They have taken from me what was not theirs; and I wage war against a world which first waged war against me; in which, even among themselves, the hand of every one is against his brother; in which, whether it be in camp, or court, or city, or mart, or church, injustice and iniquity are striving to snatch from one another the rod of oppression, and keep the humble beneath their own yoke."

"I cannot think," replied Bernard de Rohan, willing to answer as generally as possible, "I cannot think that the state of society is so terrible as you represent it. There may be occasional instances of corruption and oppression, and doubtless there are. I have seen some myself, and endeavoured to prevent them; but still these things are by no means general."

"Not general!" exclaimed the brigand, turning upon him almost fiercely. "Sir Baron, I say they are universal. There are one or two exceptions, it is true. You are one of those exceptions yourself. You are one of those who deserve to be convinced; and I can convince you. I can show you men who pretend to be holy, and humble, and good, oppressing most basely those who are in their power. I can show you tyranny and injustice at every step and in every station throughout the earth, from the tradesman's shop to the monarch's throne. I can show it to you in every garb, and in every profession, and in every place. I can, ay, and will show it to you, within these twelve months, in such forms of cruelty and blood that you shall say the brigand on the hillside is mild compared with the man of courts or the man of refectories; that he may be an eagle, but that

these are vultures."

"I see not," replied Bernard de Rohan, with a smile, "I see not how you can show me all this. You forget that we shall most likely part here in Savoy. That, as soon as I can rescue Mademoiselle de Brienne from the situation in which she is placed, I shall hasten onward to my own country, and we shall most likely never meet again."

"Not so, not so," replied the brigand. "We shall meet again. Either with her or without her, you must, as you say, go thither soon. My steps are bound likewise towards France; for think not that I dwell always here, or appear always thus: were it so, my head would soon be over the gate of Chamberry. I will find means to show you a part of what I have said, perhaps to give you some assistance likewise, when you most need and least expect it. But remember," he added, "if misfortunes should befall me, or danger threaten me, it is a part of our compact that you do not strive to give me any aid; that you neither raise your voice nor your arm in my behalf."

"Nay, nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I cannot promise that. I must ever remember the generous assistance you have afforded me this night, and must do my best to prove that I am grateful for it."

"The best way of proving it," replied the brigand, "is by doing what I ask you. You are held wise for a young man: now ask yourself if you can judge so well of what is for my advantage as I can judge myself. I tell you that I have many means of deliverance which you know nothing of; and, therefore, any attempt to aid me, without my asking you, might ruin me and ruin yourself likewise."

"If you will ask me," replied Bernard de Rohan, "when aid can be serviceable to you, I shall be contented."

"I will, I will," answered the brigand; "and now tell me, What have you arranged with fair Isabel of Brienne? for I take an interest in your fate and hers."

"You seem indeed to do so," replied the young cavalier; "and yet I know not why it should be so, for I cannot remember that we ever met before."

"Once," replied the brigand, "only once. Several years ago we were side by side, but for a moment. You and I, and that fair girl, and her brother—her brother, the young Count Henry, who is now in Paris. It was but for a moment, but that moment was one by me never to be forgotten."

"I cannot recall it," replied Bernard de Rohan. "It is strange, too, if it was a moment of such importance. But you say that her brother is in Paris: I wrote to Henry to meet me in Grenoble, and I think he must be there by this time."

"Oh! he is in Paris still," replied the other. "He is a good youth; but he is weak and young—ay, younger than his years. He will be easily persuaded to stay in Paris, and flutter in bright silks, and flaunt at tournaments, run at the ring, or fence at Moors' heads upon a turning pole. He is at Paris still, depend upon it; and, if you count upon his coming ere you claim the lady's hand, you must seek him in the capital, and bring him with you."

"I shall demand her hand at once," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but we doubt that there will be opposition from one who has no right to make it; and, to bear down that opposition, Henry de Brienne must be with me. He is the guardian of his father's promise solemnly given to me before I first went to Italy. But I will write to him as soon as day breaks to-morrow. Hark! do you not hear voices coming up the pass?"

"Most likely your servants and the priest," replied the brigand.

"I wonder they have not joined us before," replied Bernard de Rohan. "We should have fared ill if their assistance had been all we had to trust to."

"They could not do better," replied the brigand. "The other party had caught a sight of us when you stood to argue with me at the corner of the rock, and they broke down the little wooden bridge behind them. Your servants know none of the paths; the priest knows not that which we took; so doubtless, by this time, they think that we are hewed into mincemeat. However, remember at that spot, by the broken bridge, a loud halloo, a blast of your horn, or a whistle thrice repeated, will at any time bring some one to you who can lead you to me should you want my assistance. Now, jolly priest, now," he added, raising his voice, "here we are safe, though no great thanks to you."

"If you are safe, and sound, and sober," said the priest, coming up with the attendants of Bernard de Rohan, "it is more than I expected; for we could not reach you for our lives; and as we were scrambling over the hills, and each losing his way according to his fancy, we heard as much noise as at a boor's wedding, though the concert was somewhat different. But now let us hasten back as fast as possible: why, we are a league and a half from the inn, and I shall be so hoarse with shouting and the night air that I shall not be able to sing matins."

CHAPTER V.

The Count de Meyrand was awake early, and dressed with the most scrupulous exactness of appearance, without a riband tumbled or a point out of place. He descended slowly about seven of the clock from the chamber in which he had passed the night, by the long black double-railed staircase, that led at once from the rooms above into the kitchen, which, as I have said before, served also as the saloon of the inn. His air and his countenance bore the same appearance of indifference which they usually displayed, and he made no inquiry whatsoever regarding the events of the preceding evening, although he had retired to rest more than an hour before Bernard de Rohan had returned to the inn. His servants came and went, seeking directions concerning this thing and that, and communicating with him, from time to time, in a low tone. The aubergiste, with many a lowly reverence, asked his distinguished guest manifold questions concerning his breakfast; but still the Count de Meyrand was not heard to ask any questions either regarding the fate of his friend, or the somewhat remarkable events which had lately taken place.

At length, however, the jovial priest made his appearance; and whether it was that the count was in a better humour for raillery than on the night before, or whether he remarked, by the keen twinkling of the other's eye, that he was about to commence an attack upon him, which would not easily cease, he chose to be the first to open the encounter, saying, "Well, good father, though I know it is not an easy thing to cool a priest's courage, yet I trust your last night's expedition has rather diminished your chivalrous ardour."

"Not a whit," replied the priest. "Everything depends upon how much a man's courage wants cooling. Yours, noble count, seems not of a quality very likely to boil over; and, doubtless, ten steps from the door of the inn would have sent you home shivering. Mine carried me, however, a little farther."

"Ay, doubtless," interrupted the count, "up to the point where you met with these rogues; and then you waited behind a great stone to see who had the best of the fray. Is it not so? I see you have brought home no desperate wounds with you."

"None," replied the priest, "that I cannot bear as tranquilly and well as you, my noble lord, could bear the sorrow of your best friend. My trade, however, is not bloodshed; I love not hard blows, and shall always keep out of their way as far as I can. So my confession is made; but here comes one who has a greater liking for wounds and bruises than I have; and now Heaven send us all as good food as I have a good stomach. Mine host! mine host! that omelet will be overdone, and the sin of burned eggs is one to which I refuse absolution. By Hercules! as the Romans used to say—Body of Bacchus! as the Italians say—Dame! as we say in France, did ever mortal man see such a basket of fine trouts? Why, it is a gift for an abbot! Look! my noble baron, look!" he continued, turning to Bernhard de Rohan, who now made his appearance; "did you ever see such fair river-gods in your life? Put them upon the ashes, host, put them upon the ashes!"

Bernard de Rohan did not pay so much attention to the fishes as the priest, by his commendation, seemed to think they deserved; but, turning to his friend, he shook him by the hand, saying, "Well, Meyrand, you certainly always were a very unaccountable sort of personage, or I should be inclined seriously to quarrel with you for suffering me to go last night without assistance, at the imminent risk of getting my throat cut for want of your help."

"If you risked getting your throat cut, De Rohan," replied his companion, "that was your fault; I had nothing to do with that; I even deviated so far from my usual habits as to ask you to stay, and not do it. I have always a reason for everything I do, good Sir Bernard, and I take it for granted that other people have a reason too. I supposed that you had some motive for going and getting your throat cut, and therefore did not in the least blame you for doing so, if you chose; but I had no reason for anything of the kind, and therefore I stayed where I was. Indeed, I had every reason in the world not to go: I was warm and comfortable, and had good wine and good viands before me; I was tired with a long day's hunting, and had got my boots off. Then what to me was the Lord of Masseran, that I should try to save his life or liberty? I had no motive for serving him: indeed, quite the contrary. Every one knows him to be an egregious scoundrel, and at this moment he owes me thirty thousand crowns, which he will never pay, and which I have no chance of getting, unless some honest brigand should cut his throat, when the King of France would doubtless take possession of his lands and pay his creditors."

"Good faith, you are better acquainted with him than I am," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Pray let me know something of his history; for I never heard anything of him till some six months ago, when letters from France informed me that the widowed Countess of Brienne, the mother of my friend and comrade, Henry of Brienne, was about to be married to a Marquis of Masseran."

"Oh! his history is told in a few words," replied the Count de Meyrand, laughing; "but serve the breakfast, my good host, and do not stand with your mouth open listening to the venerable character of your noble lord, for I take it we are here upon his domain."

"No, no!" replied the host, "he is no lord of mine, noble sir; this is ducal domain we stand upon."

"It matters not," answered the count; "this Lord of Masseran, then, Bernard, though his mother was a Frenchwoman, was born on the other side of those Alps, a Piedmontese vagabond; half Frenchman, half Italian; a sort of water-snake, neither adder nor eel; though a sort of third-size sovereign, an underling of the Duke of Savoy. He who would have been beggarly for a French gentleman, was ten times more beggarly for a prince; and thus, in all probability, he would have gone on living—filled with all the small Italian vices of our day; sharing, it is said, with the

brigands who take refuge on the territories of such small lords; and employing the stiletto or the drug when it suited his purpose to get rid of troublesome friends—thus, I say, he would have gone on living what is considered in Italy a very respectable, quiet, insignificant life, had a fancy not suddenly come into the head of our worthy king to take possession of the dominions of his friend and cousin, the Duke of Savoy, which fancy at once raises this Lord of Masseran into a person of importance. He has, it seems, upon his lands one or two small towns and one or two small castles; but these towns and these castles are so situated as to command several passes and defiles valuable to France. Now my Lord of Masseran is a conscientious man, and, of course, nothing would ever induce him to take part with any one who could not pay him for the same. From the poor Duke of Savoy not a livre tournois was to be expected. The King of France himself, though a perfect Cr[oe]sus in promises, was known to be somewhat threadbare in the treasury. He, however, was the more hopeful speculation of the two, for he had power if he had not money, and there was a probability of his paying one friend out of what he pillaged from another. With him, then, my Lord of Masseran chose to deal, and promised to give free passage to the troops of France upon certain conditions, which are, of course, a secret. One thing, however, is evident; my Lord of Masseran did with the king as some of our followers do when they take service of us. He asked, in short, for something in hand. Now the worthy monarch of France had nothing to give but the hand of a fair widow in her fortieth year. With that hand, however, went a dowry of some twenty thousand crowns a year, and the Lord of Masseran came to Paris and opened the campaign against the widow's heart. She has the repute, as you should know better than any one, of being somewhat hard and stern in her purpose, and cutting with her tongue. She was inconsolable, too, for the death of her noble husband; always wore black, like the mother of the late king, and looked the picture of widowhood. My Lord of Masseran, however, with his Piedmontese eloquence, found means to win the widow, with the support of the king. The lady thought, it would seem, to spend her days in Paris; but that city soon became a residence unsuited to the health of her new husband. There were strange stories current regarding him; but there was one thing certain, namely, that he was marvellously fond of those small, square, spotted pieces of mischief, which have the art of conveying so many fortunes from hand to hand. He played largely; he won generally; and his fortune seemed immense. One night, at the Louvre, he borrowed from me the large sum I have named, with a promise to repay it the next morning; but it would seem that, after I left the hall, either fortune went against him, or he took an irresistible longing for Savoy. His lady raved and raged, we are told: but she found that she had now to do with one, upon whose dull ear the sweet sounds of a woman's tongue, raised to ever so high a pitch, had no effect. The Lord of Masseran paid not the least attention to anything that she said; he did not seem to hear her; but, with the most kind courtesy and ceremonious respect, handed her to the carriage which was prepared to bear her away; and she found herself on the road to Savoy before she could arrange any scheme for resistance. This is his history; mine is soon told: I choose not so easily to abandon my hold of my Lord of Masseran; and I am here hunting his game, riding through his woods, and visiting his castle gate; for he seems to me to be as deaf to my sweet solicitations for repayment as he showed himself to the melodious intonations of his lady's voice. Now, priest, though your clerical appetite may be good, do not devour all the trout in the dish, for I am hungry as well as you, and have told a long story."

"And a good one too," replied the priest, laughing, and putting over the dish to the count; but he suddenly added, "Have you never got within the gates of his castle, then, my noble lord?" and he fixed his eyes full upon the face of the Count de Meyrand.

A very slight change of colour took place on the count's cheek; but he replied at once, "Oh yes, I have been within, but to no purpose."

"He must be an obdurate man indeed," said the priest, "if your persuasions, my noble lord, can have no effect upon him. I wonder what mine would have! Perhaps he might listen to the voice of the Church: I will go up and try."

"Why what hast thou to do with him?" demanded the count, suddenly turning his eyes sharply upon the priest. "On what pretext wilt thou go thither?"

"To exercise my calling," replied the priest, with a sly smile; "to exercise my calling in one of its various ways."

"I knew not that your calling had various ways," replied the count, his usual air of indifference verging into a look of supercilious contempt.

"Oh yes it has," replied the priest, well pleased, as it seemed to Bernard de Rohan, that he had piqued the count out of his apathy. "Our calling has various ways of exercising itself. We address ourselves to all grades and classes. If I convert not the Lord of Masseran, I may convert his cook, you know. My efforts for the good of his soul may prove for the benefit of my own body; and the discourse that is held over venison and capons comes with a fervour and an unction which is marvellously convincing."

There was a sly and jocular smile upon the priest's countenance, especially while addressing the Count de Meyrand, that somewhat puzzled Bernard de Rohan, and evidently annoyed the count himself. It was not difficult to see that, in the most serious things he said—though, indeed, there were few that he did say which were serious at all—there was a lurking jest, that seemed pointed at something which the hearer did not clearly see, but which might or might not be something in his own character, purposes, or pursuits.

The significance of his tone towards the Count de Meyrand, however, did not pass without that

gentleman's observation; and, after listening to him for several minutes more, while the party concluded their breakfast, he turned towards him as he rose, saying, "It seems to me, priest, that you would fain be insolent. Now let me tell you, that, though you are very reverend personages in Savoy, and men meddle with you warily, in France we have a way of curing clerical insolence, which is a good scourging with hunting-whips. Perhaps you do not know that this is the way French gentlemen treat those who are insolent."

"I know it well," replied the priest, turning upon him sharply, "I know it well, as I happen to be a French gentleman myself."

He instantly changed his tone, however, and added, with his wonted smile, "Nay, but now, Heaven forbid! that I should be insolent to the noble Count de Meyrand. He being a generous and well-bred gentleman, and, like every other gentleman, indifferent to all things upon earth, can never take offence where no offence is meant; but, as he looks furious, I will take myself out of harm's way. The blessing of a whole skin is great. Adieu, my son! adieu! We shall meet some time again, when I shall find you, I trust, restored to temper, and as lamb-like and meek as myself."

While he thus spoke, the priest gradually made his way to the door and issued forth; while the Count of Meyrand, calling one of his attendants to him, whispered something which Bernard de Rohan construed into an order unfavourable to the safety of the jovial priest's shoulders.

"Nay, nay, Meyrand," he said, "let him have his jest, for pity's sake. Recollect he is a priest."

"His gown sha'n't save him," replied the count. "Those priests have too much immunity already in all parts of the world. But what do you now, de Rohan? Will you hunt with me to-day, and we will drive this Lord of Masseran's deer from one end of Savoy to the other? or do you go on to Paris at once, and deny me your good company?"

"I write to Paris," replied the cavalier, "and send off a messenger immediately. But I myself go up to seek this Lord of Masseran. I have despatches for him from the Maréchal de Brissac, and also some orders to give by word of mouth."

"I hope they are not disagreeable orders," replied the count, turning towards the door of the inn; "for he is not one of those whom I should like to offend in his own castle."

"Oh no, I shall say nothing that should offend him," replied Bernard de Rohan. "But, besides that, I shall not go till after the arrival of the rest of my men, who come across the mountain this morning; and he might find it rather dangerous to do me harm."

"His ways of dealing with troublesome friends are various," replied the count. "I should love neither to dine nor to sleep in his dwelling. A word to the wise, good friend, a word to the wise! Now, my men, quick! quick! get ready the horses, bring out the dogs. You will not be tempted, De Rohan?"

"I cannot now," replied his friend. "Another day, if I stay so long. I wish you sport, I wish you good sport;" and, turning towards his chamber, he caused a table to be brought, and materials for writing to be placed before him. He there remained for nearly an hour and a half, busily tracing upon paper those small black characters which, since some man—whether Cadmus, who, if he did it, may well be said to have sown dragons' teeth and reaped a harvest of strife, or whoever else the learned world may have it—those black characters, I say, which, since some man, not contented with what mischief the tongue can do, invented writing for the propagation thereof, have worked more of wo and mischief, as well as of happiness and prosperity, than any other invention that the prolific mind of man ever brought forth. At length the sound of a trumpet coming down the hill saluted his ear, and in a few minutes after it was announced to him that the rest of his train had arrived.

CHAPTER VI.

We must now conduct the reader at once to the entrance of the castle of Masseran. The gate itself was shut, though the drawbridge was down and the portcullis was up. There was a little wicket, indeed, left ajar, showing the long, dark perspective of the heavy archway under the gate tower, gloomy and prison-like, and the large square court beyond, with its white stones glistening in the sun; while the gray walls of the castle and part of a window, as well as the door of the keep, appeared at the opposite side. On either side, under the archway, but scarcely to be seen in its gloomy shadow, was a long bench, and on the left hand a low door leading up to the apartments in the gate tower. The right-hand bench was occupied by one of the soldiers of the place, and at the door was the warder's wife talking to him, while our friend, the jovial priest, who had escaped without harm or hinderance, notwithstanding the threats of the Count de Meyrand, was waiting at the wicket, from time to time looking through into the court, and from time to time turning round and gazing upon the mountains, humming an air which was certainly not a canticle.

After a pause of some ten or fifteen minutes, the warder himself appeared, a heavy man, past the middle age, and dressed in rusty gray. "He won't see you, Father Willand," he said. "He's walking in the inner court, and in a dangerous sort of mood. I would rather not be the man to cross him now."

"Poh! nonsense," replied Father Willand, laughing. "Go in again to him, good warder: tell him I have business of importance with him, and I know that this refusal is only one of his sweet jokes. He will see me, soft-hearted gentleman! Go and tell him—go and tell him, warder!"

"Faith, not I," replied the warder. "That business of last night seems to have galled him sorely, and he is just in the humour to fire a man out of a culverin, as we know his father once did; but in these days it won't do: culverins make too loud a report, you know. I will not go near him again."

"Then I will go myself," replied the priest. "He won't hurt me. Nay, warder, you would not squeeze the Church in the wicket gateway! By Heaven—or, as I should say less profanely, by the blessed rood—if you pinch my stomach one moment more you will pinch forth an anathema, which will leave you but a poor creature all your life."

"Well, be it on your head," cried the warder, with a grim smile; "though a two-inch cudgel or a fall from the battlements is the best thing to be hoped for you."

The priest was not to be deterred, however; and, making his way onward, he crossed the outer court, turned to the right, and, passing through a long stone passage, feeling damp and chilly after the bright sunshine, he entered a colonnade or sort of cloister which surrounded the inner court. It was a large, open space of ground, with tall buildings overshadowing it on all sides. The sun seldom reached it; and there was a coldness and stillness about its aspect altogether—its gray stones, its small windows, its low-arched cloisters, its sunless air, and the want of even the keen activity of the mountain wind—which made most people shudder when they entered it.

But there was nothing the least chilly in the nature of Father Willand. His heart was not easily depressed, his spirits not easily damped; and when he entered the cloister, and saw the Lord of Masseran walking up and down in the court, an irresistible inclination to laugh seized him, notwithstanding all the warder had said of his lord's mood at that moment.

It is true—although, from the description of the worthy officer of bolts and bars, one would have expected to see the Lord of Masseran acting some wild scene of passion—he was, on the contrary, walking calmly and slowly backward and forward across the court, with his eyes bent on the ground, indeed, but with his countenance perfectly tranquil. It was nothing in his demeanour, however, that gave the priest a desire to laugh, for he was very well aware that the passions of the Lord of Masseran did not take the same appearances as those of other men, and he saw clearly that he was at that moment in a state of sullen fury, which might, very likely, have conducted any other man to some absurd excess. His personal appearance, also, had nothing in it to excite mirth in any degree. He was a tall, thin, graceful-looking man of the middle age, with a nose slightly aquiline, eyes calm and mild, lips somewhat thin and pale, and a complexion, very common in the northern part of Italy, of a sort of clear, pale olive. His dress was handsome, but not ostentatious; and, on the whole, he looked very much the nobleman and the man of the world of those times. The priest, however, laughed when he saw him; and, though he tried to smother it under the merry affectation of a cough, yet the effects were too evident upon his countenance to escape the eye of the Lord of Masseran as he approached.

"Ha! Father Willand," said the marquis, as their eyes met, "I told the warder to say that I did not wish to see you to-day."

"Ah, but, my excellent good lord," replied the priest, bowing his head low, with an air of mock humility and reverence, "it was I who wanted to see your lordship; so I e'en ventured to make my way in, though the warder—foul fall the villain—has so squeezed my stomach in the wicket, that, like a bruised tin pot, it will never again hold so much as it did before."

"You are somewhat of a bold man," said the marquis, with a cold, bitter, sidelong look at the priest; "you are somewhat of a bold man to make your way in here when I bid you stay out. You may come in once too often, Father Willand."

"Heaven forbid, my lord," replied the priest; "I shall never think it too often to serve your lordship, even though it should be at your funeral: a sad duty that, my lord, which we must perform very often for our best friends."

"I should imagine, priest," replied the marquis, somewhat sternly, "you would laugh at the funeral of your best friends."

"I will promise your lordship one thing," replied the priest, "to laugh at my own, if death will but let me. But surely, my lord, this is a time for merriment and gayety! Why, I came to congratulate your lordship upon your escape from those who attacked you last night—Ugh! ugh! ugh!"

While the priest, unable to restrain himself, thus laughed aloud, the marquis bit his lip, and eyed him askance, with a look which certainly boded no great good to the merry ecclesiastic. They were at that moment close to a spot where a door opened from one of the masses of building into the cloister, and the Lord of Masseran, raising his voice a little, exclaimed, in a sweet Italian tone, "Geronimo!"

For a moment the priest laughed more heartily than before; but, seeing the marquis about to repeat his call, he recovered himself, and, laying his finger on the nobleman's arm, said, "Stay a moment, my lord, stay a moment before you call him. First, because the sweet youth must not exercise his ministry upon me. It would make too much noise, you know, and every one in the valley is aware that I have come hither. Next, because there are certain friends of mine looking for me at the bottom of the slope, and expecting me within half an hour, so that I cannot enjoy

your Geronimo's conversation—"

"It is, in general, very short," said the marquis.

"And, thirdly," continued the priest, "because I have come up to tell you two or three things which require no witnesses. I am here upon a friendly errand, my good lord, and you are such a niggard that you refuse me my laugh. However, I must have it, be it at you, at myself, or at any one else; and now, if you behave well and civilly, I will tell you tidings that you may like well to hear. If you don't want to hear them, I will take myself away again, and then neither priest nor warder is much to blame. Shall I go?"

He spoke seriously now, and the Lord of Masseran replied, in a somewhat more placable tone, a moment's reflection showing him that the priest, in all probability, would not have come thither except upon some important errand: "No, do not go," he said, "but speak to me, at least, seriously." He looked down upon the ground for a moment, and then added, "You may well think that I am angry, after all that took place last night; for you, who hear everything, have doubtless heard of that also."

As he spoke, he suddenly raised his keen dark eyes to the countenance of the priest, as if inquiring how much he really did know of the matter in question.

"Oh yes," replied Father Willand, "I do hear everything, my good lord, and I knew all that had happened to you last night before I sat down to my breakfast this morning: I heard of your happy deliverance, too, from the hands of the daring villains who captured you, for which gracious interposition I trust that you will keep a candle burning perpetually before the shrine of Saint Maurice."

The priest spoke in a serious tone, but still there was an expressive grin upon his countenance; and, after pausing for a moment or two more, he added, as the marquis was about to reply, "You think I am jesting, or that I do not understand what I am talking about; but I know the whole business as well as you do yourself, and somewhat better. I tell you, therefore, that it is a great deliverance that you have met with, though perhaps you think it less a deliverance than an interruption."

The priest paused as if for the marquis to reply; but the Lord of Masseran was silent also, regarding his companion with a quiet, sly, inquiring air, which, perhaps, could be assumed by no other countenance upon earth than that of an Italian. It might be interpreted to say, "You are more in my secrets than I thought. A new bond of fellowship is established between us."

As he remained actually silent, however, the priest went on to say, "What I come to talk to you about is this very matter; for you may chance be outwitted, my good lord, even where you are putting some trust. But what I have to say," he continued, "had better not be said among so many windows and doors."

"Come with me! come with me!" said the Lord of Masseran; and leading the way through the cloisters, he thridded several long and intricate passages, none of them more than dimly lighted, and many of them profoundly dark. He was followed by the priest, who kept his hand in the bosom of his robe, and, if the truth must be said, grasped somewhat firmly the hilt of a dagger, never feeling perfectly sure what was to be the next of the Marquis of Masseran's sweet courtesies. Nothing occurred, however, to interrupt him in his course, and at length the lord of the castle stopped opposite to a doorway, over which a glimmering light found its way. As soon as it was opened, the bright beams of the day rushed in, and the marquis led the way into a wide garden, which sloped down the side of the hill, and lay between the walls of the castle itself and an outwork thrown forward to command one of the passes of the mountain. It was walled on all sides, and nothing could be seen beyond it; but in itself it offered a beautiful contrast to the wild scenery round, being cultivated with great care and neatness, and arranged in the Italian style of gardening, which was then very little known in France, where it had been first introduced some years before by Catharine de Medicis. Long and broad terraces, connected together by flights of steps, formed the part of the garden nearest to the chateau, while below appeared many a formal walk, sheltered, even in that mountain scene, by rows of tall cypresses and hedges of other evergreen plants.

"Here we can speak undisturbed," said the marquis, as soon as he had taken a few steps in advance. "Now what is it you have to tell me, priest?"

"Did you ever hear of such a person as Bernard de Rohan?" demanded the priest, fixing his eyes upon the countenance of the Lord of Masseran.

"I have—I have heard of him," replied the marquis, turning somewhat pale. "What of him? what of him? Is he not still beyond the Alps?"

"He is within a few leagues of your dwelling," answered the priest.

"I thought so, I thought so," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, striking his brow with his hand. "But he shall find he has come too soon."

"You must take heed what you do," replied the priest, grinning. "Did you ever hear how the fox vowed vengeance against the lion, and was wroth, and forgot his cunning, and flew at the lion's muzzle, and the lion put his paw upon him, and squeezed the breath out of the poor fox's body? My very good lord, you do not know that this Bernard de Rohan has men-at-arms at his back, and

despatches to you from the Maréchal de Brissac, which may not be pleasant for you to receive; and, moreover, he is a great friend of a certain Count de Meyrand, and they have been conferring earnestly together both last night and this morning, and the name of the Lord of Masseran was more than once mentioned. So now, my son, you see what is going forward, and must take your measures accordingly."

The wily Piedmontese sunk back into himself as he heard the unpalatable tidings communicated to him. From the few significant words which the priest had spoken, it was evident enough to the Lord of Masseran that, by some means or another, all the plans and purposes in which he was engaged in at the time were nearly as well known to the personage with whom he was then conversing as to himself, and yet he could not bring himself to speak with him freely thereupon. He wanted advice. He wanted assistance. The priest appeared to know more than he said; and, to arrive at certainty upon that point, the Marquis of Masseran now applied himself with all the skill and shrewdness of which he was master; but in good Father Willand he met with more than his match; for, with equal dexterity and shrewdness, the ecclesiastic had resources which the Lord of Masseran himself had not. He could evade a question by a laugh, or a jest, or a figure, or a pun, and never did diplomatist more skilfully turn and double in a conference than he did in his conversation with the Marquis of Masseran.

At length, driven to speak more clearly, the marquis paused suddenly on the terrace across which they were walking, and, fronting the priest, demanded abruptly and sternly, "Tell me, then—tell me what is this situation in which you say I am placed, which you always allude to and never explain. Tell me this, and tell me how I shall meet the danger, or, by the powers of Heaven and hell, you shall never quit this place alive."

"A pretty and a sweet persuasion," exclaimed the priest, laughing heartily; "but, my dear son, I am not so easily killed, even if such parricidal thoughts were anything more than a jest. You know not what a tough morsel an old priest is: hard of mastication for even stronger teeth than yours. Nay, nay, think of tenderer food! In other terms, ask me pleasantly and civilly, my good son, and you may then chance to receive an answer. If you were to kill me forty times over it would do you no good. My secrets are like the goose's golden eggs: not to be got at by slaughter."

"There is something that you want, priest," replied the marquis, in the same abrupt tone. "Quick! tell me what it is; if it be anything in reason, you shall have it."

The priest smiled with a meaning look, but thought for a moment or two before he replied; for, to say the truth, he had not, in his own mind, fixed upon that which he was to demand as his recompense. He had, it is true, an object in view, and the chief means of attaining that object was to persuade the Marquis of Masseran that he dealt with him truly and sincerely. Now he well knew that the mind of the worthy lord was so constituted that it could by no means be brought to conceive that any man dealt honestly with another, unless he had some personal object to gain by so doing, and, therefore, the priest determined to assign such an object, although he was, in reality, without one. "Well," he said, "well, you shall promise me, most solemnly, first, not to tell any one what I reveal to you; and also, if you find that what I tell you is true, and if the way that I point out to you prove successful, you shall give the priest of the church of Saint John of Bonvoison a fat buck in August every year when he chooses to send for it; you shall also give him a barrel of wine of your best vintage, and five silver pieces for alms to the poor, and this in perpetuity."

"Fy, now, fy!" replied the Lord of Masseran; "for your own life were quite enough; but in perpetuity, that is more than I can engage for: it is owning your vassalage, good father."

"It must be even so, though," replied the priest, "or you have not my secret. I care not for venison, sinner that I am, it is the good of the Church I think of."

"Well! well!" answered the Lord of Masseran, "most disinterested father, I give my promise; and now be quick, for I expect a visiter full soon, my dealings with whom may depend upon your words: what is it that I should fear?"

"That Adrian, count of Meyrand," said the priest, "and Bernard, baron de Rohan, laying their heads together for their own special purposes—"

"That can never be, that can never be," cried the marquis, with a scoff. "They both love the same woman. They both seek her. They can as soon unite as oil and water. No, no, that is all vain!" and he turned away with a sneer.

"Suppose," said the priest, smiling in a way that again shook the Marquis of Masseran's feelings of security, "suppose that the one should love her money and the other herself, and they should agree to settle it thus: We will prove to the King of France that the Lord of Masseran holds secret communication with the Duke of Savoy and the Emperor Ferdinand. Suppose this were the case, I say, do you think, my son, that there would be any chance of their really proving it? Could the noble Count of Meyrand say boldly that, to his knowledge, the Lord of Masseran conspired secretly with some troops of Savoy, to carry off, as if by force, himself, the Lord of Masseran, and Mademoiselle de Brienne, for special purposes of his own, somewhat treasonable towards France, only that the scheme was defeated by an accident? Could Bernard de Rohan say that he had seen the Lord of Masseran in the hands of his captors, going along with no great signs of unwillingness, and showing no great signs of gratitude to those who set him free."

"Was he there?" exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, eagerly. "What, a youth in a buff coat? By

Heaven, his eyes have been haunting me all night. He seemed to look through me."

"The same person," replied the priest, with a loud laugh; "and he did see through you, my son. You have been very transparent lately. I ask no questions, but put it to yourself whether these two gentlemen can say these things to the King of France. Then may not the one say, 'Sire, I love this girl, and have got her father's promise for her hand; here is her brother, too, consents to our marriage: I claim as my reward your good-will and approbation.' Then may not the other say, 'Sire, the Lord of Masseran, as I have showed you, betrays your trust. He has fair castles and fortresses, beautiful lands and lordships, vineyards, olive-grounds, cornfields: I pray you, in return for having discovered his dealings with the empire, put me in possession of his lands and his lordships till your majesty shall think fit to conclude a peace.'"

The Lord of Masseran looked moodily down upon the ground; and though, to say the truth, he did not yet put great faith in the priest's sincerity, he asked briefly, "Well, what remedy? How is this to be avoided?"

"That," replied the priest, "for certain I cannot tell you; but I can tell you what I would do were you Father Willand and I Marquis of Masseran. I would order horses to be saddled and grooms to be prepared, and by the most silent, secret, and sudden way, I would betake myself to Paris, cast myself at the king's feet, accuse this Count of Meyrand of seeking to corrupt me, tell him that Savoy had offered me bribes, and, failing there, had striven to carry me off. I would do all this, and then—"

"Hush!" said the Lord of Masseran, "hush! here is some one coming to seek me:" and, leaving the priest, he advanced a few steps towards a servant who now approached from the house. The marquis asked a question in a low tone, to which the other replied, loud enough for Father Willand to hear,

"He will not come within the gates, sir, but desires to speak with you for a moment without: he says he is but in his hunting-garb, and unfitted to enter your halls."

"How many men has he with him?" demanded the Lord of Masseran.

"No one but a page, my lord, near the gates," replied the man. "The rest I saw gathered together about a mile down the road, on the other side of the valley."

"I will come!" said the Lord of Masseran, "I will come!" and he added, in a lower tone, some words which the priest did not hear, but which he judged had reference to himself, from perceiving the eyes of the speakers turned more than once shrewdly towards him. "I will be back again in a few minutes, good father," the Lord of Masseran continued. "Wait for me, for we have yet much to speak of."

"I will wait, I will wait," replied the priest; "only be not long, my good son; for, though I have much to say to you, I have little time to spare."

The Lord of Masseran gave him every assurance that he would return speedily; and then left the garden, followed by the attendant who had summoned him. The priest looked after them and listened; and, being someway connected with the race of that gentleman called in history Fine-ear, he distinctly heard the door by which he and the marquis had entered the garden locked after the latter had quitted it. "There is another door," he muttered to himself, with a smile, looking towards one of the archways upon the terrace leading to the chateau.

The next instant, however, there was a sound from that quarter also, as if somebody turned the key there likewise; but the priest continued to smile notwithstanding, and, proceeding slowly along the terraces, as if merely to amuse himself by a walk, he approached the thick wall of the garden, and stopped at the entrance of one of those little guerites, or watch-towers, with which the whole enclosure was studded from place to place. Up the narrow staircase in the stone he made his way, and then looked carefully out through the loophole which was turned towards the chief entrance of the chateau. No living object, however, was to be seen in the immediate neighbourhood of the castle itself; though, as the attendant had said, about a mile down the road which passed through the valley was a group of men, and horses, and dogs gathered together in various listless attitudes, while two large eagles were seen whirling in immense circles high up above the tops of the mountains, upon the lower part of whose tall sides a flock of sheep appeared feeding in peaceful tranquillity.

"I may as well go," said the priest to himself, as he gazed out upon this quiet scene. "I have said all that it is necessary to say, and this sweet lord may not have done all that he may think it necessary to do. I like not his whisperings, so I may as well go."

But, as the priest thus murmured to himself, he looked out again in the same direction, when two persons came slowly forth from behind an angle of one of the towers, and, taking their way under the garden wall, approached the very spot where Father Willand stood. There was no difficulty in recognising the Lord of Masseran and the Count de Meyrand. "Now what would I give," murmured the priest to himself, "for one of those famous inventions—those ear-trumpets—those sound-catchers—which we read about in old histories."

The good priest, however, possessed none such; and though his ears, as we have said, were very sharp; though he thrust his head as far as he could into the loophole; though the count and his companion, thinking that no one observed them, spoke loudly and vehemently; and though they passed directly under the turret where the priest stood, nevertheless, the words that he could

catch were very few. "Well, my good lord, well," said the Lord of Masseran, "you blame me without cause. I have done my best, and am as disappointed as you are."

"I do not blame you," replied the other; "I only tell you what must be the result if the plans you have proposed cannot be carried through immediately."

"Not that I have proposed, not that I have proposed," replied the other; "the suggestion was your own."

"Indeed!" said the Count de Meyrand, "this is something new to me. All I know is, that I have got the whole of your scheme drawn out in your own hand; the names false, indeed, or written in cipher, but for that we will soon find a key. What I asked was this, either that you should pay me the large debt you owe, or that you should give me such assistance in my suit to Mademoiselle de Brienne as would enable me to call her my wife within two months. Those two months have now wellnigh expired, and I will be trifled with no more."

The latter part of this sentence was lost to the ear of the priest; but he guessed what it must be; and certainly the slight portion that he had heard gave him a very strong inclination to hear more. He paused, then, to consider whether this could be accomplished by any possible means, but it was evident that such could not be the case; for, even while he turned the matter in his mind, the little path along which the Marquis de Masseran and his companion walked led them farther and farther from the wall of the garden. We must now, however, follow the two noblemen, and leave the priest to his fate, which we shall very speedily see.

"Well, well, my good friend," replied the Marquis de Masseran, in answer to the last observation of the count, "the time has not yet fully expired, and it shall be your own fault if my promise is not completely fulfilled."

"How can it be my fault?" said the count. "I have nothing to do with the fulfilment of your promise."

"Yes, you have," answered the Marquis of Masseran: "I will give you the means; but if any pitiful scruple, any lady-like hesitation upon your part, prevents you from employing them, the fault is your own."

"Mark me now, my good lord," replied the count: "it was understood between us that I was to have no share in anything contrary to my allegiance to the crown of France. With your own plans I had nothing to do. If you chose to give the agents of the empire an opportunity of making you a prisoner, and taking possession of your fortresses for reasons and with purposes best known to yourself, I had nothing to do with that: that was your own affair; I would be in no degree implicated with it; I would receive no bribes from Savoy or Austria," he continued, with a sneer; "all I agreed to do was to rescue the lady, if, on any occasion, I were informed that she was travelling as a prisoner between Fort Covert and Brianzone. This I promised to do, and I should have had no scruple then to use my opportunities to the best advantage."

The Lord of Masseran smiled with a meaning look, which his companion easily interpreted. The count added with a frown, "You mistake me: I would have done her no wrong, sir! Though I would have taken care to keep her so long with me that she could give her hand to no one else, I would have treated her with all honour."

"Doubtless, doubtless," replied the Lord of Masseran; "but what I mean now, my lord count, is, that if I again, at a great risk to myself, give you good opportunity, you will have no hesitation in using a little gentle force to compel this lady's union with yourself. We have priests enough who will perform the ceremony with a deaf ear to the remonstrances that her reluctance and maiden modesty may suggest; but when we have carried the matter so far as that, remember that my safety, nay, my life itself, may be compromised if you yield to any weak supplications. Once commit ourselves, and our only safety is in her being your wife! Then she will be silent for her own sake."

"By Heavens," said the count, in a deep, low tone, "she shall be my wife if it be but in revenge for the scorn with which she treated me in Paris. If it costs the lives of her and me, and all our kin, she shall be mine, Lord of Masseran."

"So be it, then," replied the marquis; "but, to accomplish my new scheme, I must be absent some few days."

The count gazed upon him somewhat suspiciously. "Some few days?" he said. "What! long enough, marquis, to go to Paris or Vienna?"

"Neither," replied the Marquis of Masseran, coolly. "Three days will suffice, if well used. In three days I will be back again."

"And in those three days," replied the count, "this Bernard de Rohan, whom we were talking about just now, will have fair opportunity of visiting the bright lady, and even, perhaps, by the connivance of her fair mother, may carry her within the French frontier, and plead her father's promise at the court of the king."

"Not by her mother's connivance," replied the marquis. "Her mother loves him as little as you do; and, even were he at the court of France to-morrow, her protest against the marriage would be sufficient to stop it. But, to guard against all danger, and, if possible, to put the mind of a

suspicious man at ease, I will tell you that one great cause of my going hence is to prevent this Bernard de Rohan from setting foot within my walls. I know his coming: I know why he comes far better than you do. I have heard his motives and his views within this hour from one who is well acquainted with them, and, if he present himself at my gates, he will find a stern refusal till I return. Then I must see him, but I shall then be prepared. Will this satisfy you? If it do so, tell me at once; for it is high time that I should mount my horse, and quit this place without delay."

Though, in reality, anything but satisfied, the Count de Meyrand expressed his consent to the proposal, determined in his own mind to watch all the proceedings of a confederate whom he could so little trust, even in the dark and tortuous schemes in which their interests were combined. He tried, as he parted from the marquis, to conceal his doubts lest they should betray his purposes; but that worthy gentleman was far too practised a reader of the human heart and human countenance to be so deceived; and when they separated, it was with the full conviction that each would endeavour to deceive and circumvent the other, unless some strong necessity continued to bind them together.

"Now," thought the Marquis de Masseran, as he paused for a moment looking after the Count de Meyrand, "now for this priest. I must have more information from him: more full, more complete. Then what is to be done with him? It might be dangerous to confine him; and yet it were easy to say that he had held treasonable discourses. A fall from the walls might be as good as anything. I will speak with Geronimo about it."

He had been standing with his back towards the castle and his eyes fixed upon the ground while he thus held parley with himself. On the other side of the valley, which was there profound, rose up the mountain, with the road into Piedmont winding along it, at the distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile, to use the ordinary expression, as the crow flies, but fully a mile by the road; and, as he ended his murmuring soliloquy, the Marquis of Masseran looked up in that direction. To his utter surprise and consternation when he did so, he beheld the figure of the priest walking quietly along the highway towards the lower ground of Savoy.

He hastened back to the castle; but he was assured at the gates by all the several persons who were standing there that no one had passed. On examining the doors of the garden, every one of them was found to be closed; and the Marquis of Masseran came to a conclusion, which was not pleasant for a man engaged in his peculiar pursuits, namely, that he was deceived and betrayed by some one of his own household.

CHAPTER VII.

The observation may seem trite, that to every period of life is assigned by the Almighty and Munificent Being, who at our creation adapted to each part of our material form the functions that it was to execute and the labours it was to sustain, either peculiar powers of endurance or counterbalancing feelings, which render the inevitable cares and sorrows apportioned to every epoch of our being lighter and more easy to be borne. The woes of childhood are, in themselves, speedily forgotten. The pains are soon succeeded by pleasures, and care, gnawing care, the rack of after-life, is then unknown. Boyhood, eager, enthusiastic, hopeful boyhood, the age of acquisition and expectation, though it may know from time to time a bitter pang, scarcely less in its degree than those that afflict mature life, has so many compensating enjoyments, its own sunshine is so bright, the light that shines upon it from the future is so dazzling, that the griefs serve but as a preparation and a warning, too little remembered when once they are past. Old age, with its decay, with the extinction of earthly hopes, with the prospect of the tomb, has also dulled sensibilities that allow us not to feel many of the more painful things of early years. The blunted edge of appetite may not give so keen a zest to pleasure; but the apathy which accompanies it extends to griefs as well as joys, and, if wisely used, is one of the best preparations for a resignation of that state of being which we have tried in the balance of experience and have found wanting; wanting in all that can satisfy a high and ethereal spirit; wanting in all things but its grand purpose of trial for a life to come. But, besides all this, unto that period of old age, thus prepared and admonished for another state, God himself has also given comfort and consolation, a promise and a hope: a promise brighter than all the promises of youth, a hope brighter than all those that have withered away upon our path of life.

There is still another age, however; an age the most perilous, often the most full of pains; an age when the eager aspirations of youth reach out the hand towards fruition; when the great truths of disappointment break upon us; when we first learn the bitter lesson that hope has told us idle tales, that fortune is of fickle favour, that friendships are too often false, that our own hearts do ourselves wrong, that enjoyment itself is often a vanity and often a vision, that we must suffer, and grieve, and repent in the midst of a world which, shortly before, we fancied was composed of nothing but brightness, and beauty, and happiness. I speak of the time of life when we first put on manhood, and meet all its sorrows at the moment when we expect nothing but its joys. For that period, too, there is a bright compensation given, there is a sustaining principle implanted in our breast, common to the highest and the lowest, the savage and the civilized; a principle that furnishes a balm for many wounds, that surrounds us with an atmosphere of consolation, hope, and joy, and enables us to live on in one splendid dream, even in the midst of hard and dark realities.

That principle is love; and that principle was warm and strong in the bosom of Bernard de Rohan, as, on the day after that in which the conversations we have mentioned in our last chapter took place, he stood, a few minutes before the setting of the sun, under a group of tall fir-trees that had pitched themselves upon a pinnacle of the rock, about ten yards distant from the farther angle of the garden attached to the chateau of Masseran. The trees grew very close together; and, what between scanty soil and the mountain winds, their large trunks had contorted themselves into manifold strange shapes. From this group two or three rows of the same kind of firs ran down the side of the hill into the valley. One would have supposed that they were the remains of some old avenue had the lines been but a little more regular.

The shadow of those trees completely concealed any one who stood beneath them, and the eyes must have been very near that could have perceived Bernard de Rohan as he leaned against one of them, gazing upon a particular part of the garden wall immediately under one of the small watch-turrets. He thus waited some time, with an eagerness of expectation, it is true, which in no other situation or circumstance had he ever known before; but, at the same time, with sweet thoughts, and hopes, and happy memories, which cheered the moments, and made even the impatience that he felt appear like some of those drinks which man has invented to satisfy his thirst, and which are at once pungent and grateful to the taste. He had waited some time, we have said, when at length, as a distant snowy peak began to change its hue and turn rosy with the rays of the setting sun, the small postern door on which his eyes were fixed was seen to move upon its hinges, and then stood ajar. Bernard de Rohan sprang forward, passed the small open space in a moment, and, pushing back the door more fully, stood within the garden of the castle of Masseran.

Scarce a step from the gate, with her hand pressed upon her heart, as if to stop the palpitation of fear and agitation, stood a lady, perhaps of twenty years of age. She was certainly not more; and her beauty, like the morning sun, seemed to have the promise of a long, bright race before it. She was very graceful and very beautiful. The whole form seemed to breathe of a bright and high spirit; but even had it not been that her person so perfectly harmonized with her mind, and was, in fact—as nature probably intended should be the case—an earthly type of the soul within, yet Bernard de Rohan would still have loved her as deeply, as tenderly as he did, for he knew that spirit to be bright and beautiful; he knew the heart to be tender, and devoted, and affectionate; he knew the mind to be pure and high, and fixed in all its purposes of right.

He had been brought up with her from youth; her father had been his guardian, and a parent to him when his own parents were no more. She had fancied herself a sister to him till the hearts of both told them it was happy she was not so. No disappointments had ever befallen them in the course of their affection; no obstacles had been thrown in their way till that time; and yet, though neither opposed, nor troubled, nor disappointed, they loved each other with true and constant hearts, and feared not the result of any hour of trial.

She was very beautiful, certainly. It was not alone that all the features of her face were fine, but it was also that the form of the face itself was beautiful, and the way that the head was placed upon the neck, and the neck rose from the shoulders, all gave a peculiarity of expression, a grace, which is only to be compared to that of some ancient statue from a master's hand. The eyes, too, were very, very lovely, deep blue, and full of liquid light; with dark black eyelashes that curtained them like a dark cloud fringing the edge of the western sky, but leaving a space for the bright light of evening to gush through upon the world. Her complexion was a clear, warm brown; but now, as she stood, there was something, either in the agitation of the moment or in the cold light of the hour, which made her look as pale as marble.

She was pressing her hand upon her heart, and leaning slightly forward, with an eager look towards the door, as if prepared to fly should any one appear whom she did not expect. The instant she saw Bernard de Rohan, however, her whole face was lighted up with a glad smile, and she sprang forward to meet him with the unchecked joy of pure and high affection. They were in a moment in each other's arms.

"My Isabel! my beloved!" he said. "I thought that this man had determined to shut me out from beholding you again."

"And so he would," replied the lady. "So he would if he had the power. But oh! Bernard, I fear him—I fear him in every way: I fear him on my own account, I fear him on yours."

"Oh! fear not, fear not, Isabel," replied Bernard de Rohan. "He can but bring evil upon his own head if he attempts to wrong either you or me. Already has he placed himself in danger. But tell me, my beloved, tell me, is he really absent from the castle, or was it but a pretence to avoid seeing me when I came yesterday?"

"No, he is absent," replied Isabel de Brienne. "In that, at least, there is no deception, for I saw him ride out with but a few horses yesterday towards midday. He took the small covered way by the back of the castle and by the other side of the gardens. I saw him from the window of my chamber in the keep, and I do not believe that he has since returned."

"It must have been to avoid me," said Bernard de Rohan, thoughtfully; "and yet, how could he know that I was here? Did he ever hint at such knowledge, my Isabel?"

"Not to me," she answered; "but I have scarcely seen him since that terrible night. I have been in my mother's sick chamber, to which his cruelty and brutality have brought her. Nor would he ever, even if I had seen him, nor would he ever mention your name to me. He would fain have me

forget it, Bernard; but on that score I have much to tell you too."

"I know that I judge your heart right, dear Isabel," replied Bernard de Rohan, "when I say he would find it hard to make you forget that name; and yet I have had warnings within the last two days of many a dark and evil scheme, it would seem, against your peace and mine. A vague hint has been given me that one whom I know to be brave, and whom the world holds to be honest; one who was once my particular friend, and my comrade in many a day of difficulty, and strife, and peril; one who, I know, must be well aware, from many things that I have casually said in thoughtless freedom of heart, that you and I are linked together by promises that can never be broken, has been labouring hard to supplant me in your affection. Yet I will not believe them, Isabel; I will not believe, in the first place, that you would hear one word on such a score from any man. Neither will I believe—though he has certainly lingered strangely away from the army; though he has changed, I may say, marvellously, and from a gay, rash, thoughtless youth, become a cautious, calculating, somewhat impenetrable man—I will not believe that Adrian de Meyrand would do me wrong. No, no, I will trust him still."

"Trust him not, Bernard! trust him not!" replied Isabel. "Trust him not, Bernard! I, at least, know what he is. You say that your Isabel," she continued, gazing on him tenderly, "would not hear one word of love spoken by any other lips than your own. You do her right, dear Bernard. She would not, if she could help it; and even when against her will, against remonstrance and anger, she has been forced to hear such words, she has scarce forgiven herself for what she could not avoid, and has reproached herself for that which was forced upon her. Do you, too, reproach her, Bernard?"

"Oh no," he replied, holding her to his heart, and gazing into the pure bright eyes, which seemed, as they were, deep wells of innocence and truth. "Oh no, dear Isabel; what was done unwillingly needs no reproach: but how was this? Tell me all! De Meyrand, then, has wronged me?"

"If he knew of your love for me, he has," replied Isabel de Brienne; "but promise me, Bernard, that no rash or hasty act will make me regret having spoken to you openly, and I will tell you all."

"None shall, my Isabel," replied her lover. "It is only dangerous rivals, or insolent ones, that require the sword of a brave man. De Meyrand is not the one, and probably may never be the other. Speak, dear one! I must hear all."

"Well, then," she answered, "before we quitted the court, I remarked that this Count of Meyrand paid me assiduous court; and though certainly he was very attentive also to my mother and her new husband, still I avoided him, for there was something in his look and his manner that did not please me. I remarked, however, that many of the nobles of the court—nay, even the king himself—seemed so to smooth the way and remove all obstacles, that he was frequently near me. One day he followed me through the crowded halls of the Louvre by my mother's side, and, when I could not avoid him, poured into my ears a tale of love which I speedily cut short. I told him at once that my heart was given and my hand plighted to another; and I besought my mother to confirm what I said, and stop all farther importunity. He had fascinated her, Bernard; and though she did what I requested, it was but coldly. He left me for the time; but the very next day, while I was alone in my mother's chamber, he came in and pursued the same theme. Then, Bernard, I fear I acted ill. He aroused my anger. I was indignant that he should thus persecute me after what I had said. I treated him with some scorn. I told him cuttingly, in answer to a question which he should not have asked, that, even were I not plighted in faith and bound by affection to another, I should never have felt for him aught but cold indifference. He lost his temper at length, though it was long ere he would leave me; and as he did at length quit the room, I could hear something muttered between his teeth which sounded very much like a menace. Since then I have only seen him three times. Once more at the court; but by that time my brother had returned from Italy. He was with me, and the count did not come near. I have twice seen him here, when I have been forced out by the Lord of Masseran upon the pretence of a hunting-party. He comes not near the castle, however; and, when we did meet, he was distant and stately in his manner, but still there was something in his eyes that made me shudder."

"For the last two days he has been in the same small inn with myself," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I will speak to him to-night, my Isabel, calmly and gently, I promise you; but he must learn to yield this suit if he still entertains it. Nay, look not grieved, dear one. I will keep my promise faithfully, and forgive the past so he offend not in the future."

"I grieve and apprehend, dear Bernard," she replied, "but think not that I would strive to stay you from any course that you yourself judge right. I know you are moderate and just, and that you will not think, as some might do, that you prove your love for me by fiery haste to expose a life on which hangs all my hopes of happiness. Your honour is to me far more than life; but oh, Bernard, judge but the more calmly, I beseech you, of what that honour requires, by thinking that not your life and happiness alone are the stake, but mine also. Having told you all truly, as I ever will through life, I must scarce venture a word more to persuade or dissuade; and yet I cannot think honour can call upon you even to speak angry or reproachful words, when this man himself was not told, by me at least, that it was his friend he was trying to supplant."

Bernard de Rohan's brow was somewhat cloudy, though he smiled. "I fear, my Isabel," he said, "that he knew the fact too well. I can call many a time to my mind when I have dropped words concerning you which he could not mistake. However, I have said I will pass over all that is gone, and now let us think of other brighter things."

"I know not," she replied, "I know not why, Bernard, but a dark shadow seems to overhang me,

which prevents my thinking of brighter things. Within the last year, so much has happened to cause apprehension and anxiety, so much to give birth to pain and grief, that my spirit has sunk; and, whereas everything used to seem full of brightness and hope, all is now full of despondency."

"Cheer thee, cheer thee, Isabel," replied Bernard, adding those caresses that cheer far more than words; "I will take thee from the midst of the sad things that must surround thee here. I know, dear Isabel, that thy mother was often harsh and always cold, and, since I and your brother have left you, you have had no support or comfort under the pain which her behaviour must have given."

"Oh, it was not her harshness nor her coldness, Bernard," replied Isabel Brienne; "I could have borne that easily; but when I recollected my dear father—when I remembered all his high and noble qualities—his kindness, his tenderness to her, and saw her again stand at the altar to give her hand to another so unlike him in everything, dark, treacherous, avaricious, and deceitful, it was then I first felt that I really wanted aid and consolation. It was then that I wanted help, I wanted protection and support; and even at that time I would have written to you to come to me with all speed if it had not been for some foolish feelings of shame."

"They were indeed wrong, my Isabel," replied Bernard; "for surely, Isabel, with our faith plighted by your own father's will, with a long, dear intimacy from childhood until now, if you could not repose full, unhesitating trust and confidence in me, where, where could you place it, Isabel?"

"I know it was foolish," she replied, "I know it was very foolish, Bernard; but yet, even now," and she looked down blushing upon the ground, "but yet, even now, the same foolish hesitation makes me scruple to tell you what I firmly believe is the best, nay, is the only plan by which we could hope to avoid the dangers that surround us."

"Nay, Isabel, nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "after saying so much, you must say more. You must tell me all, freely, candidly. The brightest part of love is its confidence. It is that perfect, that unhesitating reliance, that interchange of every idea and every feeling, that perfect community of all the heart's secrets and the mind's thoughts, which binds two beings together more closely, more dearly than the dearest of human ties: more than the vow of passion or the oath of the altar. It is that confidence which, did we not deny its sway, would give to earthly love a permanence that we find but seldom in this world. Oh, Isabel, you must not, indeed you must not, have even a thought that is not mine."

"Nor will I, Bernard," she replied, "nor will I; though I may blush to say what I was going to say, I will not hesitate to say it. It is this, then, Bernard: You must take me hence without delay."

"Oh, how gladly," he cried, throwing his arms round her, and kissing the glowing cheek that rested on his shoulder; "oh, how gladly, Isabel! I waited but for the arrival of your brother to propose that step to you myself. If this Lord of Masseran chooses to refuse me admission, I cannot force my way in, and you may be subject to every kind of grief and pain before I receive such authority from the king or from Brissac as will force him to give you up."

"That is not all, Bernard, that is not all," replied the lady. "This man is deceitful to all. Suppose but for a moment that, finding the King of France obliged to withdraw his troops from Italy, as I hear has been the case, he resolves to betray the trust that has been reposed in him, to submit himself again to the Duke of Savoy, to receive the troops of the emperor. Suppose, Bernard, he removes me and my mother beyond the limits of Savoy, beyond the power of the king of our own country, beyond your reach, Bernard, what would be the consequences then? I should be but a mere slave in his hands. But listen to me still, dear Bernard; there is more, more to be said; I have good reason to believe and know that all these dangers are not merely imaginary, but that he is actually dealing with the empire. I have seen couriers come and go, and heard them converse long with him in the German tongue. I have seen officers who spoke neither French nor Italian surveying the castle, and consulting with him over plans of other fortresses. Twice, also, when I have hesitated to ride forth with him, fearing dangers—I did not well know what—my mother, who is already his complete slave, has held out vague threats to me of removing me to far-distant lands, where my obedience would be more prompt and unhesitating. Now, even now, Bernard," she continued, "I believe that he is gone on some errand of this kind, and it would in no degree surprise me, ere three days are over, to see this place filled with German soldiers."

"Then, dear Isabel," exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "we must lose no time. I wrote to your brother to meet me at Grenoble, and I have sent off messengers to him there and at Paris. But we must not wait for his coming. Your father's written consent will justify us, and the king is already aware that this man's faith and adherence to France is insecure. It would have been better, indeed, if your brother had been here, for then he might, in the first place, have openly demanded you at the hands of this man."

"Oh no, no, Bernard," she replied; "I rejoice greatly that Henry is not here. I feel a sort of terror at the idea of his falling into the hands of this Lord of Masseran. You know that Henry's death would place great wealth at the disposal of my mother; and, though it is dreadful to say, yet I do fear there is no act at which this Italian would hesitate to obtain wealth or power, or any of the objects for which men strive on earth. I would not for the world that Henry should put himself into the hands of one so treacherous. If Henry be at Grenoble, we can fly to him at once, and be united there."

"Better, far better, dear Isabel," replied her lover, "that we should be united before we go. There

is a priest here who seems to have some regard for me, and who lingers still at the inn, I know not why. He will be easily persuaded to unite our hands, as our hearts are already united, and then my right to protect and defend you will bear no denial. Let it be soon, too, my Isabel. Why not to-morrow night?"

She replied not for a moment or two. Not that she hesitated, not that there was a doubt in her own mind of what her answer must be; but yet she paused, with her hand clasped in that of Bernard de Rohan, and her eyes hid upon his shoulder, while he went on to persuade her, though there needed no persuasion.

"Consider, dear Isabel," he said, "the secret of this postern door is one that may be discovered at any time. He might return within a day. If we were to meet often, our meeting might be discovered. What it is necessary to do, it is necessary to do at once."

It need not be said that Bernard de Rohan's entreaties were successful. Isabel promised to be there at the same hour on the following night, prepared for flight; and Bernard de Rohan undertook to have the contract of their marriage drawn up by some neighbouring notary, and a priest ready and willing to unite them.

"In four or five hours," he said, "we shall be within the pale of France, and, as you saw the other night, we shall have plenty of willing guards thither, dear Isabel. Besides that wilder retinue, too, my own train is down at the hamlet; but, of course, I must bring few people with me, for fear of attracting attention. Have you anybody in the castle, dear Isabel, besides good Henriot, who can give you aid and assistance?"

"Oh yes," replied the lady; "there is the maid who conveyed to you the note to-day. I can trust her."

"She seemed sullen or stupid," replied Bernard de Rohan: "I could not induce her to utter more than one or two words, and those I did not distinctly hear."

"She is very silent," replied Isabel, "but is not so dull as she looks. Give her but one thing to think of, and one object to attend to, and she will execute what she is directed to do well enough; and perhaps it is all the better that she observes nothing which passes round her, and is so sparing of her words."

"Hush!" said Bernard de Rohan. "There is a light upon the terrace, near the castle, and some one seems coming hither. Adieu! dear Isabel, adieu! Though the evening is too dim for them to see us, it is better that I should leave you till to-morrow. But forget not, dear one; and oh! be rather before than after the hour."

Thus saying, he pressed her to his bosom for a moment, and then passed through the postern door. He closed it not entirely, however, for some vague apprehension concerning the sweet girl he had just left behind caused him to pause and listen, till he had assured himself that the person whom he had seen approaching was no unfriendly one. In a few minutes he heard another female voice saying distinctly to Isabel, "Your lady mother, mademoiselle, desires that you would come and play to her on the lute."

"I come, I come, good Maddelene," replied the voice of Isabel de Brienne; and in the clear evening air Bernard de Rohan could hear the sound of receding footsteps.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Has not the Count de Meyrand returned?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, as he re-entered the kitchen of the little inn, and saw it tenanted only by one or two of his own attendants, the host and hostess, and a waiting-boy.

"He has not only returned, my lord," replied the landlord, "but has gone away again, and, sorry I am to say, gone away altogether. He came back, and departed in great haste, paying for all that he had like a prince."

"This is strange!" replied Bernard de Rohan. "Did he leave no message for me?"

"No message, my lord," replied the host; "he gave your man, Master Martin, a note for you, however; but he has just gone up the hill, and taken the note with him."

"Do you know where the count has gone to?" demanded the young nobleman.

"Oh, to Pont Beauvoisin, on his way to Paris," the landlord answered; "he has been gone wellnigh two hours."

It is a very common piece of policy on the part of hosts, aubergistes, landlords, and others of the same class and character, by whatsoever denomination they may be known, to laud up to the skies the guest just departed, praising in him those especial virtues which they wish to inculcate upon the guest who happens to be their listener. Thus the landlord was proceeding to paint in high colours the generosity and careless liberality of the Count de Meyrand, when some persons speaking, and a loud, rich, buttery laugh, merry in every tone, announced that the good priest,

Father Willand, was approaching the auberge with some companion.

"We shall live like clerks now he is gone, we shall live like clerks," exclaimed the voice of the priest. "By the holy mass, he was not content with eating more than his own share of everything, but his very look changed everything that he did not eat, and turned it bad. His aspect was so cold that it chilled the pottage; his look so sharp that it turned the wine sour. I will make a new prayer night and morning: May I never again meet such a companion at an inn as this Count de Meyrand."

Bernard de Rohan found, on the entrance of the priest, that it was his own attendant, Martin, with whom Father Willand had been conversing. The attendant immediately produced the Count de Meyrand's note, which his master read attentively, and with an appearance of satisfaction. "So my friend De Meyrand has gone on business of importance to Paris," he said aloud.

"Ay, as the fox is said to go to his hole," replied the priest.

"I dare say, indeed," replied the young cavalier, "that there are many foxes in that hole, my good father; but still your comparison is not a very pleasant one for the good count."

"The comparison was more aimed at his way of going to Paris than at either Paris or himself," replied the priest. "I repeat, he is gone to Paris as a fox is said to go to his hole; that is, back foremost."

"Nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I never yet saw fox so stupid. Why should a fox go back foremost?"

"To hide the way he goes," answered the priest; "to make the footsteps point out of the hole instead of into it. So the good peasants tell one."

"But how can this apply to the Count de Meyrand?" asked Bernard de Rohan, with his curiosity now considerably excited.

"Because he tells you," replied the priest, "that he is going to Paris, and we watched him from the top of the hill, and saw him turn quite the other way before he got two leagues out into the plain."

"Strange enough!" replied Bernard de Rohan, not choosing to appear as much interested as he really was; "strange enough; but he may well have some friends to see—some town to visit in the way. Come, my good host! come, let us have supper speedily, and give us more light, for the night is growing dark and sombre. Good priest," he continued, turning to Father Willand, and speaking in a low voice, "I have a word for your private ear by-and-by; somewhat to consult upon, regarding which I need sound discretion and good counsel. I beseech you, therefore, pause at the end of the first stoup of wine."

"My son, my son," replied the priest, "men have always made a mistake with regard to the abode of truth. Truth and my brains lie together at the bottom of the second pottle pot, for most men are sure to tell the truth when they get to that pitch; and my brains are never clear, clean, and neat till they have been washed in that quantity at least. Fear not, fear not, I will be careful; though, if you are going to confess yourself, you ought to wish me as drunk as possible, for the penances I enjoin are always light when my knees feel like an unstarched ruff. Were it not better, however, to talk this matter over first, while my good host prepares the supper, and then we can consider it in our cups, you know?"

"It may indeed be as well," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Follow to my chamber, good priest, then. Go on, Martin, with a light;" and, taking his way up the dingy staircase, Bernard de Rohan led the priest to the large square, lofty bedroom which had been assigned him as his place of repose, and which no one would have imagined that lowly and humble-looking inn could boast of. The moment the door was closed and the attendant gone, the priest's eyes assumed a shrewder, but more serious expression, and he said, "Know you that I have been here twice yesterday, and three times to-day, seeking you?"

"In truth, I did not," replied the young cavalier. "On what account did you seek me?"

"To tell you to make good use of your time," answered the priest. "The Lord of Masseran is absent. He, I doubt not, is really gone to Paris; gone to justify himself to the king against accusations which he hears are to be made against him. You have, therefore, time to do all that you would, and nothing is required but to be diligent, quick, and secret."

"I have been all three," replied Bernard de Rohan. "And I just come from the postern by the fir-trees."

"Then you have seen Corse de Leon," said the priest, abruptly. "When and where? For I could not find him, neither yesterday nor to-day."

"I met him this morning," replied Bernard; "I met him this morning, and took him for an old drover, so completely had he disguised himself."

"Then have you seen the lady also?" asked the priest.

"I have, my good friend," answered the young cavalier, somewhat surprised to find how completely his proceedings were divined. "I have seen the lady; and it is in regard to that interview that I wished to speak with you. May I trust to you to do for me to-morrow night one of the offices of your holy function, and—"

"Marry you, in short," replied the priest, "marry you to this fair Isabel of Brienne. Well, my son, I see no impediment—no harm therein. If you have well considered the matter," he added with a laugh, "and have determined to take upon yourself the holy estate of matrimony, far be it from me to prevent you, although I must say, that it was in gracious consideration and providence for our temporal as well as spiritual happiness that our holy church exacted from us an oath not to enter into the condition you so much covet; however, I will put the couples round your necks, and then you must run along the road together as you can; but where shall it be?" he continued. "Tell me the whens and the hows, for that is very needful."

Bernard de Rohan explained to him as much as he judged needful. Indeed, what he was obliged to explain put his plans completely in the power of the priest. Nevertheless, he did not anticipate any evil on that account. All of us, wise and simple alike, are more or less guided in our dealings with our fellow-creatures by various other principles than the dictates of mere reason. The most suspicious man, the most cautious man, will, from time to time, place confidence where it is least deserved, from some motives to which his judgment would refuse its assent. The calm and deliberate politician, who has frustrated many of the cabinet knaves of Europe, and concealed his thoughts from the penetrating eye of diplomacy, has often betrayed his secret to a pretty face, and sometimes let it fall into possession of a roguish valet.

But Bernard de Rohan was neither a very cautious nor a very suspicious man. His nature was frank and confiding; and, wherever he showed himself reserved, he was rendered so by the effect of reason and deliberate consideration. In the present instance he was forced to trust the priest, and he trusted him without regret or hesitation; for there was something in good Father Willand's face and demeanour which was frank and kindly, and, to say sooth, Bernard de Rohan had conceived a prepossession in his favour, which might or might not be justified. He thought, too, that, although his own memory of the good priest's features might have faded in the lapse of many years, and though those features themselves must have been much changed by time since he had seen them—he thought, too, that they were not wholly without some corresponding traces on the tablets of remembrance. Memory has her instincts, too; and often, though we cannot recollect the why or the wherefore, the time or the circumstances regarding an object suddenly presented to us, we feel that it is connected with pleasant or unpleasant things in the past; that there have been causes to love, or hate, or fear a person whose very name and being we have forgotten. Thus was it with Bernard de Rohan and Father Willand; for, though he knew not where they had met before, though he was not sure that they ever had met, he was sure that if they had, there had existed good cause to hold the priest in some esteem.

When all the arrangements for the succeeding night had been made between the priest and the young cavalier, the latter turned to a point connected with the same subject which pressed somewhat heavily upon his mind.

"And now, my good Father Willand," he said, "you must tell me, sincerely and candidly, whether you have reason to be perfectly certain that this Lord of Masseran has betaken himself to the court of France."

"My dear son," replied the priest, "there is nothing upon the earth or under the earth that we have any reason to be perfectly certain of. And, now that you put it in my head," he added, pausing thoughtfully for a moment or two, "now that you put it into my head, there are several reasons for believing that this Savoyard devil has not gone to Paris. In the first place, I advised him to go, which is a strong reason for supposing he would not; he being one of those who think that no man can be sincere in anything. I was so far sincere, however, that I told him what is really the only way of saving his neck from the gripe of the King of France; but I had another object, too, which was to clear the place of his uncomfortable presence. At the same time, there is a second reason for believing that he is not gone to the court of France—"

"There are a thousand," interrupted Bernard de Rohan.

"Ay, but there is one," rejoined the priest, "which, though not one out of your thousand, is stronger than all the rest, namely, that the worthy and truth-loving Lord of Masseran told some of his servants, and those not the most confidential ones, that he had gone to Paris. Now, as he was never known to tell truth in his life when a lie would do as well, this is a second strong reason for believing that he has not gone to Paris. But then, again, on the other hand, we have to recollect that it is very possible he might for once tell the truth, in the hope and expectation that, from his known character, it might be mistaken for a lie, and deceive his dear friends that way. In short, the matter is doubtful; for every saying of the Lord of Masseran is, like one of the learned propositions of the schools on which we dispute so learnedly, compounded of so much lie, that if there be a grain of truth therein, the finest head in France will not separate it in a year. But let me hear, my son, let me hear, what reasons have you to bring forward on the one side or the other?"

"None of very great weight, indeed," replied Bernard de Rohan, unable to divulge the orders, written or verbal, that he bore from the Maréchal de Brissac. "A report, indeed, has reached us in Italy," he continued, "that this man is playing a double part between the courts of France and Austria; and, when I did hear of his departure, I certainly suspected that the end of his journey might be Milan rather than Paris."

"I will soon learn that," cried the priest, "I will soon learn that. What you suspect is anything but improbable. And although—knowing well the object of your journey—he might give out that he went to Paris to clear himself before he saw you, yet the whole may be false together, and he

himself be within ten miles of his castle at the present time. One thing, however, is clear, my son, no time is to be lost; and, in the mean time, I will ascertain beyond all doubt what road he took."

"But can you ascertain?" demanded Bernard de Rohan; "is it possible to learn exactly in such a labyrinth-like country as this?"

The priest laughed. "Beyond all doubt, my son, beyond all doubt," he said. "The past we can always ascertain. The future is God's," he added, more reverently; "the future is God's, and must rest in his dark council chamber. But do you not know, have you not yourself seen, that though the peasant and the traveller wander along the sides of these mountains without beholding anything but the gray stone, and the clear stream, and the green bush; though he might whistle all the lays of France and Italy together, and blow all the horns that ever were winded from Naples to the far North, without rousing anything but a roebuck or an eagle, there are particular sounds, to be uttered by particular voices, which would call every bush into life, and change every rock into an armed man? My good friend, my good friend, the mountain is full of eyes; and the Lord of Masseran himself, though he knows it is so, does not know to what extent. There is only one being under the blue eye of heaven that sees it all, and that is the man whom I met with you the other night."

"He is certainly a very extraordinary being," replied Bernard de Rohan, "and I would fain know more of him."

"In all probability you will know more," replied the priest. "But you may meet with thousands like him in various parts of the world. There are three places where you generally find the great rogues congregate—the court, the court of law, and the refectory. The honest man has only two places that I know of—the mountain-side and the highway. There are exceptions, you know; for instance, there is a very honest priest, who has the care of the poor souls in the parish of Saint John of Bonvoisin, just across the frontier line in France. Sinner that I am! what should he be doing here, using his time no better than his patron, Saint Anthony, used his head? Why should he be here, I say, preaching to the stones upon this mountain, when his reverend predecessor preached to fishes and petted a pig? However, the king, a blessing on his good-humoured head, sent the said priest to Bonvoisin to keep him out of harm's way; for that boisterous heretic, Clement Marot, threatened to drive his dagger into him for throwing back some of his ribald poetry on his own head. Then, again, the grave and serious admiral felt aggrieved at his preaching, one Saint Anthony's day, upon the subject of herrings, which he vowed was a satire upon the tax he had laid on the fishery. However, there the good priest is—or, rather, there he is not, but ought to be—one of the honestest men in all France, if you will take his own word for it; a great rogue according to some men, and a good soul according to others. There may be two or three like him in other parts of France; and depend upon it, wherever they are, you will find the poor speak well of them, the widows and the maidens over forty shake their heads and disparage them when they compare them with their reverend predecessor; while some very grave men in the parish look wise and suspect them to be heretics, without being able to prove it."

Bernard de Rohan smiled; but, wishing to hear somewhat more of Father Willand's acquaintance with his friend Corse de Leon, he replied, "I thought that this same good priest you mention, if not a Savoyard by birth, had a Savoyard cure, and that the first of his penitents was our good friend Corse de Leon."

"You are mistaken, my son," replied the ecclesiastic, "you are mistaken altogether. He has no cure in Savoy, though he may have business there; and as to Corse de Leon being a penitent, he is very impenitent indeed. I remember now," he continued, in a thoughtful way, "it is some five or six years since, when I was travelling through a little village called Pommieres, not far from the foot of Mount Rosa, that the people called me to confess a young man who had been crushed under an earth-slip of the mountain. It was difficult to get him to confess at all; and one priest from Saint Maurice had left him. But I set about the matter in a different way; told him I did not think he would die, and had great hopes of his not being damned if he did. He said he would rather die than not; but I argued him out of that, and in the end got him to make a full confession. What he did confess is no business of yours, my son; but I found him to be a man who had suffered many wrongs, and had endured bitter griefs; but one who was naturally as kind of heart as he was bold, fearless, and determined, and as noble and generous in his purposes as he was sometimes wild, fierce, and intemperate in their execution. I sat by his bedside for six weeks, for the three first of which he fluttered between life and death. At the end of that time he recovered, and his frame, like iron tempered in the fire, seemed to become but the stronger and more active for what it had undergone. Two or three years elapsed ere I met him again, and by that time he had become Corse de Leon. The cause of his quitting his native country, France, which was just before I first met with him, was that, on his return from the army, where he had served his king for years, he found his sister injured, insulted, and disgraced by the intendant of a high nobleman who was lately dead. He first sought for justice, but could not obtain it. He then visited the deathbed of the poor girl, and found her head supported by the daughter of that very high noble, and her lips moistened by the hand of—*Bernard de Rohan*. He turned away as soon as Death had done his work, and, mad for revenge, had sought the house of the intendant. But the generous spirit of two high youths, Bernard de Rohan and Henry de Brienne, had been beforehand with him, and had driven forth with ignominy the oppressor whom he sought. Still, however, the thing rankled on his mind, and the injustice which he had once suffered and but too often seen, turned a portion of his blood to bitterness. But hark! there is mine host knocking at the door to tell us that supper is ready; and what is all human nature compared with supper?"

CHAPTER IX.

The evening was dark and somewhat stormy; and, though the hour was the same as that in which Bernard de Rohan had met Isabel on the preceding day, so much less light was there now in the heavens that he could scarcely see the postern gate, while with a beating heart he watched it from the small clump of fir-trees of which we have already spoken. Although a hollow and whistling wind blew sharp and strong among the mountains, the heavy vapours hung unmoved around the peaks; and though there was a reddish glare upon the edges of some of the clouds in the western sky, no light was derived from any lingering rays of the sun. Everything was gloomy, and dark, and cheerless; and yet the heart of Bernard de Rohan beat high with love, with joy, with expectation.

She was to be his, the being whom he had so long, so deeply, so tenderly loved. Within one short hour she was to be his own, bound to him by that indissoluble bond, to which he looked forward all the more joyfully, because it was to be eternal. Whose heart would not beat high at the fulfilment of the dream of years?

At length he thought he saw the door move, and, darting forward, he opened it gently. Isabel was waiting within with the faithful Henriot and her silent maid; and though she trembled very much as Bernard threw his arms around her, it was agitation, not fear, which moved her. The Lord of Masseran was still absent: there was no one likely to interrupt them; and when her lover strove to sooth and to encourage her, telling her that his own men were within sound of his horn, and many more unseen, surrounding them on all sides, she replied by assuring him in a low voice that she had no apprehension, and was ready to follow him whithersoever he would. Still, however, he saw that she was agitated; and, as he led her forth, he poured many a soothing and a tender word into her ear, drawing her nearer to his heart, and seeming to assure her, by every action as well as by every word, that the love and the protection which he was about to vow was as tender, as unchangeable, as the brightest dream of hope and expectation could picture it.

"Do you know the chapel down in the valley, my Isabel?" he asked, as he led her onward down a narrow path that wound along the side of the hill, as close under the walls of the castle as might be. "We have obtained the keys, and the priest is waiting."

"But at this hour," demanded Isabel, eagerly; "can he perform the service at this hour?"

"He has procured full authority," replied Bernard, in the same low tone. "Nothing, dear girl, has been left undone."

"Hark!" said Isabel, stopping. "Did you not hear some voices above?"

He paused and listened, but no sound met his ear. "The echo of our own voices," he answered; "though we speak low, they catch the angles of the rock, and are given back again to our own ears. But let us hasten onward, dearest. Once thou art mine, such apprehensions will cease."

Nothing occurred to interrupt them. Step by step, over the rough and encumbered path, they pursued their way, till at length, in the lowest part of the valley, shut in between the small river and the rock on which the castle stood, appeared an old Gothic chapel. The pinnacles, the towers, the mouldings of the little building, in all their rich tracery, were fully visible; for, as the party descended, the chapel lay exactly between them and a clear part of the stream, so that the glistening surface of the water formed a background to the dark lines of the building, though none of the surrounding scenery, except the bold masses of some adjacent rocks, could be distinguished.

Thither, by another path, which, being cut through the rock, gave admission to the castle at once, had Isabel often come to attend the service on Sundays and on holydays; but all seemed changed as she now approached it; as much, indeed, in regard to the feelings with which she revisited it, as to the aspect of the place itself. Through the windows on the side which they approached, a small ray of light stole forth from the altar like a pure and holy religion in the midst of ages of darkness, and, guided onward by that, they were soon at the door of the chapel. It yielded easily to the hand, and Isabel, half led, half supported by Bernard de Rohan, found herself approaching that altar where the last vow of maiden love was to be spoken. On one side of that altar stood the good priest, Father Willand; but on the other, to the surprise both of Bernard de Rohan and of Isabel de Brienne, appeared the ordinary priest of the place, pale, somewhat agitated, and looking from time to time round the building with a wild and fearful glance.

"Quick!" cried Father Willand, as the party approached; "you have been very long, my children. Let us despatch this business speedily, and put out the lights."

"I am forced," said the other priest, "by commands that I dare not disobey, to be here this night; but I call you all to witness that it is against my will that I am here; and, in case the Lord of Masseran—"

"Pooh, pooh!" exclaimed Father Willand, "we don't want you to be here at all, my good friend. All we want is the chapel. I will read the service, brother. Approach, my children, approach;" and, taking up the book, he commenced at once, and in the most abridged form that the Church allowed, the marriage service between Bernard de Rohan and Isabel de Brienne.

The latter needed support not a little; but the quiet maid, who was the only woman that accompanied her, was far too inanimate and statue-like to afford her any. It was in no ordinary circumstances that poor Isabel was placed. True, indeed, she was not called upon to give her hand to one who was nearly a stranger to her, as is but too often the case; true, that with her all the sweet and delicate feelings which surround the heart of woman from her youth were not to be rudely plucked away without preparation, like flowers torn by a harsh and reckless hand, which, while it takes, injures the plant which bore them; true, that she was giving herself to one whom she had long known and deeply loved, and towards whom she had ever looked as to her promised husband; but still she was becoming his bride suddenly, secretly; she was flying with him in darkness and in concealment, with the presence of none of those bound to her by the ties of blood to sanction the new bonds that she was taking upon her.

The fear, too, of discovery and pursuit was superadded to all the other feelings which such circumstances might well produce. She knew that it might not, and probably would not, be long before her mother—who had been left evidently as a sort of spy upon her actions and a jailer of her person, rather than a friend, a protector, and an adviser—might send to make sure that the harsh commands of the Lord of Masseran were strictly observed, and that she did not quit the walls of the castle for a moment during his absence; and she was well aware that the discovery of her flight would produce instant pursuit. Thus, though generally she kept her eyes either bent down upon the ground, or raised with a look of confidence and affection towards Bernard de Rohan, yet from time to time she cast a hasty glance over her shoulder towards the door of the chapel; and, as she did so, she remarked that the same fears seemed also to possess the waiting woman, whose eyes were generally turned in the same direction.

No interruption took place, however. The words, the irrevocable words that bound her and Bernard de Rohan together, were spoken in a low but a firm voice. The ring was upon her finger. The benediction was pronounced, and for a moment, for one short moment, she was clasped as a bride in the arms of him she loved, when there came suddenly a noise as of something thrown down in the small vestry on the right-hand side of the altar.

The priest instantly put out the lights. Bernard de Rohan still held her close to his heart with his left arm, but, at the same time, laid his right hand upon his sword. Before he could draw it, however, three men sprang upon him, two from the vestry itself, and one from a window behind him, through which several had forced a way.

All was now darkness and confusion in the chapel; but it was evident that the number of persons it contained increased every moment. The young cavalier strove violently to free himself, and, by an exertion of his great strength, dragged his assailants hither and thither; but still they clung to him; still, twining round his arms, they prevented him from grasping either sword or dagger, and from reaching the small hunting-horn which he carried at his side, and which he knew, could he but blow it, would bring assistance speedily. Frustrated in his attempt to lift it to his lips, he raised his voice and shouted loudly; but fresh assailants poured upon him; a scarf was tied over his mouth; his hands were pinioned behind, and he found himself irretrievably a prisoner.

All was darkness, as I have said; not the least light appeared in the chapel, and no words were spoken aloud by any one; so that all Bernard de Rohan could hear was the moving of many feet; a low, murmuring whisper, as if of consultation or direction; and the sobbing of a bosom which he knew too well to be that of her he loved best on earth. At one time a voice was raised somewhat louder than the rest, and he thought he distinguished the tones of Adrian de Meyrand. The next moment another voice that he did not know replied, "No, not that way. Keep that door shut. There is another here which leads us thither more quickly."

Now completely overpowered—although his heart burned within him, and he longed for the strength of him who cast down the temple of Gaza to burst the bonds upon his hands—Bernard de Rohan strove no longer with those who held him, for he felt that to struggle was utterly vain. Nevertheless, it was not without rude violence that they dragged him along through the vestry, and from thence by a small door into the open air. The scarf was still over his mouth, so that he could not speak, and could scarcely breathe; but, as there was some slight increase of light, he looked eagerly around him. Isabel, however, was not to be seen. There were some dark, scattered groups here and there, but he could distinguish no one clearly, and was dragged on towards the rock on which the castle of Masseran stood.

Into whose power he had now fallen there was no doubt. The character of the man was well known; and, had Bernard de Rohan thought at that moment of his own probable fate, he could have anticipated nothing but the darkest and most atrocious termination of the act which had been just committed. At that moment, however, he thought alone of Isabel de Brienne; and he remembered, with grief and agony that will not bear description, what might be the consequences to her of falling into the hands of the Lord of Masseran under such circumstances, and beyond the pale of her native country.

They dragged him on, however, across the short space which lay between the rock on which the castle stood and the chapel, to a spot where a doorway presented itself, hewn in the solid stone, under the arch of which appeared a soldier with a light. Into his hands those who brought him thither consigned the young French gentleman, pushing him forward, and saying, "There, take him, and put him where my lord told you."

The man with the light replied nothing, but with another, who had been standing behind him, received the prisoner from the hands of his comrades, and, with somewhat more gentleness than

they had shown, led him onward. The moment he had taken a step or two forward, a large, oblong mass of solid rock, which, turning upon a pivot, served the purpose of a door, and, when shut, blocked up the whole passage that led under ground to the castle, rolled slowly to behind him. He went on patiently, for it was clear that no effort of his own could effect anything towards his deliverance; and when he had gone on some way and ascended a small flight of steps, he found another armed man standing with a light at a door plated with iron. Those who followed told him to go in, and he found himself in a dungeon, of which he was evidently not the first tenant, for there was a crust of bread covered with long green mould upon the table, and a broken water-pitcher in one corner of the room. There was a bed, too, with some straw, at one side of the door, and a single chair; but besides these necessaries there appeared hanging from the wall, to which they were attached by a stanchion imbedded in the solid masonry, a large, heavy ring, and some strong linked fetters. At these Bernard de Rohan gazed for a moment fiercely, and then turned his eyes to one of his jailers, who had been removing the mouldy crust from the table and the broken water-cruise from the corner of the dungeon.

The man seemed to understand the look at once. "No!" he said, "no! They are not for you unless you are violent. But we may let you speak now as much as you like;" and he untied the scarf from Bernard de Rohan's lips. The young cavalier drew a deep breath, and then demanded, "What is this? Why am I here? Take notice, and remember that I am an officer of Henry the Second, king of France, now actually on his service; that I came hither from the Maréchal de Brissac, with despatches and messages to the Lord of Masseran; and that bitter will be the punishment of all those who injure or detain me."

The man heard him to the end with the most perfect composure, and then replied, "We neither know nor care, young gentleman, who or what you are, or in whose service you are. We obey the commands of our own lord; and, if you are inclined to give up all resistance and be quiet, we will untie your arms, and let you have the free use of your limbs and tongue. There is only one thing necessary for you to tell us. Will you be quiet and peaceable, or will you not?"

"I have no choice," replied Bernard de Rohan, in a bitter tone. "As you have wrongfully and unjustly made me a prisoner, I have no power of resisting whatsoever you choose to do with me."

"That is talking sensibly," replied the man; "but, in the first place, if you please, we will take away all these pleasant little things from you, as I would rather have them in my hand than my throat." And he deliberately stripped the prisoner of all his weapons, to keep them, as he said, with a laugh, for his use at a future time. He then untied his arms, which were benumbed with the tight straining of the cords with which they had bound him, and saying, "I will bring you some food," he moved towards the door where his companions stood.

"I want no food," replied Bernard de Rohan, gloomily; and in his heart he asked himself if any human being could find appetite to eat in such an abode as that.

"You will come to it, young gentleman, you will come to it," replied the man; "before you get out, you will come to it well enough. I have seen many a one who thought of nothing else all the day long but the time for eating and drinking. Why, it was the only thing they had to do with life. They might as well have been a stone in the wall if it had not been for that."

With this awful sermon upon the imprisonment that awaited him, the jailer set down the lamp he held in his hand and went away. He returned in a minute or two, however, with some food, which he placed upon the table before which the young cavalier was still standing, exactly as the other had left him. The man gave him a cold look, as if merely to see how he bore it, and then once more quitted the dungeon, turning the key in the heavy lock.

Bernard de Rohan remained long in that same attitude, and filled with the same dark and melancholy thoughts. Still, still they pressed upon his brain, although he sought to banish them and to bear his condition with his usual equanimity and fortitude. He was not one ever to give way to despair where any opportunity existed for active exertion; but here he could do nothing. With his own hand he could not right himself. With his own voice he could not plead his cause. Talent or genius he might possess, but all in vain. Vigour and courage were useless. There was but one thing left—endurance; a species of courage which the very bravest do not always possess. Bernard de Rohan strove to summon it to his aid. It came but slowly, however; and, when he thought of Isabel of Brienne, his own sweet, beautiful bride, snatched from him in the very first moment that he could call her so, resolution forsook him, and in agony of heart he cast himself down upon the straw in his dungeon. Was that his bridal bed?

CHAPTER X.

"Now, then, have I not kept faith with you?" said a voice in the chapel.

"Yes, in truth you have," replied a second voice; "but I fear we have been too late. The falling of that accursed horse has lost us the five minutes—the important five minutes on which all success in life so often depends."

"You should not bring fine-pampered Barbary steeds into these wild mountains, count," replied the other voice; "but a bold man is never too late. The lover is safe enough for a long time to

come, and you can—"

"Hush! hush!" said the other, as if fearful that their conversation, though the tone in which they spoke was little louder than a whisper, should reach the ears of some one near.

"Oh! she has fainted," said the other. "She sank back upon my arm a minute or two ago. Here! Forli, bring me a lantern!"

A lantern was soon brought, and, one side being opened, the light was suffered to stream full upon the face of Isabel de Brienne. The beautiful eyes were closed; the long, dark lashes rested on the fair cheek; the lips themselves were pale; and there was no indication that the heavy, senseless sleep in which she lay was not the slumber of death itself, except a slight movement of the fingers, as if the cord that tied her wrists caused some corporeal pain, which was felt even through the swoon in which she lay. It was upon her face and form alone that the full light shone, but the feeble rays which found their way around dispelled in some degree, though but slightly, the profound darkness that before had filled the whole building. No one could be seen so as to be recognised; but in various parts of the chapel appeared groups of dark figures, all holding aloof from the spot where the unhappy girl lay, with her head resting upon the upper step of the altar, except two tall and powerful men, who stood close to her, and another, who knelt down, holding the lantern to her face.

"Were it not better to take her away at once?" said one of the voices.

"There is the ring upon her finger!" said the other, without answering the question. "Accursed be that brute for thus delaying us! I will shoot him with my own hand when I get back." He paused a moment, and then continued: "So, he thinks that there is no charm which can ever get that ring off again. But I will find one; and, if I mistake not, there is even now a mighty magician in the Louvre preparing the counterspell. No, no, my good lord, we will not change our plan. I must appear as the deliverer, not as the offender. The time is gone by when ladies fell in love with their ravishers; but where shall it be? Up towards La Chapelle?"

"No, no!" replied the other, "that will not do. You might say I was going to join the emperor. No, better in the valley just above Les Echelles. There, too, my good friend, we shall be free from those who stopped us in our last attempt. It will take us till daylight to get there, and that will be just the time."

"Hush! she is waking!" said the other. "Quick, close the lantern!" and, after a few words more, spoken in a still lower tone, there was a considerable movement in the chapel. Several persons came and went; and Isabel de Brienne, gradually waking again to a consciousness of her unhappy situation, heard the stern tones of the Marquis of Masseran, now speaking in a loud voice, and giving various orders to the people that surrounded him.

"Is the litter not come yet?" he said. "Go, some one, and hasten it: I will take care that no such plots as these are carried on again. Have you got the priest? I trust you have not let him escape."

"He is safe enough," replied one of the others; "he is safe enough, and up at the castle by this time. Here is the litter, my lord."

"Come, fair madam," said the Lord of Masseran, "if you cannot walk, we must have you borne forth. But surely a lady sufficiently active to deceive her own mother, and to find her way hither on such a night as this, may very well walk to the chapel door."

"My lord," said Isabel, faintly, "I did not deceive my mother. It was only one prisoner who concealed her plan of escape from another, compelled—I trust and believe unwillingly—to act the part of a spy and a jailer. I call every one to witness," she added, speaking as loud as her feeble state would permit, "that I protest against your removing me anywhere but to the court of the King of France, my native sovereign."

"Who said we were going to take you anywhere but to his court?" rejoined the Lord of Masseran. "Come, madam, come! Cease arguments and protests; I am your mother's husband, your guardian for the time, and that guardianship you shall not break through very easily." Thus saying, he raised her rudely by the arm, and, half leading, half dragging her, conveyed her to the door of the chapel, and placed her in a horse-litter which stood near. Some farther delay took place while the men around were mounting their horses and arranging the order of their march. When this was completed, however, the Lord of Masseran put himself at the head of his troop, and proceeded at a slow pace, taking a road that led away from the castle.

Isabel, unable to move, lay in the litter and wept; but she remarked that, from time to time, single horsemen passed from the rear to the front, and from the front to the rear, and that manifold were the orders and directions given to the different persons of whom the party was composed. No one, however, spoke a word to her; but it was some consolation to see, as day began to break upon their weary journey onward, that there was the form of another woman among the troopers on before. Isabel thought, too, that she had once heard, during the night, the voice of her maid speaking in a somewhat complaining tone; and the idea of having her society in the state of captivity she was doomed to suffer was no slight alleviation.

It was just at that moment, while the sky was still gray with night, but the rocks, and trees, and mountains round about growing every instant more clear and defined, that a good deal of bustle and agitation became evident in the party of the Marquis of Masseran. A minute or two afterward he halted on the edge of the hill, and was seen speaking eagerly with some of his followers. At

the same time the sound of a trumpet was heard, and Isabel thought she could distinguish the galloping of horse. She then saw a number of the Lord of Masseran's followers, who were on before her, dismount, and, unslinging their firearms, fire a shot or two into the valley. A loud volley of musketry from some distant spot was heard immediately afterward, and the marquis, apparently in great haste and agitation, ordered the litter to be brought on with all speed, and driven forward in advance of the party. The discharges of musketry, however, both from his own attendants and from those who seemed to be pursuing him, grew more and more frequent every moment; the smoke drifted down the valley in long white wreaths, enveloping the litter, and making all the objects more indistinct than before; while the galloping of horse was now clearly heard, together with loud voices giving orders. Then came the clashing of swords, and two or three men on horseback were driven fiercely past the litter, contending with others hand to hand. After a short scene of tumult and confusion, the sound of the firing appeared to come from a greater distance. The two men on horseback who were guarding the litter suddenly stopped, gazed around them, and galloped away at full speed. The actual driver slipped down the rocks into the valley below, and seemed to hide himself among the bushes; while Isabel remained alone, with her hands tied, and unable to quit the vehicle in which she had been placed.

A number of voices talking aloud, however, soon met her ear, and a gay and gallant party, somewhat soiled with dust and smoke, rode up to the spot where she lay. The leader of the victorious body sprang from his horse at once; and, while one of his followers caught the reins of the horses in the litter, the Count de Meyrand approached Isabel's side, exclaiming, in a tone of much pity and commiseration, "I fear, indeed, Mademoiselle de Brienne, that you must have suffered terribly. Good God!" he continued, "the villain has actually tied her hands;" and on the spot, with his own dagger, he cut the cords, which had left a deep print on the small, delicate wrists that they had bound. At the same time, he added many a soothing word, but still with a tone of deference and respect, which made Isabel feel that deliverance by his hand was not, as she had at first been inclined to think, more painful than her former captivity. She spoke a few words of thanks for his assistance and attention; and, with an eagerness that waited not to be questioned, Adrian of Meyrand went on to tell her "that he had heard, late on the preceding night, that some violence had been shown to her, in consequence of an attempt she had made to escape from the castle of Masseran, and that her mother's husband was carrying her away far into Savoy.

"I have good reason to know," continued the count, "that this man has secret communications with the enemies of France, and I doubt not that his purpose was to remove you for ever from the neighbourhood of your friends and connexions, from your native country, and from the protection of the king. Although," he added, with a sigh, "I was not sure that my assistance would be acceptable, yet I could not resist my inclination to follow and offer you deliverance. I was afraid of offending you; but these bonds upon your hands, sweet lady, evidently show that you were carried away against your will, and, therefore, what I have done has not been in vain."

His words agreed so well with the suspicions which Isabel de Brienne had before entertained regarding the views and purposes of the Lord of Masseran, that they taught her to put more faith in the count than she might otherwise have been inclined to do. The respectful tone which he assumed, too, removed, as we have said, many anxieties from her mind, and she again expressed her thanks for the service he had rendered her, but still looked bewildered in his face, as if inquiring what was to be done next.

The Count de Meyrand skilfully read that look, and, knowing that her situation placed her entirely in his power for the time, he determined to leave her the utmost appearance of unrestrained liberty so long as she could use it to no effect. He said not a word then in regard to where her steps should be turned, but stood beside the litter with his cap in his hand, and the feather trailing on the ground, as if waiting for her commands.

Isabel was embarrassed: she could have wished to tell him all that had occurred; she could have wished to say, "I am Bernard de Rohan's wife. Protect me for the sake of your friend and companion." But there was a hesitation, a doubt, an apprehension: she had known and she had seen, with a woman's clear insight into all those things that appertain to love, how strong and dangerous was the passion which the Count de Meyrand had conceived for her; and, though timidity had certainly some share in making her hesitate to acknowledge at once her union with Bernard de Rohan, yet an apprehension of endangering him, of making his imprisonment more severe, of putting his very life in peril if she acknowledged her union with him to his rival, confirmed her resolution of taking time to think ere she so acted. What she was next to do, however, was the immediate question; and, after a long and embarrassing pause, she said, half as a question to herself and half to the count, "Where can I go to, and what can I do?"

That question was what Meyrand expected and what he desired. "If I might advise," he said, in an humble tone, "Mademoiselle de Brienne would at once proceed to the court of the King of France, and put herself under the protection of her own sovereign, who is the person best qualified to guide and guard her. She will there also have the counsel and assistance of her brother, and will consequently be restored to that situation of freedom, comfort, and, I trust, peace, of which I must think she was deprived by her mother's marriage with this unprincipled Savoyard."

"But there are many things," said Isabel, in a low tone, "but there are many things, Monsieur de Meyrand—" and, as she spoke, the thought came across her of leaving the man to whom she had so lately given her hand in danger, in grief, perhaps in misery, and of putting many hundreds of

miles between them within a few hours after they had pledged themselves to each other to remain together for life.

The Count de Meyrand, however, cut her short. "At all events, dear lady," he said, "it is necessary, very necessary, for us to pass the French frontier immediately. It is at no great distance; and a few hours will place us in our native land. Depend upon it, this good Lord of Masseran will not lose his prize so easily. Every man I have in Savoy is with me here. He can call hundreds to his aid, and, I fear, might overwhelm me in spite of all resistance. If, indeed, you wish to remain in Savoy, I will do my best to protect you; but I fear much the consequences, and I would advise, nay, persuade you, to take the road to France at once. You can determine upon your future conduct afterward, when we are once across the frontier; for, though France holds this country by armed force, still it is not our own; and, while we keep the fortresses, we are obliged to leave the open country to its fate. Ha!" he continued, gazing along the road, down which a party of his attendants were now leading a horse, bearing the poor, quiet *soubrette*, who had followed her mistress through that eventful night. "Ha! here come some of my people, seemingly with a woman servant. If she be any one you can depend upon, it may be a great comfort for you to have her with you."

"She is my own maid," replied the lady, "and I think, my lord, as you do, that we had better, in the first instance, make our way into France direct, if the distance be not great to the frontier."

"It is but a few hours' ride," replied the count. "But we must lose no time lest the enemy be upon us."

Though Isabel was fatigued and exhausted with sorrow, agitation, and want of rest, she signified her readiness to proceed at once, and the horses in her litter were turned in the direction of the frontier. Her maid, too, weary with the long journey on horseback, took her place beside her mistress in the more easy conveyance; and the Count de Meyrand, riding close to the vehicle, continued to offer to Isabel de Brienne every kindly and soothing attention. Nor was his manner marked by any such signs of admiration or affection as could give her pain; but, at the same time, it must be confessed, she would have been much better satisfied to have been left to a communion with her own thoughts. The mere necessity of travelling any distance under the guidance and protection of a man whose love she had been forced to reject, and who had pressed it upon her in a way that she had felt to be insulting, was painful in the highest degree; and the prospect of having to proceed far in such circumstances was so grievous, that she resolved at all risks to avoid it. What plan she was to form for this purpose was a question which required much thought to answer; but the count took care that she should have no time either for calm consideration or for discussing her future prospects with the woman who accompanied her, and who was, in fact, the only one now with her whom she had known long and well.

Ere three hours were over, they passed the frontier into France; and Isabel could not help thinking it strange that, if the Lord of Masseran's purpose had been to throw himself into the hands either of the emperor or of Philip of Spain, he should thus have approached within a few leagues of the French territory. There were other circumstances also, in all that had passed, which puzzled her; but she had no means of accounting for any of these matters, and could not lull to sleep the suspicions which they occasioned.

At the first village which they came to, it was found necessary to pause for the purpose of refreshing the horses of the litter; and everything that could be procured for her comfort and convenience was ordered with prompt and careful attention by the Count of Meyrand. When he had seen that a chamber had been prepared for her in the little inn, where she could repose for an hour or two, and that refreshments of various kinds were in active preparation, he ordered his horse to be brought round again, much to her surprise, saying, "It will be better for me now to leave you, Mademoiselle de Brienne. You will be in security here till my return; but I must go and scour the country towards Chambery, to make sure that none of this man's parties have crossed the frontier, and are watching for you on your onward way."

Isabel was anxious to put the best interpretation on her companion's conduct, and it seemed to her that this might merely be a delicate excuse to leave her for the time. She was willing to imagine that such an explanation had taken place between the count and Bernard de Rohan as to deprive the former of all hope of obtaining her hand, and she fancied that Adrian de Meyrand's conduct in the present instance might be guided by a wish to show that his purposes were only those of friendship and honourable courtesy. She would not, however, banish the suspicions to which woman's instinctive insight into the passion of which she is the object gave rise, and, for fear of being mistaken, she would not say one word to prevent his going, although she felt that it was scarcely courteous of her not to do so, and though she thought that there was an expression of disappointment on his face at the cold indifference with which she heard the announcement.

CHAPTER XI.

The Count de Meyrand and his horsemen wound slowly away from the door of the little cabaret, leaving Isabel de Brienne and her maid the only tenants of the place. Both were extremely tired; and the lady herself would have desired to lie down to rest at once rather than wait for the preparation of any kind of food, but that she was also anxious to converse over her situation with

her attendant, and to see if, between them, they could not devise some plan of future conduct which might obviate the difficulties which surrounded her. She, therefore, did not even propose to take rest, and began the conversation at once; but, taciturn as the woman always was, she was at present more so than ever. There was not only a sort of sullenness in her manner, which somewhat displeased Isabel, but she spoke rather in the tone of one who had been injured than in compassion for the greater sufferings of her mistress. In answer to all inquiries regarding what had been done in the chapel after her lady had lost the power of observing what was passing, she replied merely that she had been as frightened as anybody, and thought of nobody but herself.

"You seem to be grieved, Marguerite," said Isabel de Brienne, after this sort of conduct had proceeded some time, "you seem to be grieved, Marguerite, that you have aided me in this business, and so brought some inconveniences upon yourself."

"No, mademoiselle," she said, shortly, "but I am very tired."

"Then I think you had better go to bed," replied Isabel; "I shall not want you for some hours."

"I will, presently, mademoiselle," replied the maid; "but I am very hungry."

Isabel had not the heart to smile, as she might have done on another occasion; for selfishness is, perhaps, less offensive when it stands out in its plain simplicity than when it is discovered through a hypocritical disguise. In fact, like ugliness, it is more ugly when painted. Almost as the soubrette spoke, however, the good woman of the house, who was a widow, brought in with her own hands and the hands of a maid-servant—which were exactly like another pair of her own, for they enacted nothing without her orders—several dishes for the morning meal, which were placed with all due reverence before Isabel de Brienne. The young lady tried to eat; but, as she did so, the thought of many painful things, of the probable situation of him she loved best, and of the dark fate that might be hanging over him, came across her mind; and, to use the homely but expressive words of old John Hall, when describing the conduct of the first famous Duke of Buckingham between his arrest and his execution, "The meat would not down."

The soubrette, however, made up for her mistress's want of appetite, and ate plentifully of all that was set before her. When she had done, Isabel bade her retire to rest, and, at the same time, ordered the food to be taken away. The soubrette at once obeyed, and left the room; and the kind-hearted hostess remarking that the young lady had taken nothing, was pressing her at least to drink some wine, for the excellence of which she vouched, when Isabel de Brienne, whose face was towards the window, gave a slight start, and replied almost immediately, "No, my good dame; the first thing that will do me good is a little quiet reflection. I think," she added, "that I saw just now a good monk, seemingly a pilgrim by the scallop on his shoulder pass close to the window, as if to sit down on the bench at the door. Give him that dish of meat, and tell him a lady sent it who begs a prayer of him, as she has been in some trouble since last night."

The worthy dame of the cabaret gladly took up the dish with her own hands and carried it forth to the wanderer. She then returned to remove some other things, and Isabel asked, somewhat eagerly, "What did he say?"

"Oh! madam, he sent you thanks," replied the hostess, "and took out a rosary, which he said had hung up at Loretto for many years, and began immediately to repeat as many paters and aves as would cost a score of crowns from our parish priest."

"Did he say nothing else?" asked Isabel, with a somewhat disappointed look.

The hostess replied in the negative, and shortly after left the young lady alone to repose. A deeper shade of melancholy then came over her. She sat and leaned her head upon her hand, and again and again the thoughts of her own situation, and that of him she loved, came across her mind with the painful, fruitless reiteration which is the most wearying, perhaps, of all the forms of care. To know and feel that activity and exertion are absolutely necessary; to have hope only just sufficient to deprive one of the courage of despair; to believe that there is a possibility of changing our situation, yet not to know how that change can be by any means effected, how exertion should be directed, or where hope would guide; such is the state into which, from time to time, we fall in our passage through life, and stand like men in one of those thick, impervious mists which are not absolutely darkness, but which are worse than darkness itself, from not being, like it, dissolvable by light.

She thought not, indeed, so much of herself as of another. She thought of Bernard de Rohan with deep, with strong, with tender affection; and, after some minutes of vague and wild inquiries as to what she could do next, she was obliged to turn to chance and fortune to find a footing for hope to rest upon—no, not to chance and fortune, but to the beneficence and mercy of God. There, then, her hope fixed, ay, and seemed to refresh itself. "Could she not," she asked herself, "could she not be, by some means, instrumental in aiding him she loved, let his situation be what it might?"

She had gathered from the struggle that had taken place in the chapel, from the want of all sounds of clashing steel or other indications of actual combat, and also from the manner in which she had been herself dealt with, that her lover had been overpowered and made a prisoner before he could resist. She did not believe that the Lord of Masseran would dare to attempt his life. The risk, she thought, would be far too great for the object to be attained; for, in truth, she knew not what that object was, and believed it to be less than it really was, and far different. If, then, he were a captive in the chateau of Masseran, could she not, she asked herself, find means to

procure his deliverance? She had heard of such things being done—ay, in the very age and times in which she lived. She had heard of woman's weak hand and persevering affection executing what man's strength and wisdom had failed to perform, and hers was a heart which, though gentle, kind, and yielding in the moment of happiness and security, was conscious of fortitude, and strength, and courage, when danger and evil assailed those that she loved.

"My father's spirit," she said, "the spirit of him who endured the whole wrath and indignation of a despotic king sooner than abandon the friend of his youth, will bear me up through any trials, while I have the object of delivering him I love."

But how, how? was the question; what means could she take, what stratagems could she employ, while she was watched by the eyes of Adrian de Meyrand? Should she confide her purposes to him? Should she appeal to his courtesy—to his friendship for her lover—to his generosity? Should she confide in him? Dared she to do so?

As she asked herself these questions, something darkened the light, as if passing across the window. She looked up. It was all clear again. The day was bright and sunshiny, and the rays pouring in from the southwest. The window was a narrow cottage lattice, in a stone frame, divided into three partitions. It might have been a branch of the honeysuckle that climbed around it, which had been blown across by the wind, and caused the shadow. It might have been but a cloud passing over the sun; and she bent her head again, and fell once more into thought. The instant after, the shadow came again, and a voice said, "Are you quite alone?"

Isabel looked up. The pilgrim, whom she had before seen, was standing near the window, leaning on his staff, not exactly turned towards her, but standing with his shoulder towards the open lattice, and his eyes apparently bent onward towards Savoy. There was something in his air familiar to her, though she could not tell in what it consisted. It had struck her before as he passed: even more, perhaps, in that momentary glance than it did now, when she saw him fully; and she could scarcely think that it was the pilgrim who spoke, or, if so, that it was to her that he addressed himself. After a moment, however, he turned his face again for an instant towards the window, repeating,

"Are you quite alone?"

"Quite!" replied Isabel.

"Then come near the window," said the same voice: "sit in the window-seat as if you were looking out. I will rest on this stepping-stone hard by. Let our words be short, and few, and low in tone; each word well pondered before it is spoken, and your eyes upon the door of the room from time to time."

The view which Isabel had of his face had shown her the features of an old man, somewhat sharp and keen, though they were much hidden under his hood, which was formed like that of a Capuchin. His beard, which was very white, was not so long as that of the generality of monks, and she concluded that it had been only suffered to grow during the period of his pilgrimage. He was a venerable-looking man, however; and, as it was evident that he knew something of her situation, she imagined that he bore her some message, and hastened to follow his directions. The moment she had taken her place at the window, he sat down on one of the stepping-stones placed to aid travellers in mounting their horses, and there, with his face still turned away from her, commenced the conversation by asking, "Do you not know me?"

"Your voice and your air," she said, "are familiar to me, but I know nothing more."

"I am Father Willand," said the pilgrim, "who baptized you in your infancy, watched you for the first nine years of your life, till your father procured me what he thought advancement in Paris, and who united you last night to the man for whom that father had ever destined you."

"Good Heaven!" exclaimed Isabel; "I thought you had fallen into the power of that evil Piedmontese; for I could not conceive it possible, when we were all so completely surrounded, that you should make your way out."

"They caught the other priest instead of me," replied Father Willand, "and I lay hid behind the altar till they were all dispersed and gone. Your husband, lady, however, has fallen into the power of one enemy, and you into the power of another, or, what is worse than an enemy, a daring, treacherous, unhesitating lover."

"Call him not so, Father Willand! call him not so!" replied Isabel. "Love elevates, ennobles, and purifies—"

"Do not let us discuss love, lady," replied the priest; "I have nothing to do with it, but yet understand it, perhaps, better than you do. Love is applied to a thousand different things, and what is its right meaning were of long argument. All I know is, that you must not remain with this man an hour longer than you can help."

"Tell me how I can escape from him," said Isabel, in the same low tone. "Nothing I desire more! But still let me do him justice: he has this day behaved well and kindly towards me; perilled his life to save me, and treated me with respect and delicacy."

"Perilled his life!" said Father Willand; "guns fired without balls, lady! swords drawn without bloodshed! a farce that would not have deceived a child! They knew you to be but a child, or they

would not have tried it! Did you see one man fall or fallen? Did you see one drop of blood shed for all the powder expended?"

"But still," said Isabel, though she had certainly neither seen wounds nor death follow the apparently smart encounter between the Count de Meyrand and the Lord of Masseran, "but still, he has been gentle and kind, and professes to leave me entirely to decide upon my own conduct."

"Try him, try him," said the priest: "use the liberty he professes to give, and you will find yourself a stricter prisoner than you were when in the castle of Masseran. Harken," he continued, "for I must not be here long. I have followed you from last night till now; taking shorter paths than you have been led by, it is true; but still, lady, I am somewhat old and somewhat fat: and, though of the quick tribe, an old greyhound will not run as long as a young one. I must have some repose; but to-night I shall be ready to give you aid wherever you may then be. When it comes, take it at a moment's warning; and, in the mean time, to make yourself sure of what you are about, exercise this liberty that you think you have. The Count de Meyrand judges you are about to set out for Paris to-morrow morning direct; tell him to-night that you have considered, and determined upon going to Grenoble to meet your brother Harry. Then see what he says. If he agree thereunto honestly, well and good; trust him! If, on the contrary, he teach you to feel that his will must be your law, then trust me, and come with me whithersoever I shall guide you!"

Isabel paused thoughtfully for a moment. "Not to Grenoble," she said at length; "I must not go to Grenoble yet! That is too far; but if any one would convey intelligence to my brother of where I am, and bid him join me instantly at Latour, then, indeed, I might succeed—"

"Succeed in what?" demanded the priest.

"In freeing him," replied Isabel; and, though the blood rose up in her cheek as she said it, she added, the more resolutely from a slight smile that came from the priest's countenance as he turned for an instant towards her, "in freeing my husband."

"Oh, fear not, fear not, pretty one!" replied the priest. "We'll get your bird out of the cage yet, never fear. Indeed, I did not come hither without taking care that those should have information of where he is, and how he is, who may best contrive the means for his escape."

"Still," replied Isabel, "I would rather not be far absent from the spot until I see him free."

"If you fancy, child," replied the priest, "that I want you to go to Grenoble, you must fancy a fox to be a more stupid beast than a sheep. I only told you to propose it, that you may try this fair Count of Meyrand. Trust him in nothing, child, till you see a dove drop her eggs in a hawk's nest, or till the sweet days come back again when the lamb lies down with the lion! The nature of the wolf does not change, and he who would insult you one day would not protect you the next! Mark my words, then, lady, and follow my counsel: lie down and take rest even now, so that your mind may be quick and prompt, and your limbs free and active this night. When this count returns, go on with him to Latour, then tell him your intention is to turn aside to Grenoble. You will see in a moment whether you may trust him or me. Decide between us at once when you have so tried him; and, after that, do not lay down your head upon your pillow till you have seen me and given me a reply."

"But how shall I see you?" demanded Isabel; "how shall I know where—"

"I will find the means," replied the priest, interrupting her. "We must use bad things to good ends, lady; and a brown gown, which, between Paris and Loretto, covers more sin and wickedness, year after year, than all the pope's indulgences can well clear away, will carry me into many a house where no other key could gain me entrance. If you should satisfy yourself that you are in danger where you are, be prepared to follow me at a moment's notice. I will at least set you free to go where you will, and will help you in all good purposes if I can. But, above all, be as secret, my child, as the grave; utter not a word of this to any one. I have heard by tradition that a woman once kept a secret four-and-twenty hours: all I ask of you is to keep one six; and now farewell, for we must talk together no more."

Thus saying, he left her; and Isabel continued to gaze from the window, pondering thoughtfully over all that had been said. It is a terrible question, the first time that man has to put it to his own heart, Whom can we trust? But this, alas! was not the first time that Isabel had to ask herself that painful and bitter thing. With her, as with every one in advancing into life, the question had been often and sadly repeated, and the bounds of the reply had become narrow and more narrow. Oh, how few are there throughout all existence that we can trust—fully, entirely, confidently trust! The faith of one; the wisdom of another; the courage of a third; the resolution of a fourth; the activity, the energy, the zeal of others; all! all! may be doubtful; and, alas! in looking back through life, the sad and terrible summing up will ever be, that our confidence has been far too often misplaced than wrongly withheld.

The question, however, which Isabel had now to address to herself was more limited in its nature and character. It was only, Which of these two men shall I choose to trust? that she had now to ask herself. Those she had to choose between were limited to two. One of those two she had already had occasion to doubt and dislike, to fear and to avoid; and she could not but feel that, over all he had since done to remove the first evil impression of his conduct, there was a tinge of suspicion which she could not remove. Of the other, indeed, she knew little; but that little seemed to prove his attachment to herself and to him whom she loved. Acts that have made us very happy leave behind them a sort of tender but imperishable light, which invests all who have had any

share in them, and brings them all out in brightness to the eye of memory from the twilight gloom of the past, like those salient objects in an evening landscape upon which we still catch the rays of a sun that has long set to our own eyes. Not only the willing agents of our happiness, but those that bore an uninterested part therein—objects animate or inanimate alike—the spot, the accessories, the very scene itself, all still retain a portion of that light, and shine to remembrance when other things are forgotten.

The priest with whom she had just spoken, however, had not only borne a willing, but an active part in uniting her to Bernard de Rohan. For that reason she believed that she might trust him; but, besides this, he had referred to former years; and though there was a long lapse of time between, spreading a dimness like a light sea-mist between herself and the objects of those days, yet there were vague and pleasant recollections which attached themselves by the fine links of association to the tones of the old man's voice, to his manner, even to the rough and somewhat reckless jests which he mingled with his discourse. She remembered such a person a frequent guest in her father's house; she remembered that father's often-repeated commendations of his honesty of purpose, of his sincerity of heart, of his zeal and disinterestedness; and whether it was that she herself strove to find some excuse for anything that seemed harsh or irreverent in his manner, or that her father had really pronounced such words, she thought that she remembered his having said that Father Willand's abhorrence of hypocrisy had driven him into an opposite extreme. It is true that she could not have recalled his features sufficiently to recognise him under any other circumstances; but, when once told who he was, they seemed to grow more and more familiar to her, and she determined to trust him, let the result of the trial which he had suggested for the Count de Meyrand be what it would.

CHAPTER XII.

In one of the sweetest situations that it is possible to conceive—with green sloping hills, covered with the richest vegetation, rising on the four sides thereof, and forming, as it were, a beautiful basin, with four long valleys, each of which bears onward its stream of clear and sparkling water—is the little town of Bourgoin, which was at that time, as now, neat, clean, and fresh-looking, with perhaps fewer inhabitants than it can at present boast, but without any of the manufactories which have since somewhat diminished its beauty, if they have increased its wealth.

It was the custom in those days for the signs to hang out far from the doors of the inn; and often at each side of the doorway was placed the name of the landlord, with a long recommendation of the fare and lodging to be found within, with the price of the various meals which were to be furnished to a visiter. A bench was there also, and a wide door, giving entrance to a courtyard.

Such was not, however, altogether the aspect of the little auberge at Bourgoin. The village was too small to have a regular inn, or *gîte*, and the homely symbol of a bush, suspended from a long pole, thrust forth horizontally from the front of the building, was the only sign that it could boast. The landlord and landlady were in their green old age, and were what they term in France *bonasse*, though that word has been applied to a beast who, if one may judge by his look, is of a very opposite sort of disposition to that which I wish to describe. They were, in short, good-humoured, honest country-people; and when the landlady beheld a considerable company of horsemen draw in their bridles at her door, with a young lady and her maid in a litter in the midst, her first thought was really not of self-interest, but of what she could best do to make her fair guest happy and comfortable during the time that she was about to stay in her dwelling.

The Count de Meyrand sprang to the side of the litter which contained Isabel de Brienne; and, as if with an instinctive insight into their lord's wishes, all his attendants but one, who was holding back the curtain, and one at the head of the nearest horse, kept aloof while the lady descended.

"Monsieur de Meyrand," said Isabel de Brienne, as she quitted the litter, "I cannot help repeating again that it is much against my inclination I have come hither. If you did not choose to conduct me, as I asked you, on the direct road to Grenoble, you might, at least, have suffered me to remain for the night at Latour."

"Indeed, dear lady," replied the count, still with an air of perfect deference, "it would have been dangerous for you to do so. There, but a few leagues from Chambery, and still less from Beauvoisin, we should have been entirely at the mercy of the enemy. In regard to Grenoble, I only besought you to pause till you could hear my reasons. You are too much fatigued to attend to them now; but, ere you set out to-morrow, you shall hear them at full."

"Your politeness, my good lord," replied Isabel de Brienne, with an air of grief and vexation, "is somewhat compulsory." Thus saying, she advanced towards the landlady, who had kept back at a sign from one of the count's attendants, but not so far as to prevent her from noting all that had passed; the ears of aubergistes and aubergistes' wives acquiring by long and peculiar practice a facility of hearing everything and not hearing anything, according to circumstances, which is truly astonishing.

The Count de Meyrand bowed low, and, following to the door, he ordered apartments immediately to be prepared for his fair charge, and then took leave of her for the night, while a slight smile played upon his lip as he turned away, and he said in his heart, "If I could trust this

man of Masseran, I would humour the girl, and see what might be done by softness. She smiled upon me this morning, and made me almost forget her former insolence. It were as well, however, to bring down this high temper; and, now the storm is somewhat roused, it may as well go on. No one can say I do her wrong in using some gentle force to bring her to Paris to the presence of her lawful king, who will soon judge whether that ring be to remain upon her finger or not."

As he thus thought, he pictured to his own imagination the marriage of fair Isabel de Brienne with Bernard de Rohan annulled by the royal authority. He fancied his own claim to her hand heard and conceded. He thought of how her travelling alone with him by slow journeys across the whole of France might render her own consent a matter more of necessity than choice; and, with inward satisfaction, he revolved the air of cool indifference with which he would treat the whole proceedings, as if there were absolutely nothing on earth worth the attention of so high a gentleman.

In the mean while Isabel de Brienne was led to her chamber by the hostess, who asked many a kindly question, not directly pertinent to the conversation which she had overheard, but tending to elicit the cause of that anxiety and distress of mind which she witnessed. Isabel did not satisfy her, it is true; but she replied so sweetly and gently, that the good woman went away with her mind made up that she was the most amiable young lady she had ever seen, and that she was, moreover, very much ill used by some one. Who that was she could not very well satisfy herself; but, nevertheless, she looked with no very favourable eye upon the Count de Meyrand, and made but short replies to the various questions which he asked her when she came down again.

After giving various directions to the soubrette, to which that taciturn person replied less than ever, Isabel seated herself near the window in melancholy thought. Removed almost by force from Latour, where the good priest, Father Willand, expected to find her, and having been now fully convinced, by the conduct of this Count de Meyrand, that she was little better than a prisoner in his hands, she knew not whence to hope for succour or deliverance. There was many a dark and painful point in her situation on which we must not dwell; many a present and many a future danger to herself, to him she loved, and to their mutual happiness. The thoughts connected with these points mingled with the chief strain of her reflections, and rendered them, bitter as they were, still more bitter and grievous to be borne.

As she thus sat and gazed out of the window—at some distance from it, indeed, so that those who were immediately beneath did not see where she was placed—she suddenly saw a small body of horsemen come over the brow of the gentle hill opposite, and ride down into the village. Isabel instinctively drew back; for, though her actual situation was painful in no slight degree, yet among those horsemen she recognised the colours of the Lord of Masseran, and it seemed to her that it would be even more terrible to fall into his power than to remain in that of the Count de Meyrand. The men came on at a quick rate, some four or five in number, and were passing by the door of the little auberge without pausing, when she heard the voice of the Count de Meyrand call to them, and bid them stop to speak with him. The first questions which he asked were put in a low voice, but the man whom he addressed spoke louder in reply, and Isabel heard the latter say distinctly, "Yes, my lord, he is gone on with all speed to Paris, and we are following him as fast as we can. We hope to come up with him at Lyons."

"By my faith, this is somewhat strange," answered the count; and then again what he said farther was lost to the ear.

In a few minutes the Count de Meyrand suffered the horsemen to go on; but he seemed much moved by what he had heard, saying aloud, "This man will never be honest. We must not let him be long in advance. The horses must be ready by daybreak to-morrow, Matthew. Pierre, put your foot in the stirrup, and ride after those men: I saw one of them turn away from the road just now, by the clump of trees on the top of the hill. If they put their hand into the wolf's mouth, they must bear a bite."

Before the daylight failed, the man to whom he last spoke returned, informing him that, as far as he could discover, the whole party had gone on towards Lyons; and the count, better satisfied, turned once more into the inn, and sat himself down to supper in a musing mood. He sent up, indeed, an humble entreaty that the fair lady whom he had the honour to escort, as he termed it, would join him at the evening meal; but the reply returned was, that Mademoiselle de Brienne had retired to rest.

The count soon after sought his pillow himself; but, accustomed by old habits to wake at any particular hour assigned, he started up with the first gleam of daylight, and gave instant orders for preparing to set out. There were few persons yet up in the inn; but the good landlady was roused, unwillingly, from her bed, and ordered instantly to wake Mademoiselle de Brienne, and give her notice that it was time to depart. The count himself stood at the bottom of the stairs, with his arms folded upon his chest, in that gloomy frame of mind to which dissatisfaction with ourselves is even more sure to give birth than dissatisfaction with the things around us. But he was roused from his revery by hearing some bustle and anxious exclamations above, the voice of the hostess raised to the tones of wonder and astonishment, the tongue of the silent maid heard at a considerably louder pitch than was at all usual, and other indications so decided of something having gone wrong as to induce the Count de Meyrand himself to quit his usual calm deliberation, and spring up the stairs with a quick step and an angry brow.

He found the door of the room which had been assigned to Mademoiselle de Brienne unclosed,

the hostess standing a few steps within, the soubrette near the bedside, the window wide open, with the morning air sighing quietly through the lattice, and Isabel herself nowhere to be seen.

"Where is your mistress?" demanded the count, furiously, fixing his eyes upon the soubrette.

"I know not, sir," replied the woman.

"Her bed has never been slept in all night," replied the hostess. "Her sweet cheek has never rested on that pillow, poor thing. She must have got out of the window, that is clear; and, if any ill have happened to her, somebody is to blame for it, I am sure."

"Silence!" said the count, looking at her sternly. "Did you not undertake," he continued, turning to the soubrette, "never to lose sight of her?"

"I can't sleep with my eyes open," replied the woman.

"This is that scoundrel Masseran's doing," said the count: "but he shall find himself deceived, for I will be in Paris as soon as he is. You, madam, will be good enough to come along with me; so put your dress in some better array, and lose no time."

He looked as if he could have said a great deal more, but he restrained himself; and, though the anger that he felt at heart found relief in a bitter and sneering smile, unaccompanied by any words, he turned upon his heel, walked down to the inn door, and remained for a few minutes looking forth upon the morning as if nothing had happened. In a minute or two after, seeing one of his men pass, he beckoned to him, spoke a word or two in his ear, and suffered him to depart. The man returned in a few minutes, and replied, "They are all ignorant of anything of the kind, sir. It is evident none of the people of the place know aught about it."

"Have you seen the landlord?" demanded the count.

"No!"

"Go and make inquiries regarding him."

The man did as he was bid, and the reply was, "That the landlord had gone away towards the market of St. Laurent an hour or two before daybreak, as was always his custom."

"That is sufficient," said the count, with a sneer. "Quick with the horses; let us mount and go on."

CHAPTER XIII.

The great tamers of strong spirits, the quellers of the rebellious heart, the conquerors of the obdurate, the determined, and the enduring, Silence and Solitude, were upon Bernard de Rohan. To know nothing of what is passing without; to have no marker of the steps of time; to see no sun rise or set; to have not even the moving shadow upon the wall to tell us that another lapse of the wearisome hours has taken place; to have nothing, in short, to link us on to human destinies, and to show us that we are wending on our way with our fellow-beings—nothing but the dull beatings of the heavy heart, and the grinding succession of bitter thoughts—this, surely, is not life; and if it be not death, it is something worse. Where there is no change of anything to mark its passing, time seems, in truth, to sink back into that ocean from which it was called at first, Eternity: and, wanting all means of calculating its flight, Bernard de Rohan did indeed feel each moment to be an age. Actual pain would have been almost a relief to the despairing vacuity of that which must have been the second day of his confinement. We can scarcely doubt that the punishment of Prometheus would have been more complete, had he been left in the solitude of the frowning heavens, without the vulture as his companion, though his tormentor.

No one came near the young cavalier throughout the whole day. The food which had been left for him was just sufficient for the four-and-twenty hours: more than sufficient, as it proved, indeed, for he tasted it not; and when, at the end of that period, it was renewed, so quick was the passing in and out of him who brought the fresh supply, that the young cavalier scarcely saw the man's entrance ere the door was again closed, and he was once more alone.

It seemed to him several hours after this brief visitation had been made—and true it is, he had gone through so many ranges of painful thought, that they might well have furnished occupation and bitterness for more than one long day—when he heard a sound at the door of the dungeon, as if some one endeavoured, with an unaccustomed hand, to draw back the heavy bolts and turn a key in the lock. At the same time, he heard a low, deep voice murmur, "The fool should have left a lamp!" "Ay, that is right!" and the next moment the key turned, the lock gave way, and the door was thrown open.

The lamp which had been left with Bernard de Rohan burned but dimly, for it had been long untrimmed, so that at first the young cavalier did not recognise the person who entered. The next instant, however, his visiter spoke, and the deep but melodious voice instantly brought to the prisoner's recollection his wild companion, Corse de Leon.

"Ah! Monsieur de Rohan," said the brigand, looking around him as he entered, "I have not forgotten you you see. Out upon that scoundrel! How dared he put you in such a place as this? He

might have given you a befitting chamber, at all events."

Bernard de Rohan grasped his hand; and, needing no words to assure him that the brigand came to set him free, he thanked him again and again, but mingled, however, his thanks with some marvellings to see him within the chateau of Masseran.

The brigand smiled. "There is nothing wonderful in it, Monsieur de Rohan," he replied. "There is not a door in this castle that does not open to me as readily as to its lord. All these things are easily explained. Some of the poor people with whom I have to do think me half a magician, and it is not worth while to undeceive them, though I seek not for any such reputation. Truth is marvellous enough, without trying to make it more wonderful," he continued, in a musing tone; "and all that I do which seems strange may, nine times out of ten, be explained by a single word. I believe that it is so, too, with the wonders of creation. We gaze with surprised and astonished eyes upon thousands of things that seem miracles to our earthly nature: we are, ourselves, miracles to ourselves; but I do believe that all the wonders that we see, the marvel of our very existence, the linking of fates together, and the long network of events and their causes, from the beginning of all things to eternity, might all be explained to us by some simple word which God's good pleasure now withholds; by some short, brief explanation, which is not fitted for this mass of moving clay to receive."

As he spoke, he sat himself quietly down on the edge of the bed, took up the lamp, trimmed it in a careless manner, and then added abstractedly, "We must wait a few minutes, Monsieur de Rohan, for the horses are not come yet, and it is as well to stay here as upon the hillside."

"But is there no danger of our being stopped?" demanded Bernard de Rohan.

Corse de Leon smiled. "It were difficult to stop me," he said; "but nobody will try to do it. You know the Lord of Masseran is gone to Paris?"

"No, indeed," replied the young cavalier; "I know nothing, and I have heard nothing, since I have been a prisoner in this dreary place. He has, of course, taken, my Isabel with him?"

"Oh, no," replied the brigand. "He set out for Paris with great speed for several reasons: first, because he knew suspicions are entertained of him in regard to his dealings with the King of Spain; next, because he feared that inquiry would be made as to what has become of you, and he wished to justify himself; and, next, because he did not choose to trust your goodly friend, the Count of Meyrand, in anything, but especially—"

"But where, then, is Isabel?" demanded the young cavalier.

"Ay, who can say!" rejoined Corse de Leon.

Bernard de Rohan started up eagerly. "Let us seek for her at once, then," he said. "If, as you say, all the doors of this castle open to you as easily as to their lord, let us seek her through every room in the place, and take her with us when we go. In Heaven's name leave her not here!"

"She is not here, wherever she is," replied the brigand; "and I trust that by this time she is free; but I will tell you more by-and-by, for I hear the clock striking one, and we shall have just time to reach the hillside before the horses arrive. Come, Monsieur de Rohan, come. They have taken your arms from you, I see. Well, we must find you others."

Thus saying, he raised the lamp, and led the way towards the door. As he went, however, the light fell upon the fetters which hung against the wall, and he paused, gazing upon them and frowning heavily. "Ah, ah, accursed implements of tyranny!" he muttered, "When, when will the time come that ye shall be no longer known! God of Heaven! even then it must be remembered that such things have been. It must be written in books. It must be told in tradition, that men were found to chain their fellow-creatures with heavy bars of iron, to make them linger out the bright space given them for activity and enjoyment in dungeons and in fetters, till the dull flame was extinguished, and dust returned to dust. Would to Heaven that there were no such thing as history, to perpetuate, even unto times when man shall have purified his heart from the filthy baseness of these days, the memory of such enormous deeds as fetters like that record! Out upon it! Was it for this that man learned to dig the ore from the mine, and forge the hard metal in the fire? But come, come! I am forgetting myself;" and he led the way forth along the same path by which Bernard de Rohan had been brought from the chapel. The ponderous doors in the solid rock were all open; but the young cavalier remarked that Corse de Leon closed them one by one behind him, till at length they stood in the open air at the foot of the hill.

It were difficult, nay, impossible, to describe the sensations which the first breath of that free air produced in Bernard de Rohan. It would require to have been a captive, and yet full of the spirit of freedom, to have contemplated long imprisonment, and to be suddenly set free, even to comprehend what he then felt. His sensations, however, found vent but in one exclamation. "Thank God!" he said, and followed his companion, who now, with rapid strides, climbed the opposite side of the hill, till he reached the spot where he had waited for Bernard de Rohan on the night when first they met. No horses were there, however, and Corse de Leon seated himself on a point of the crag, and seemed about to fall into one of his fits of revery; but his young companion was not disposed to rest satisfied without some farther information.

"Now," he said, "now! You promised to tell me more—you promised to tell me more concerning Isabel. With whom is she? In whose hands is she, if not in those of the Lord of Masseran?"

"She was," replied Corse de Leon, "she was in the hands of your bright friend, the Count de Meyrand."

Bernard de Rohan's hand grasped for the hilt of his sword, but it was gone; and he only muttered the words "Villain, villain! I thought I heard that treacherous voice. Who shall one depend upon in this world?"

"Upon none of those," replied Corse de Leon, "whom men are accustomed to depend upon. Not upon the gay companion of the winecup, who aids us pleasantly to spend our wealth or to squander our more precious time: not upon him, not upon him, young gentleman! Not upon the smooth-spoken and the plausible adviser, who counsels with us on things where our own interest and his are combined, and who uses our exertions and our means to share in our fortune and our success: not upon him, I say, not upon him! Not upon the sweet flatterer, who either dexterously insinuates how virtuous, and great, and good and wise we are, or who boldly overloads us with praise, in the hope of some, at least, being received: not upon him, I say. Not upon the pander to our vices or our follies, even though he sell his soul to pamper us with gratification: not upon him. Not upon the light wanton, who yields us what she should refuse, vowing that it is love for us which conquers, when love for many another has gone before: not upon her. Neither on the priest that preaches virtue without practising it; neither upon the soft hypocrite, nor upon the rude hypocrite; neither upon the one who assumes sleek sanctity, nor upon the other who builds the reputation of honesty upon a rough outside. There are some that will weep with you, and some that will laugh with you; some that will discourse, and some that will sport with you; but trust in none but him that you have tried, but him whom you know to be honest to himself, and who has proved himself honest to you. We were speaking of the Count de Meyrand. That he has betrayed you and deceived you most shamefully is his fault, not yours; for, though you believed him honest, you did not weakly trust him. It were well, when you find him, to nail his ears to the doorpost; but still you have nothing to reproach yourself with. I trust, however, that sweet and good lady is by this time freed from his hands, for one who loves her very well has undertaken that part of the task."

"But how," exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "how came she in his power at all?"

Corse de Leon replied briefly, but with sufficient detail to show his hearer at one glance all that had taken place in regard to Isabel de Brienne since he had seen her. The deep and bitter indignation that gathered at the young cavalier's heart as his companion went on, was not of a nature that wasted itself in many words. "This must be looked to!" he said; "this must be looked to! And now, my friend, to think of this dear girl's escape. Can we trust to good Father Willand? Not his faith, I mean, but his power. He is there, it would seem, alone, unaided, unsupported, to cope with a man artful, rich, powerful, and numerous followed."

"We may trust him, I am sure," replied the other. "This count's art, like all pitiful art, will help to deceive himself; and in quiet wisdom he cannot compete with the good priest. Besides, Father Willand is not so unsupported as you think. It may seem strange to you to hear, but many of your own men, nay, I believe all, are with him or round about him."

"No," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that surprises me not. Most of them were born within sight of the lands of Brienne—most of them have often seen and know her well, and there is none who has seen her that would not willingly sacrifice life to serve her."

Corse de Leon smiled with somewhat of a melancholy expression. In life, when we have lost any of those sweet delusions which, like the radiant colours of the morning sky, clothe, at the dawning of our youth, thin air itself and unsubstantial vapours, nay, perhaps even the cloudy home of the future storm, with loveliness and radiance, and the most glowing hues of Heaven's own golden treasury—when we have lost those sweet delusions, I say, and any one with whom they still remain speaks of the reality of things whose emptiness we have proved, how sad, how profoundly sad, is the contrast suddenly presented to us, of what we were and what we are! how melancholy is the conviction of the emptiness of our dream-like life! And yet there is something sweet which mingles even with our sadness, to see others enjoying and believing what we can no longer enjoy or believe; something ennobling and elevating that shares in our melancholy, if the feeling of how unreal are life's best joys lead us to sigh for those that are more true and lasting.

Bernard de Rohan saw not the expression upon the countenance of his companion, although the night was clear and bright, and sufficient light remained in the heavens to make even small objects visible; but his eyes were at that moment fixed upon the castle of Masseran, and more especially upon one of the outstanding towers to the northeast, separated from the rest of the building by a space of two or three hundred yards, and only attached to it by walls and minor fortifications. In that tower there appeared a great light, at first streaming through some of the upper loopholes only. After a moment or two, however, it became brighter and brighter, and poured through all the windows of the story below. Bernard de Rohan could almost have imagined that, as he gazed, he saw flames come forth and lick the dark stonework of the tower; and he was soon confirmed in the belief that it was so, by the wreaths of pale white smoke which began to ascend into the dark air, and in a minute or two formed a cloud above the tower, acquiring a red and ominous hue as the fire below increased.

"Look there! look there!" he exclaimed, catching Corse de Leon's arm; but, even as he spoke, the roof of the tower fell in, and a pyramid of flame shot upward into the sky.

"Yes, I see," replied Corse de Leon; "but here come the horses! and we must go quick to the spot

where I trust we shall find her whom you seek for. Then, get you across the frontier into France as soon as may be. Your own men will be sufficient to protect you, and will be glad to see you; for, notwithstanding that they may, as you think, love your fair Isabel well, they would not have gone unless we had put a light deceit upon them, and had left them to think, more than told them it was so, that you and the lady were together. Those I have with me here dare not set foot within that land, and the other friends I have are far distant. That was the reason I did not make her free myself, and punish that slight traitor as he deserves."

While he spoke, three or four horsemen appeared, leading two other horses, and, without taking any farther notice of the conflagration, Corse de Leon put his foot in the stirrup, and, springing into the saddle, rode on towards the little inn which we have often before had occasion to mention.

The young cavalier followed his example; but, before they had gone a hundred yards, a loud explosion took place, which shook the rocks around, and echoed afar through the valley. Their horses started at the sound, and Bernard and his companion turned their eyes towards the castle of Masseran. The burning tower had now lost all shape and form, though part of the walls still remained, with the fire clinging to them in various places.

"Do you know what that is?" demanded Corse de Leon; and, ere Bernard de Rohan could reply, he went on. "It is an act of folly worthy of a king or a prime minister. There are people in that castle," he said, "who, knowing of my coming and of your escape, have done the act, the effects of which you see flaming yonder, in order that the tower may fall in and crush the dungeon into which they had thrust you, solely to prevent the Lord of Masseran from discovering how you have escaped. Thus it is with the world; every one act of weakness, of folly, or of crime, we judge must be followed by another, to conceal or to justify it. Let men or ministers place themselves in a dangerous situation by some capital fault, and then they think expediency requires them to commit another to obviate the effects of the first, forgetting that each fault is written down in the two eternal books—the Book of Fate, God's servant, and the Book of God himself; and that there must be a reckoning, a terrible reckoning, for the whole amount, in this world and in the next. Let us ride on."

CHAPTER XIV.

We must now entirely change the scene. The spot is no longer the same—the actors different. From the mountains of Savoy, the feudal castle, the lonely chapel, and the humble inn, let us turn to the capital of France, her stately palaces, and the gay and glittering hall where laughed and revelled the bright, the brave, the fair, and the witty of that splendid epoch which began with Francis the First, and ended with his immediate successor. The personages, too, have changed with the scene. The young warrior and his fair bride, the wily Italian and the supercilious and unprincipled Count de Meyrand, are no longer before us. Even good Father Willand himself is left behind, and one for whom we owe no slight affection, Corse de Leon, is, for the time, off the stage.

At the door—or rather, we may say, beyond the door, for they were not actually in the chamber—stood two of the king's guard, with their halberds resting on their shoulders, embroidered on which appeared the well-known cognisance of the salamander. They were there merely to perform the place of a living gate, barring the way against any who would enter, till such time as the orders of the king threw open the halls of the Louvre.

Henry himself, in the prime of his years, graceful, handsome, vigorous, with a countenance full of fire, but still kindly and good-humoured, stood at the farther end of the large and nearly vacant reception room, close to one of the windows, which looked out upon the river Seine, speaking with a lady, on whose appearance we may well be expected to pause for a moment. That lady was the celebrated Diana of Poitiers; and, though the period had by this time passed by when her dazzling beauty captivated all eyes as well as those of her royal lover, she was certainly still very handsome. But she had also in her countenance an expression of power and resolution, of quickness of understanding and of sparkling vivacity, which at once displayed many of the chief points of her character. As one stood and looked at her, and saw the play of her fine features, the rapid changes, the sudden lighting up of the eyes, the occasional look of intense eagerness, the shade of momentary meditation, succeeded by the bright smile, the gay laugh, the eyes cast up to heaven, it was easy to understand what manifold powers of charming and persuading lay beneath, and to perceive that, whatever might have been at any time the mere beauty of feature and expression, the chief loveliness of that lovely countenance must ever have been in its wonderful variety.

What was it that moved her now? What was the eager scheme that she was urging upon the king with such a host of wiles, and charms, and graces, that it was hardly possible to expect that he should resist? Lo! how she hangs upon his arm with those two fair hands, and gazes up into his face with those speaking eyes! Now comes a shade of vexation over her brow. One hand drops from his arm. Her head is partly turned away: a tear dims the eye for an instant, then leaves it brighter than before. Now, again, how merrily she laughs, with the clear, joyous, ringing laugh that we so seldom hear but from the lips of infancy; and then, again, that look of bright and eloquent thoughtfulness, while with her extended hand she argues with the monarch on some

mighty theme, and carries high conviction on her lofty brow! What a wonderful picture does she form there, even at this very moment, changing by her words the destinies of Europe, and with smiles, and tears, and laughter, and high thoughts, all mingled in a wondrous antidote, curing one of those spoiled children of fortune that we call kings of that venomous and pestilential sickness, the love of war!

"Well," said the king, "well, you have triumphed. He shall have the powers, although it goes against my soul to yield anything to that cold and haughty Spaniard. What though Fortune have, with all her fickleness, left at the last a momentary balance in the scale against France, have we not already retrieved much, and are we not daily retrieving?"

"True, sire, true," replied Diana of Poitiers, "your armies are retrieving all that was once lost. But your country, sire, alas! your country is not. France suffers, France groans even, while Spain is wounded, and each blow that you strike at the enemy but injures yourself far more."

The king was about to reply, but she stopped him eagerly: "I am foolish to argue with you," she continued; "You have said I have triumphed, you have said I shall have the powers; and, though he may conquer me in argument, my Henry's word is never broken. Besides," she added, "have I not a private suit to be heard and granted also?"

"Ha!" said the king, after pausing thoughtfully for a moment or two, as if he were still unconvinced, and unwilling to leave the subject on which they had just been conversing, "ha! I had forgot! You did mention some private suit—what, I remember not now, sweet Diana. But yet it is hard even to hear of peace after defeat. Were we just hot from victory—were we flushed with triumph, and our enemy reduced to lowly supplication—then, indeed, then we might hear of terms of peace, and grant them liberally and willingly. But after this accursed battle of St. Laurence; after so total, so signal, and terrible a defeat—the constable himself taken, one half of the nobility of the land wounded or slain, our soldiers scattered, and our provinces, invaded—it is bitter indeed to hear the name of peace."

"As bitter to Henry's heart," replied the lady, "as the sound of war to many another man. But you have promised, sire. You have promised Montmorency the full powers, and—you have forgotten my petition."

"Well, well," said the king, with a sigh, "what is your petition? I know that you have no private interest in this matter, Diana, You never were a friend to Montmorency."

The lady coloured slightly, but replied at once. "I never was his friend, sire, while haughty fortune smiled upon him, and when he urged measures harsh and injurious to the country upon your majesty; but I will own that I am his friend now, when, bearing his adversity with calmness and with dignity, he would fain persuade your majesty to that which is most necessary for the safety of your realm. So much, indeed, am I his friend, your majesty, now, that I have promised to mingle our families together by the marriage of our sweet Henrietta with his son Damville. Nay, start not, sire, I told you of this before."

"Did you?" exclaimed the king, "did you? I recollect it not. Yet now methinks I do remember something thereof; but I must have been thinking of other things. How can I consent to such a contract?" continued the king. "Recollect, dear lady! Is there not a story current of Damville, like his brother, having bound himself by a secret marriage to an Italian woman?"

"There is some tale of the kind, sire," replied the Duchess of Valentinois, "but I believe without foundation. Even were it so, however, sire," she continued, eagerly, "what matters it, in truth? The connexion has long ceased: the pope will annul the marriage instantly; and, not many months ago, your majesty vowed that you would give an edict rendering clandestine marriages of no effect, and declaring all illegal but such as have the full consent of the nearest surviving relative of both parties, always under your majesty's good pleasure."

"I recollect," replied the king. "The edict was drawn up, but never signed, because, as it deeply affected ecclesiastical matters, it was thought best to have the sanction of our holy father in Rome, and he made manifold objections. But that edict, even had it issued, could not affect the past."

"Your majesty will pardon me," replied the lady. "It had a clause which rendered it retrospective—at least I am so informed, in a letter which I received not many hours ago from your faithful subject the good Count of Meyrand, whom you intrusted to carry the edict to Rome. Had it not that retrospective sense," she added, eagerly, "the hopes and expectations of Montmorency and myself would both be very bitterly disappointed."

The king's brow grew somewhat cloudy, and she added suddenly, "Not for myself, sire! I speak not for myself, and with no reference to this proposed marriage between Henriette de la Mark and the young Damville. But there is one thing for which I know the good constable has long sighed. The duke, his eldest son, is more ambitious than your majesty dreams of."

"Indeed!" said the king, with a slight smile. "What do you mean, fair lady? Is his ambition dangerous to the state?"

"Nay, nay, sire, not so," replied the duchess, with a smile, seeing that the king, while affecting ignorance, in reality understood what she meant. "There is a certain lovely lady bearing the same name as my more humble self, and somewhat near to the affections of your royal person—near, even as a daughter, some men say. She has now wept for some time in widowhood; and the

young Duke of Montmorency, daringly priding himself upon the royal blood that flows also in his veins, has ventured to sigh for this fair lady's hand. But the great impediment is that fatal contract which he signed with Mademoiselle de Pienne, without his father's knowledge and consent."

"I have heard something of this before," said the king, to whom the idea of uniting his natural daughter to the high race of Montmorency was not a little grateful. "But does the constable desire this marriage for his son? If so, why did he not speak long since?"

"Most humbly, sire, does he desire it," replied the lady, "and has commissioned me to sue, by every means of persuasion and entreaty, that your majesty would condescend to grant your consent to the union of his son with Madame de Farnese. He overrates my means, I know; but he does calculate that your majesty has some affection still for me, as well as some regard and esteem for him."

"Much, much for both, dear lady," replied the king; and then, falling into a fit of thought, he added, as if speaking to himself, "This marriage is most unfortunate. But that a rash boy should pay, by a whole life of celibacy and regret, for the idle folly of signing his name to a promise extracted from him by an artful woman, is indeed too much. I would fain see the draught of the edict which was proposed."

"Here is the chancellor, sire, hard by," replied the lady, pointing to a group of three or four persons who had followed her into the hall at her first entrance, but who had remained gathered together in a group at the other end of the chamber, conversing in a low voice. "Here is the chancellor, sire: perhaps he may have a copy of the edict with him now."

"Perchance he may, fair dame," replied the king, laying his hand fondly upon her shoulder, and smiling, at the same time, at the evident preparation of the whole affair, "perchance he may. Ho! my good chancellor, we would fain speak with you here a while."

At the very first word the king addressed to him, a tall and somewhat meager man, in the rich and gorgeous habit of one of the princes of the Roman Church, took a step forward from the rest of the group, and, bowing low, advanced towards the king. He was dark and pale in countenance, and his features were of an Italian cast, while a look of shrewd, calm cunning, which that cast is so well calculated to assume, was the predominant expression.

"His majesty, my Lord Cardinal," said the duchess, addressing the famous John Bertrandi, and having marked well the shrewd smile upon the king's countenance, "his majesty, my Lord Cardinal, would fain see a copy of that edict referring to clandestine marriages, which was drawn up some months ago, but never signed. I besought you this morning to seek for it: has it been found?"

"I have it here, madam," replied the chancellor at once, opening a portfolio which he carried under his arm; "may I present it to your majesty:" and, selecting from among a number of papers which the portfolio contained the one that was required at the moment, he put it into the hands of Henry the Second.

The king took and read it attentively. "And is this, my lord," he demanded, "in all due form, and ready for promulgation?"

"It is, sire," replied the chancellor: "wanting nothing but your majesty's signature and the seal."

Henry paused thoughtfully. "And is it," he asked, "and is it altogether, and in all parts, in strict accordance with the laws of France?"

"*Que veut le roi, veut le loi*," replied the chancellor. "What the king wills, the law wills;" and, with that tyrannical axiom, the attempted enforcement of which, in France, has caused more bloodshed than perhaps any other line that ever was written, John Bertrandi satisfied his conscience in sanctioning that which was contrary to the true spirit of all law.

Henry himself, however, was not satisfied! Although it is so easy for base counsellors—on whom be eternal shame—to find specious arguments in favour of those things which monarchs wish, however evil; and although it certainly was the case that the King of France himself, eagerly desiring the marriage of his natural daughter with the heir of Montmorency, had potent tempters in his own bosom to second the words of Bertrandi, still he was not satisfied that the retrospective act proposed to him was right. He looked first at the cardinal; next turned his eyes for a moment to the countenance of Diana of Poitiers; smiled doubtfully, and then said, "Put it up, my Lord Cardinal, put it up! I will take one day more to consider of it. Nay, look not grieved, fair dame, it shall have favourable consideration. Forget not that both our wishes run in the same way. Now let us speak of other things, Diana. Do you come to our gay hall to-night? Nay, you must not be absent," he added, seeing that the duchess looked down somewhat mournfully; "Henriette de la Mark must dance a gaillarde with her lover Damville."

"But can her lover ever be her husband?" demanded Diana, gazing reproachfully in the king's face; and then adding, with consummate skill in the management of that monarch, "It matters not! Since I have accomplished what I sought for the good of the country, even if I have failed in what I sought for my own pleasure, it matters not! My good Lord Chancellor, the king has been pleased to promise that powers shall be immediately granted to the noble constable of Montmorency to treat with Spain and with the empire for a good and perfect peace. Let it be said that this has been obtained by the solicitations of one who could obtain nothing for herself! but

still, not to her honour let it be, but to the king's, inasmuch as he overcame in his own heart the love of glory and the thirst of victory for the sake of his good land of France. Will you, sire," she continued, "will you not order the chancellor at once to expedite the powers for the good constable? It cannot be done too rapidly."

"Why so?" demanded Henry. "There is, surely, no such haste."

"Because, sire," replied the lady, "there are two great and fortunate men, whose first wish must be to change your majesty's counsels in this regard. The conqueror of Calais may well have a say in matters of peace and war. The Cardinal of Lorraine is still at your majesty's ear. The purpose may evaporate and pass away, war be continued gloriously and long, and France be ruined."

"Nay, nay," replied the king, looking at the duchess reproachfully, "I am not so vacillating in my purposes. The Guises have not the influence you think."

"They have had the influence, sire," replied Diana, boldly, "they have had the influence to delay, for months, that very edict, drawn up by the orders of the king himself, for the security and protection of the French people, and to guard against the evils under which half of the noble families of France now smart, from alliances contracted in wild youth with races of inferior blood."

"The Guises had nothing to do with that—have nothing to do with it," replied the king, impatiently. "What interest have they in this matter? I remember, it is true, the Cardinal of Lorraine did oppose the edict, but upon motives of general justice. What interest had he, or his brother either, for or against the edict?"

"To keep down the house of Montmorency," replied Diana of Poitiers. "To blast the expectations of the young duke, in the hopes which he, perhaps presumptuously, had entertained."

"I believe that it is so, indeed, sire," said the chancellor. "There is much reason to think that the opposition of our holy father the pope was raised up by the instigations of the Cardinal of Lorraine. You are well aware, sire, that a messenger from the cardinal outstripped even the Count de Meyrand, and that the latter gentleman found the holy father already prepared to oppose the edict."

"I will think of the matter," said the king again. "If the opposition be but factious, we will give it no head; but I would fain, before I promulgate the edict, have some cause before me to justify it, in which my own personal wishes, and yours, fair lady, are not interested. I must have time for thought upon it. Now let the doors be opened, for we have kept our court too long without."

The doors of the anteroom were accordingly thrown open. The guards, with their halberds, drew back, and in a few minutes the great hall of reception was crowded with the nobles of France. While the king, with affable condescension, received his subjects, spoke with many of them, and smiled upon all, and the buzz of voices, steps, and rustling garments raised a sort of whispering murmur through the halls, the chancellor was seen speaking, in a low voice, to the Duchess of Valentinois; and some one who was passing heard the latter say, "Not only that, my lord, but the abbey of St. Martin also, if we succeed. The revenues are twelve thousand crowns a year."

The chancellor bowed low, with an humble and obsequious smile, and the duchess turned to speak to some one else.

CHAPTER XV.

Before a mirror of the most beautiful polish that it was possible to conceive, and a toilet table covered with all the most costly essences and perfumes which could be procured from the four quarters of the globe, appeared the Duchess of Valentinois, seated in a large armchair of rich velvet, towards nine o'clock in the evening of the day whereof we have just been speaking. She was clothed in a dressing-gown of silver tissue, and all the stately and somewhat cumbrous apparel of the day had been put off, while, with three maids all busy about her person, she was dressing for the assembly of the court, which was to be held that evening. Nor did she appear in the least the less lovely that she was without any of the additions that dress and ornament sometimes make to beauty; nor, strange to say, did she appear less young when thus unassisted by art, than even when dressed in the most sumptuous mode of the court. The eye of the woman who was combing her long, rich, luxuriant brown hair, detected not one silver thread marking the passing of years among the rest. The teeth were as white and pearly as those of youth. The brow and neck without a furrow ploughed by the hand of time.

On a footstool at the lady's feet sat a very lovely girl, bearing in her countenance a slight resemblance to herself. She was already dressed with great splendour, and sat looking up in the face of the duchess, as if admiring and wondering at the beauty which seemed to set even the great destroyer of all things at defiance.

The duchess, upon her part, looked down at her with pleasure and affection, calling her "Ma belle Henriette," and, parting the hair farther away from her brows with her own hands, she said, "You must look your loveliest to-night, Henrietta; for you must do much in the way of captivation."

The girl smiled playfully, and replied, "No, no! that were bad policy; I would rather not look so lovely now as afterward. His love, at present, I can count upon. But I must try and be more captivating hereafter, to keep it when he is my husband."

The duchess smiled in turn: "Ah, my Henrietta," she said, "the love of man is not so difficult to keep, if woman do but use the same efforts to retain it that she does to win it. We often make men fickle who would be faithful, thinking that to captivate them once is all-sufficient. How many do I daily see, Henrietta, who take all imaginable pains to win affection; who are gay and cheerful, courteous and kind, willing to please and ready to be pleased; robing themselves, as it were, in small graces and sweet allurements; and who, when the object is attained, cast away, at once, every effort; are dull and cheerless, exacting, sullen, and harsh, and then wonder that the won heart is lost more quickly than it was gained! When children catch flies, my Henrietta, they put not down a drop of honey, which the insects can eat and fly away. There must be enough honey to keep them, my child."

"It is a lesson that I will remember," replied Henriette de la Mark. "But, as I have always thought, dear lady, that it is happiness we seek, and not admiration, I trust I should never have forgotten that the same means must be taken to keep affection that are used to win it. But hark! there are manifold sounds below. Surely the guests are not arriving already?"

The question was soon answered; for, a moment after, one of the female attendants was called to the door, and returned to tell the duchess that two gentleman had arrived in haste, and anxiously desired to speak with her. She turned towards the woman with somewhat of angry scorn in her countenance, asking if they had been told that she was at her toilet. The woman replied in the affirmative; but that they had, nevertheless, urged the important nature of their business.

"Bid them send me their names," replied the duchess, after thinking for a moment. "Meyrand's letter declared that he would soon be here. Perhaps he has come himself."

It was as she thought. But the other name which the servant brought back was that of the Lord of Masseran.

"Bid them wait but a moment," replied the duchess. "I will not be long. Tie up my hair, Laurette, in a large knot. Any how, any how; but be quick."

Then, drawing the dressing-gown more closely round her, and preceded by one of her women bearing a light, she descended to a saloon below, making a sign to Henriette de la Mark to remain till she returned.

Standing near a table in the room which Diana of Poitiers now entered, appeared the tall and graceful Count de Meyrand, and the dark-looking and subtle Marquis of Masseran. Each, to a certain degree, retained his usual aspect, though neither could entirely banish from his countenance the varied emotions which were busy at his heart. Graceful and dignified in demeanour Meyrand still was. Indeed, it was so much a matter of habit with him to act with ease and calm self-possession, that they could never be entirely lost; but still his usual air of indifference was gone, and there was an eager impatience in his eye which marked that strong and busy passions were agitating him within. On the other hand, the look of calm subtlety, which was the reigning expression of the countenance of the Lord of Masseran, but which we have already seen, on more than one occasion, give way to fiercer passions, had now yielded to an expression of restless inquietude, while his eye turned sharp and flashing at every sound.

On the appearance of Madame de Valentinois, the count advanced with signs of low and humble homage, and raised the hand which she proffered him respectfully to his lips. The Lord of Masseran came a step behind, and then a momentary pause took place. It was broken, however, by the duchess herself, who was much too impatient to learn the cause of their sudden arrival to wait till it was explained in the course of conversation.

"Welcome to Paris, Monsieur de Meyrand!" she said. "But say, what is it that brings you here at this hour? It must be business of importance, I am sure."

"Nothing but business of immediate moment, madam, would have induced me thus to trespass upon you," replied the count; "but I have myself arrived within this half hour in the capital. I came, I confess, with some wrongful suspicions of my good friend the Marquis of Masseran here, in regard to the lady of whom I wrote to you. I fancied that he had been instrumental in preventing me from executing my purpose of bringing her with all speed to the presence of the king. His manner, and his solemn assurances, however, madam, both show me that I was mistaken; and it would appear—"

"But stay, stay, Monsieur de Meyrand," said the duchess; "first tell me exactly what is the case, and how you and Monsieur de Masseran are interested in the business. I remember well Mademoiselle de Brienne, of whom you speak, and a sweet girl she was, well fitted to set any cavalier's heart on fire, so that I can easily conceive that yours was touched, Monsieur de Meyrand, with that same flame of love. But, if all friends agree, the lady surely can never have such great objections to yourself as not to be won by less forcible means than those you seem to have been using. I will speak with her: I will see what can be done. Let me thank you, my good lord, for the tidings you sent me concerning the edict: I have turned them this day to good advantage. But still the king is not easily won in this matter."

"By Heaven! madam," replied Meyrand, vehemently, "he must be won, and that right soon, or all

will go wrong with us. But hear me, dearest lady! hear me out. You have a faint and very wrong idea of all this affair. We are all deeply concerned; and, pardon me for saying it, but your own wishes and excellent views are closely and intimately connected with our objects and purposes. You ask for a frank and candid explanation: you shall have it in a very few words. The Lord of Masseran and I are equally, but somewhat differently, interested in this matter. I am moved in some degree, as you are pleased to say, by love. Yes!" he added, "it is so! by love the most strong and passionate; and yet, I know not why or how, but something very like hatred mingles with it: deep and bitter indignation at having been made the sport of a mere girl, and determination to force her to be mine or die—"

He paused and bit his lip, and a shade of dissatisfaction came over the brow of Diana of Poitiers as she listened; but the next moment the count went on, with a slight sneer.

"The Lord of Masseran is affected otherwise. He, madam, as you know, married the mother of this fair dame; and to this bright Isabel descend, at that mother's death, certain fair estates close to the frontier line of France and Savoy."

"I understand, I understand," replied Diana of Poitiers, interrupting him. "The Count of Meyrand may be easy in his dealings about those estates, if he but obtain the hand of the fair lady. Is it not so, my good lords?"

"Something of the kind, madam," replied the count.

"A treaty of partition! ha?" continued the lady. "Now for the obstacle, and for the manner in which this affects me?"

"The obstacles are somewhat difficult to be encountered, madam," joined in the Lord of Masseran, "especially as this noble count is somewhat of a suspicious nature. But, to make a long tale short, madam, there was, it seems, in years long past, a promise made by the old Count of Brienne that his daughter should marry a certain young nobleman named Bernard de Rohan. That promise was foolishly committed to writing; but I hold that it was of course conditional, and requires to be confirmed by the consent of the mother. The young gentleman we speak of has been long warring with the armies in Italy; but, called thence, as I believe, by the young lady herself, who has a marvellous love for her own way, he appeared in Savoy some short time ago. I absented myself for a few days from my own home, making a pretence of coming to Paris, in order to see what would take place. But, although I had good information of all that passed, what between the young lady's wit and the youth's impudence, they had very nearly won the race. Myself and Monsieur de Meyrand, here, surprised them in the very celebration of a clandestine marriage."

"Were they married? Were they married?" demanded the duchess, eagerly; for, whatever be her own views, woman's heart is rarely without interest in a tale of love.

"There was a ring upon the young lady's finger," replied the Marquis of Masseran, while the Count de Meyrand stood silent and bit his lip; "farther we know not."

"What did you do next?" exclaimed the lady, with an impatient look, which neither of her two companions thought very favourable to their cause.

"Why," replied the Lord of Masseran, "we separated them, of course; and I carried the young lady some way through the mountains, arranging, in fact, a little sort of drama or mystery with my good friend the count, wherein he played the part of deliverer, rescued the young lady from my hands, and, according to our agreement, was bringing her here to Paris, in the trust that you, from wise motives which the count knew you to possess, would support the right of the mother to dispose of her daughter's hand to whom she pleased."

The marquis, in delivering this account, had paused and hesitated several times, and Diana of Poitiers had remarked that he avoided carefully all mention of the after-fate of Bernard de Rohan.

"What has become," she asked at length, interrupting him, and fixing her eye full upon his face, "what has become of the young Baron de Rohan, sir?"

The Lord of Masseran turned his look to the Count de Meyrand without answering; but the duchess went on sternly and impetuously, "I insist upon knowing, sir, what was done in regard to Monsieur de Rohan? You surprised him at the very altar, you say! You have gone too far not to say more!"

"Why, of course, madam, it was necessary to separate them," replied the Count de Meyrand. "Monsieur de Rohan was carried into the chateau of my friend, Monsieur de Masseran, who kindly and liberally undertakes to provide the young gentleman with board and lodging for a certain time. No evil was done him, though the very act that he was performing might well have justified more violence than was used."

"In short, sir," said the duchess, addressing the Lord of Masseran sternly, "in short, sir, you have imprisoned one of the king's very best officers and most faithful subjects—the right hand of the Maréchal de Brissac—and one who has rendered himself famous in the wars of Italy, and without whose assistance the difficulties which surround the marshal in Piedmont would be terribly augmented."

"Madam," replied the Count de Meyrand, with a slight sneer, which no prudence could repress,

at the reputed tenderness of the duchess towards Brissac, "had we known that Monsieur de Rohan was so absolutely necessary to your graceful friend, we would have sent him under a strong escort across the mountains, for time was all that we wanted."

"He must speedily be set at liberty," answered the duchess; "for I cannot have it said that anything in which I take a share is connected with a transaction so detrimental to the service of the king; and now, Monsieur de Meyrand, show me in what way you think I am interested in this affair."

"Why, madam, you must clearly see—" said the count.

"It matters not what I clearly see, my lord," exclaimed the duchess, interrupting him. "Give me your own showing of the matter."

"Why thus it is," replied the count. "Since I had the honour of bearing to Rome the copy of an edict proposed by the king, you have three or four times done me the great favour of writing to me, and consulting with me in regard to the opposition made to that edict, and to the best means of inducing the king to promulgate it. Now, madam, one clause in that edict annuls all existing marriages which have been contracted without the consent of parents or guardians; and you did me the honour to reveal to me that such a clause was absolutely necessary to the proposed marriage of the Duke of Montmorency and the king's daughter, Madame de Farnese, and to that between the constable's second son, the Duc Damville, and your fair relation, Mademoiselle de la Mark. That clause is equally necessary to me and to Monsieur de Masseran, in order that, the clandestine marriage of Mademoiselle de Brienne with the Baron de Rohan being annulled, she may, with her mother's consent, give her hand to me. Thus, madam, what I pray and beseech you to do is, as the views of both tend absolutely to the same point, to give us the most zealous aid and co-operation in persuading the king to promulgate this edict at once."

Diana of Poitiers paused for a moment in intense thought ere she answered, while the two noblemen stood gazing upon her in silence. "I will do so," she replied at length; "but, in the first place, Monsieur de Rohan must be set at liberty."

"Madam, that is impossible," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran. "Were he set at liberty, all our plans and prospects are at an end together. His very first act would be to seek this rash, imprudent girl, who thinks herself fully justified by her father's written consent; and, depend upon it, he would soon find means of discovering her, though we cannot."

"Why, in the name of Heaven, where is she?" demanded the duchess. "Why, you said but now, Monsieur de Masseran, that you left her in the count's hands, that he might bring her to Paris."

"Ay, but she escaped from his hands, madam," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Whether the count is quite innocent of all knowledge of female wiles, or whether he had been somewhat harsh and importunate with her, I cannot tell; but at the end of the very first day's journey she contrived to escape from him, how or when no one can discover. I had come on to Paris in order to justify the detention of Bernard de Rohan, and, in fact, to give an account of my whole conduct to the king; but the good count, thinking that I must have some hand in the lady's flight, followed me hither as rapidly as possible, without taking sufficient time to inquire after her on the spot."

The duchess heard him to an end, but her mind had run on far before her; and she was gazing thoughtfully upon the ground, with various feelings contending more strongly in her bosom than her two companions imagined. Bernard de Rohan, she well knew, was the dearest friend of one who certainly possessed her highest esteem—perhaps her highest affection—the Maréchal de Brissac, and she loved not to take any share in injuring or grieving him. We must say even more. Not being naturally of a harsh or unkindly disposition, she was anything but disposed to abet such machinations against two people who loved each other; and she could not but feel at her heart that there existed between the Lord of Masseran and the Count de Meyrand a dark and shameless conspiracy for frustrating the intentions of the Count de Brienne, and thwarting the affections of his daughter. All these considerations opposed themselves to the very thought of aiding them in their purposes; but yet her own views, her own dearest objects, were to be obtained by the same means which tended to promote theirs; and she clearly saw that, if without exposing, as she might do, the real views and purposes of the parties concerned, she were to bring this case before the king as a new instance of a marriage in opposition to the parent's consent, she would instantly obtain the promulgation of the edict which was so necessary to her own designs. She paused, then, and thought, considering, in the first place, the opposing motives which led her this way and that, and afterward asking herself whether she could not combine the two; whether it was not possible to use the fact of this clandestine marriage in order to obtain the king's signature to the edict, without ultimately separating the hands of Bernard de Rohan and Isabel de Brienne. A few moments convinced her that she could do so. The edict would, of course, annul their marriage; but then she thought, "the great services of this young cavalier, the friendship of Brissac, the support of Montmorency, the father's written consent, will surely be enough to obtain for him afterward the hand of this fair girl from the king himself; at least, my management shall render these things sufficient;" and, trusting that it would be so, she resolved upon that evil policy of employing bad means in the hope of directing them to good results; a policy which has seldom, if ever, yet failed to end in misery and ruin.

"What says the mother?" demanded the duchess, after this long pause.

"Oh, she says the same as myself, of course," replied the Lord of Masseran.

"Of course!" replied the lady, her lip curling slightly as she spoke. "I had forgotten! Is she in Paris?"

"She is here," replied the Lord of Masseran; "and not only ready, but eager, to declare that this marriage has been against her will."

"Indeed!" said the duchess: "and the brother? There is a youth I have seen about the court, a gay, thoughtless, high-spirited lad, who gained some renown under this very Baron de Rohan: what says he to the marriage?"

"Oh! he is too young and thoughtless," replied the Count de Meyrand. "He has been asked nothing on the subject, though there is reason to fear, we must not deny, that he would give his voice in favour of his old companion."

"But one thing is clear and certain," added the Lord of Masseran. "His consent was not asked to the marriage; therefore it was without his approbation and against the mother's."

"So far so good," replied Diana of Poitiers. "Now mark me, gentlemen, you must leave the whole conduct of this business to me; and if you pledge yourselves to act exactly as I am about to dictate, I, on my part, will pledge myself to obtain the promulgation of an edict annulling this marriage within twelve hours from this time."

A glad smile lighted up the face of the Count de Meyrand. But the Lord of Masseran asked in a low, sweet tone, "Pray what are the conditions, madam?"

"These," replied the duchess at once. "And remember, gentlemen, that I am one who will not be trifled with; so that, if you fail to perform exactly your part, you shall find your whole schemes fall about your heads, and perhaps crush you in the ruins thereof. The very moment that I have obtained that edict, Monsieur de Masseran, without the loss of a single hour, you shall depart from Paris, and set this young cavalier, Bernard de Rohan, at liberty. Do not interrupt me! This is indispensable. You can leave the marchioness behind. In the next place, to guard against the evil consequences which I see you anticipate, you shall engage the young Count of Brienne to set off instantly in search of his sister, in order to bring her at once to Paris to the presence of the king. You, Monsieur de Meyrand, shall not make the slightest attempt to seek for her yourself, nor shall you at present quit Paris. But this young gentleman, instructed that this edict annuls the clandestine marriage, and is upon the very point of being signed, shall go as the guardian of his sister's honour, and, at the same time, as the friend of Monsieur de Rohan, to bring her safely back to the protection of her mother and of his majesty. His own sense of what is right, under such circumstances, will be a sufficient guarantee that he do not suffer his sister to remain an hour with a man who is not her husband; and now—"

"But, madam," said the Count de Meyrand, "if you will pardon me for thus rudely interrupting you, I would point out one slight obstacle to the arrangement you propose, which renders it absolutely impossible, and may make it expedient that I should go myself. Henry of Brienne is at Grenoble, I understand."

"Well, then, sir," said the duchess, imperiously, "some one else must go. *You* must not! Were the other the lowest valet in my household, he is more fit than you are to bring this lady to Paris."

The Lord of Masseran had remained silent till the duchess's answer was made, but he then joined in the conversation again, in one of his sweetest tones, saying, "The count is mistaken, dear madam; Henry of Brienne is in Paris. He thought of going to Grenoble, but did not go. He was with his sweet mother not an hour ago."

"Well, then, hear me!" said the duchess. "Do you undertake, Monsieur de Meyrand, not to set out upon this search at all?" The count laid his hand upon his heart, bowed with mock humility, and replied, "Who ever yet resisted your commands? Nay, I am not jesting! I give you my promise, madam."

"Then, my Lord of Masseran," continued the duchess, "all I have to say is this: Wait here for five minutes till I write a note above. Give it to Henry of Brienne: afford him every direction and hint for finding his sister, and bringing her at once to Paris. As soon as he has set out, come with your fair lady to the palace to offer your complaint regarding this clandestine marriage to his majesty. I will take care that you shall have an immediate hearing, and I pledge myself that the edict shall be signed this night. To-morrow morning, at daybreak, you depart alone, posthaste, to liberate Bernard de Rohan. Is it not so?" and she fixed her keen eye firm upon him.

"It is, madam," replied the Lord of Masseran, better pleased at the arrangement than she knew.

"As for you, Meyrand," she added, with a smile, "take my advice: come also to the court, appear totally unconcerned in this whole business, and press your suit upon the king, if you so please, when the edict is signed."

"A woman's policy is always the best, madam," replied the count, "and in this instance I shall follow it to the letter."

"I must now leave you," said the lady, "for I am already late. Wait here for the note, and then let us to our several parts with all speed."

In less than the time that she had specified, a servant brought in an open note, which contained these words:

"Diana, duchess of Valentinois, to Henry, count of Brienne, greeting:

"These are to inform you that your sister Isabel de Brienne has contracted a clandestine marriage with Bernard, baron de Rohan; and that, inasmuch as this night an edict will be signed annulling all marriages of the sort, it is absolutely necessary to your own honour and to that of your sister that you should immediately proceed to find and bring her to Paris till the farther pleasure of the king be known. The Baron de Rohan having been arrested the moment that the marriage was celebrated, will be set at liberty immediately; but it is requisite that you should prevent all communication between him and your sister until it be authorized by his majesty."

The Lord of Masseran made no scruple of reading the contents and showing them to the Count de Meyrand, who marked them with a smile, and adding, "We must make quite sure of the youth, however," led the way from the apartments of the duchess.

CHAPTER XVI.

In the great hall of the Louvre, the princes, the nobles, and the ladies of France—all who had a right, from their rank and station, to be present at the great festivals of the court, and all who could by any means obtain an invitation from the king himself—were assembled before the hour of ten at night, on that occasion to which reference has been made in the last chapter. The monarch himself had not yet appeared; but one of those services which Henry principally required from his great officers was to entertain with affability and kindness those whom the etiquette of his court obliged him to keep waiting; and, on the night of which we speak, the famous Marquis de Vieilleville in fact, though not ostensibly, represented the king, and, aided by a number of other gentlemen and officers commissioned so to do, received the court, and endeavoured to make the time of expectation ere the sovereign's arrival pass lightly.

Everything had been done that could be done to give splendour to the apartments, and many of those ornaments and decorations which we attribute to the taste of modern days, but which, in fact, have but come back again in the constant revolutions of fashion, were displayed on this occasion to render the scene of royal festivity bright and exciting. Some of the rooms were blazing with light, and covered with every sort of ornament of gold and silver: rich draperies were hanging from the walls, banners waving over head, garlands festooning the cornices, and music floating on the air. In others, again, by some means, a green hue had been given to the light, and it had been shaded and kept down to a kind of soft twilight by flowers and green branches; while a cool wind found its way in through open casements and well-watered plants, and a stillness reigned upon the air only broken by the far-off sound of the music, the murmur of distant voices, and the sighing of the night air through the gardens.

We shall pause no more, however, on the decorations of that gay scene, inasmuch as so to do would be merely to give description without an object; for we have no reason to assign why the reader should bear any part thereof in mind. It is principally with the great hall we have to do, but more especially still with the people that were in it. Shortly after ten the king himself, with his queen, the famous Catharine de Medicis, several of his children—among whom were three destined to be kings, and two queens of mighty nations—entered the hall, and took his place towards the head of the room.

It was very customary in those times to give the balls of the court in open day; and, though it certainly would strike us as somewhat strange to see dancing take place except by candlelight—unless, indeed, it were upon the greensward, where the smiling look of Nature herself seems to justify and to call for that exuberant life which she first taught in the world's young days—yet then as gay and as merry dances as any that we now behold, took place in the painted saloons, under the somewhat too bright and searching eye of the sun. The whole of that morning, however, had been spent in either business or in festivities of another kind, and the present was one of those more rare occasions selected, as we have said, for a ball at night.

Shortly after the king entered the room, he spoke a few words to the young Count Duilly, then celebrated for his skill and grace in the dance, and he, making his way to the spot where the musicians were placed, communicated to them the orders of the king. What was called the *Danse Royale* was then played; and Henry himself, graceful and distinguished in every sport and exercise, opened the ball in person. Shortly after, another dance was played; and all who were, or believed themselves to be, the most skilful of the court, hastened to figure in the galliarde. Upon the execution of that marvellous performance, the galliarde, however, perhaps the less we say the better; for it is to be acknowledged that the various names of the wonderful steps danced—the desportes, capriolles, turns and returns, fleurettes, close and dispersed gamberottes, &c.—convey as little definite idea of what was really done to our own mind as they would to the minds of most of our readers. It was all very successful, no doubt; and there is much reason to believe, from the account which Monsieur de Vieilleville himself wrote on the occasion, that many a young lady's heart was pierced through and through by the graces of particular cavaliers.

The king himself took part in the dance, as we have said, but it was a dignified part; and, having set the example, he retired from it as speedily as possible. When he had done he looked round, as if searching for some face he had missed, and his eye soon fell upon the fair Duchess of

Valentinois, whom he had not beheld before; for, to say the truth, she had just entered, taking advantage of the general movement round the galliarde to come in without attracting much attention. Her countenance bore an expression of such unusual gravity, that Henry himself, ere he resumed the place in the saloon where he usually stood on such occasions, paused and spoke to her; first playfully scolding Henrietta de la Mark for not having joined the dancers, and then asking the duchess, in a lower tone, if anything had gone amiss.

Diana smiled, and replied, "No, sire, nothing exactly amiss; but I have had visitors this evening at an unusual hour, and they have been pressing me to obtain for them an audience of your majesty on this very night, regarding matters of much importance."

"Nay, why should that cloud your fair brow?" said the king, in the same low tone: "I will give them audience ere I go to bed, if my so doing will please you, bright queen of night. If they can put it off, however, let them come to-morrow, and your name shall open the doors of the cabinet to them, be they the lowliest in the land."

"That they are not, sire," replied Diana. "They are high enough to present themselves here this night even unbidden; but I fear that to-morrow will not do; for, upon your majesty's reply to them, a courier must depart at once for the South. Still let me say, ere they come forward—for I see them entering now—that it is not their requested audience that makes me somewhat grave; no, nor their pressing for it at an unseasonable hour, but it is that they come to urge upon your majesty the selfsame suit I urged this morning; and, as I then saw that for the first time I was doubted and suspected of art, in trying to lead rather than to argue with my king, it may now be thought I have some share in their coming, when, Heaven is my witness, it could take no one more by surprise than myself."

"Nay, but what is all this?" demanded the king, in a soothing tone; and then, suddenly turning to Mademoiselle de la Mark, he exclaimed, "Lo! Henriette—belle Henriette! here comes Damville, all love and ambergris, to claim your fair hand—for the dance. Go with him, lady! Now, Diana, what is this that agitates you thus? Faith, I suspect you not, and never have suspected. I did but smile this morning at your eagerness, though natural enough, and to see how we kings find soft leading, and all things prepared to bring us to that which wise or fair counsellors judge is for our good; it is the vice of power, my Diana, it is the vice of power! As men by years reach childhood again, so kings by power fall into weakness. But that matters not; your wishes were for the best; and, if there was a little management in the matter, there could be but small offence."

"With one so placable as you are, sire," rejoined the duchess, gazing in his face with a smile; "but the matter is this: There came to me this night the Lord of Masseran—one of your majesty's faithful adherents in Savoy—beseeching that I would obtain for him and for his fair lady immediate audience of your majesty on matters that brook no delay. He, judging wrongly that I had some little credit or influence with you, besought me to urge upon your majesty the immediate promulgation of the edict, so long delayed and often spoken of, concerning clandestine marriages, and besought me to tell you the cause of his application. All this I refused to do, telling him that on the subject of the edict I had already done my best; that I had pleaded for myself; that I had even pleaded in behalf of what I thought your majesty's best interest; and that, having done so, I could not say a word for any other being on the earth. Thus, sire, all I have to request is, that you would hear him and judge for yourself."

The expression of Henry's face while she was speaking puzzled not a little Diana of Poitiers. The king's brow became for a time dark and heavy, and his eye flashed angrily. But then, again, when he saw that the lady seemed somewhat alarmed by his look, he smiled upon her kindly, as if to mark that any feelings of dissatisfaction which he experienced were not directed towards herself. His real feelings were explained, however, immediately, by his replying in the same low tone, "He is, I believe, a most consummate villain, this Lord of Masseran; and there is good reason to suppose he has been playing false both to France and Savoy. He has the very look of a handsome wolf," the king continued, turning his frowning brow to the part of the room towards which the eyes of Diana of Poitiers directed his in search of the Lord of Masseran: "I will speak with him presently, however. Let him be taken into the white chamber, next to that in which they serve the confectionery. Send likewise for Bertrandi. He is in my closet. I will join you there in a quarter of an hour. A guard, too, may be wanted before we have done. So, as you pass, bid Beaujolais keep near the door."

Thus saying, the king turned away and occupied himself with other matters, speaking to the most distinguished persons present, and laughing gayly with many a fair dame as he passed along. The duchess remained for a short time where he had left her, not only for the purpose of preventing her long conversation with the king from connecting itself in the suspicions of those around with whatever might take place regarding the Lord of Masseran, but also because she had some doubts as to whether she should herself be present or not at the interview between the Savoyard nobleman and the king. Henry had certainly implied that she was to be present. But she had doubts and fears in regard to meddling too much with the matter; and, if she could have trusted to the Lord of Masseran, she certainly would have stayed away.

Trust him, however, she could not; for there was something in his whole aspect, demeanour, and tone which at once inspired suspicion. Indeed, he did not try to avoid it; for, looking upon skill, cunning, and acuteness as the greatest of human qualities, he made no pretence whatever to either frankness or sincerity. She still hesitated, however, when the Count de Meyrand, dressed in the most splendid, and, at the same time, the most tasteful habit that perhaps the whole court that night displayed, passed by her as he retired from the dance. He bowed as he did so with

lowly reverence, but, at the same time, with a meaning glance of the eye towards the spot where the Lord of Masseran stood.

"I must watch what takes place myself," thought the duchess: "I will take no part in the matter unless there be great need; but I will watch all that is said and done."

She accordingly drew herself gradually back from the circle, and, choosing a moment when some change in the dance produced a momentary confusion, she retired to the room which the king had named.

A minute or two after, an attendant passed through the ballroom and whispered a few words to the Lord of Masseran, who instantly followed the servant, accompanied by a lady who had continued to stand beside him since his entrance, but to whom he had not addressed more than one or two words during the evening. She was a tall and handsome woman, and in her countenance there was certainly some degree of resemblance to the fair Isabel de Brienne. The features, however, though still fine, were all larger and harsher except the eyes, which were small and of a different colour from those of Isabel, being of a keen, eager black. She was pale, and looked somewhat out of health; and, mingling with an air of sternness which sat upon her brow, there was an expression of anxiety and grief which made her countenance a painful one to look upon. It seemed to bear written upon it, in very legible lines, the history of a haughty spirit broken.

When the Lord of Masseran and his wife reached the chamber to which the royal servant conducted them, the Duchess of Valentinois was there alone. She received them affably, but with somewhat of regal state, and begged the marchioness to seat herself, acting in all things as if the palace were her own.

"Is that note for me, Monsieur de Masseran?" she inquired, after having announced that the king would join them in a few minutes, and asked some questions of common courtesy regarding the health of the Marchioness of Masseran. "Is that note which you hold in your hand for me?"

"It is, madam," replied the other. "It is from Monsieur de Brienne, whom we left booted and spurred, with his horses at the door, ready to mount at a moment's notice."

The duchess took the note and read. "Madame," it ran, "I am ready promptly to set out for the frontier of Savoy as soon as my errand is clearly ascertained. My dear sister Isabel is either the wife of my earliest friend Bernard de Rohan, to whom she was promised by my father, and to whom it is my first wish she should be united, or the marriage which I understand has taken place is null. If she be his wife, Heaven forbid that I should make even an attempt to separate them, which I am sure De Rohan would instantly and justly resist. If, however, the king, by an edict which I must not dare to impugn, has thought fit, as I am told, to declare such marriages void, whether past or future, it, of course, becomes my duty immediately to seek my sister, and to keep her with me till such time as we obtain his majesty's permission for her final union to my friend. But I must first be positively certified that such an edict has been signed. If I can show this to De Rohan, I know him too well to doubt his conduct; but, if I cannot show it to him, I must not and dare not attempt measures towards him which he would infallibly resist. At the same time, madam, let me tell you, with all respect, that I find I have been trifled with; that false information regarding De Rohan's movements has been given me, in order to prevent my joining him at Grenoble, as he wished; and that I am certain my sister Isabel has been driven to give her hand thus suddenly to her promised husband by circumstances of which we are not aware."

"More good sense than I gave him credit for," said the duchess, musing.

"May I be permitted, madam, to see the note which has excited your admiration?" inquired the Lord of Masseran, with a quiet sneer.

"Nay, Monsieur de Masseran," answered the duchess, "it was not written for the public benefit."

"And, doubtless," continued the Lord of Masseran, "as the young gentleman was not in the sweetest of moods, it was not written for my private benefit either?"

"He never mentions your name, my lord," replied the duchess, "nor speaks of you in any way. But here comes my good lord the chancellor: the king will not be long."

Her prediction was verified, for Bertrandi had scarcely entered the room when Henry himself appeared, accompanied by his son, afterward Francis the Second, and followed by a page, who placed himself at the door to prevent any one from entering without permission. Every one present drew back as the king appeared, and bowed low; while, with a frowning brow, he crossed the cabinet, and seated himself at a small table. The dauphin then took a place upon his father's right hand, and the chancellor, after a deprecatory bow to the Duchess of Valentinois, advanced to the king's left.

"I grieve, madam," said Henry, addressing the Marchioness de Masseran, in a courteous tone, "I grieve to see you apparently so much altered in health. It would seem that the air of Savoy—that pure, fine air—suits not your constitution. We must keep you more with us in Paris."

"I have been suffering some anxiety and grief, sire," replied the lady, while the eyes of the Lord of Masseran were bent keenly and fiercely upon her.

"Most sorry am I to hear it," replied the king. "We believed that, in providing for you so noble and

high a husband as the Lord of Masseran, we should have moved grief and anxiety from you altogether. We trust that we have not been deceived in this noble lord," continued the king, gazing sternly upon the Savoyard.

"Your majesty has, I believe, been mistaken in what this dear and excellent lady said," replied the Lord of Masseran; "I discovered no charge against myself in her words. Was there any, dear lady?"

"Oh, no," replied the lady, quickly, and, it seemed, fearfully; "none, none; I spoke alone of the grief and anxiety which, as you know, I came hither to lay before his majesty, if we were fortunate enough to find audience."

"Then I will beg you, madam," said the king, "to lay it before me at once, and fully, confiding in me entirely as you would in a brother, and remembering that, whoever be the offender, you have in the king one who can protect as well as punish, and who will protect wherever he sees wrong offered or evil suffered."

The lady gave a momentary glance at her husband, as if of timid inquiry. It was like a child saying its lesson, and looking up for a word of direction or encouragement. "I thank your majesty much," she said, "for your gracious promise, and I come to you with full confidence, feeling that you will grant me redress for what I consider a great injury. My complaint is this: that a gentleman of high rank and station, connected with some of the highest families of this realm, a distinguished soldier also, and one who has hitherto borne a high character—has, while pretending to carry on the war in Piedmont, and commanding certain bodies of your majesty's troops—has, I say, clandestinely carried away my daughter, Isabel de Brienne, during the temporary absence of my husband, Monsieur de Masseran. He had even induced a priest to perform the marriage ceremony between him and her, when the fortunate return of my husband at the very moment enabled him to seize them at the altar. I say, sire, that this is my complaint, and for this I beg redress; the more so, indeed, inasmuch as this very gentleman who has so acted was well aware that your majesty had expressed yourself strongly against such clandestine marriages, and had even proposed an edict declaring them void and of no effect."

"Pray who is this gentleman?" demanded the king, in a stern tone. "By your showing, madam, he has acted bitterly wrong, and, unless some extenuations appear, he shall be most severely punished; nor shall that punishment be the less on account of his rank, distinction, and services, as he could neither plead ignorance, inexperience, nor folly."

The features of the Lord of Masseran relaxed into a dark smile; and the lady replied, "His name, sire, was once dear and familiar to me and mine—it is Bernard, baron de Rohan."

"What! our good friend and daring captain?" exclaimed the king; "this is indeed too bad. Monsieur de Rohan ought to have known that he had nothing to do but to apply to ourself, not only at once to obtain our royal permission, but also to induce us to use every argument with such of the lady's family as might be opposed to his wishes."

"Sire," replied the lady, taking advantage of a pause in the king's answer, "this gentleman has acted ill in all respects. He neither put confidence in your majesty nor in me; he never even applied for my consent; he has never seen me since he crossed the Alps."

"This is altogether amiss," replied the king. "You say they are separated," he continued, in a musing tone; "where is the young lady? I would fain see and speak with her."

Such communication would not have suited the purposes of the Lord of Masseran, even had it been possible to produce Isabel of Brienne; and now, having seen his wife make her formal complaint exactly as he could have wished, he took the rest of the business out of her hands, fearful lest she might make some rash admission. "Alas! sire," he said, "it is impossible that your majesty's commands can be complied with; not only is the lady not with us in Paris, but she has escaped from the hands of those into whose charge I gave her. Where she is, and what doing, we know not; and it is under these circumstances that we come to your majesty, not so much for redress as for aid."

"This complicates the matter, indeed," said Henry; "have you, then, reason to suppose that she has rejoined him?"

"No, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran, "not so at all; for I ventured to take a step which—although, of course, on my own territories I am free and independent, as lord and sovereign—I would not have done, had I not been aware that your majesty is as just as you are powerful. I found one of your majesty's subjects upon my territories committing an unlawful act, for which I would have punished any of my own vassals with death, and I ventured—"

"You did not kill him?" exclaimed the king, starting.

"Oh no, sire, no," replied the Savoyard; "I never dreamed of such a thing. I ventured to arrest and imprison him, in order to prevent the evil being carried farther; and, having done so, I set out immediately to cast myself at your majesty's feet, to inform you exactly how I had acted, to beg your forgiveness for having imprisoned one of your subjects, and to place the decision of his fate entirely in the hands of your majesty."

"You have acted well and wisely," replied the king; "and, such being the case, you shall not only have aid, but redress. The edict which renders such clandestine marriages null and void shall be

signed this instant, and shall be registered by our Parliament to-morrow. My lord the cardinal, we trust that you come as well prepared this afternoon as you were this morning. Have you the edict with you now?"

"I have not, your majesty," replied Bertrandi; "but it is in your majesty's cabinet."

"Let it be brought instantly," said the king. "This new example of the fault which it is destined to amend, not only fully justifies the act, but also peremptorily requires the clause which remedies the evil just committed. Nor shall this be the only punishment which shall fall upon the head of him who has so far neglected what was due to himself and to us. He must be summoned to Paris immediately; and, in the mean time, means must also be taken to bring this refractory girl also to our court. Be quick, good cardinal, for we must not be long absent from the hall."

The dauphin listened to his father in silence, and with an air of deep reverence. "I trust, sire," he said, at length, as soon as he perceived that the king, having given his orders, was turning once more to address the Marquis of Masseran, "I trust that there are some circumstances in the case of Monsieur de Rohan which may mitigate your majesty's anger when known. It seems to me that Monsieur de Masseran has not been completely explicit on one or two subjects; may I presume to ask him a few questions in your majesty's presence?"

"Certainly, Francis," replied the king. "It gives me always pleasure to see you exercise your judgment and powers of mind on subjects of importance."

The young prince bowed with an ingenuous blush, while the Marquis of Masseran turned a shade paler than usual, and bent down his eyes upon the ground before the boy of sixteen, who now advanced a step to question him. "You tell us, Monsieur le Marquis," he said, "that the Baron de Rohan did not even apply for the consent of your fair lady: may I ask if he ever presented himself at your palace, or chateau, or whatever it may be, for the purpose of so doing?"

"It was the marchioness who said so, not I," replied the Lord of Masseran: "I was absent at the time."

"At what time?" demanded the prince, sharply; and, seeing the Savoyard hesitate, he added, "Did or did not Monsieur de Rohan come to your gates? and was he or was he not refused admission?"

"I believe he did," said the Marquis of Masseran, "I believe he did present himself at the gates when I was absent."

"He himself believed that you were not absent," replied the youth, with royal sternness, while the king felt no little surprise to find that his son had so intimate a knowledge of the facts in question; and the Marquis of Masseran, still more surprised, concealed his astonishment less skilfully than the monarch. "On my word, your highness," he said, "on my life, I was absent."

"But yet, Monsieur de Masseran," continued the prince, "you were perfectly well aware that Monsieur de Rohan presented himself at your gates, demanding to speak with yourself, in the first place, and then, in your absence, with this fair lady your wife, who certainly was within the chateau; and yet you suffered her—unconsciously upon her part, no doubt—to lead his majesty to believe that her approbation had not been sought and was utterly contemned. This was not right, sir, for it was misleading the king."

"You speak well and wisely, Francis," said his father: "go on, my dear boy, go on, if you have anything more to ask."

"One or two things more, may it please your majesty," he replied, with a look of pride in his father's approbation, but keeping his eyes still fixed upon the Lord of Masseran. "My next question is: as the young lady has a brother, who is her next male relation, did he or did he not give his consent to the marriage of Monsieur de Rohan with his sister?"

"In regard to that, sir, I can say nothing," replied the Lord of Masseran. "Monsieur de Brienne, your highness, is not under my charge and guidance. All I have to say is, that his mother most positively refused her consent."

"It might be more straightforward, sir," replied the prince, "to say whether, to your knowledge, Monsieur de Brienne consented or not."

"I think, monseigneur," said Diana of Poitiers, taking a step forward, "I think I may reply fully to your question, which Monsieur de Masseran seems not inclined to do. Henry de Brienne always has approved of his sister's marriage to Bernard de Rohan, and Monsieur and Madame de Masseran are amply aware of the fact."

"I do not deny it," said Madame de Masseran, sharply. "He is a headstrong and unruly boy."

"One question more," said the prince, "and I have done. Is not Bernard de Rohan justified, to a certain degree, in that which he has done, by a written promise of Mademoiselle de Brienne's hand, given to him by her own father shortly before the good count's death? I ask you, madam, is not this the case?"

"It is the case that he has such a promise," replied Madame de Masseran, in the same shrewish tone, "but not that he is justified by it, your highness. That promise never had either my consent or approbation; though the late Monsieur de Brienne, who was his guardian and brought him up, was foolishly fond of this boy, and thought that he was everything great and noble, I had always

different views for my daughter, and never either directly or indirectly countenanced that promise."

"I am in no way interested in this business, sire," said the dauphin, turning towards his father, "not being personally acquainted in the slightest degree with Monsieur de Rohan; but I thought it necessary to ask these few questions in your majesty's presence, in consequence of information I had received in a somewhat circuitous manner. Having thus far elicited the truth, which was at first evidently concealed from you, your majesty's wisdom must decide the rest—"

"This is the edict, sire," said the Cardinal Bertrandi, re-entering the chamber; "it wants but your royal signature and the great seal. May I offer you the pen?" and, thus saying, he spread the parchment on the table before the king.

Henry took the pen, paused for a moment, and then turned his eyes upon the Duchess of Valentinois. She looked down upon the ground, however, and uttered not a word. The king dipped the pen in the ink and wrote his name at the bottom of the edict. The chancellor countersigned it, and raised it from the table.

"Now, Diana," said Henry, in a low voice, turning to the duchess, "what think you?"

"That your majesty has done perfectly right," replied the lady, in the same low tone. "Not that this poor Bernard de Rohan, it would appear, is really to blame."

"I do not know," replied the king, "I do not know; but we shall soon see. The question must be inquired into," he added, in a louder voice. "I will hear all parties, and then decide. For the present, the marriage is annulled. Monsieur de Masseran, hasten back to Savoy, and instantly set the Baron de Rohan at liberty. Let some one proceed immediately—her brother will be the best, the fittest, the only fit person. Let him immediately proceed to seek for Mademoiselle de Brienne, and bring her to Paris without loss of time. You, Monsieur de Masseran, will command De Rohan, in our name, to present himself in the capital within fourteen days from the date of his liberation by your hand. You will do well also to come hither yourself as speedily as may be; for our good friend Brissac, who is somewhat of a sanguinary person to deal with, has conceived an objection to the frequent passing of couriers through your part of the country. It were well to keep out of Brissac's way. My good Lord Cardinal, see that all things requisite be done, and also that the edict be duly registered in the Parliament to-morrow. Come, Francis, come. We shall have all the world marvelling at our absence."

CHAPTER XVII.

What would life be without its varieties?

I forget where I have met with it—whether in the works of Kant and his disciples, or in the thoughts and imaginations attributed to Zoroaster, or in some of the lucubrations of Plato, or in the fragments of Epicurus, whose doubtful philosophy has left the world at war as to his tendency towards good or evil, virtue or vice: certainly it was not in Pyrrho, who had nothing good in him, or in Confucius, the great teacher of the tea-growing nation—I forget where I have met with it; but among the many speculations, wise and foolish, learned and ignorant, fanciful and earthly, with which we children of the lower sphere from time to time have amused ourselves, sometimes reverently, sometimes impiously, sometimes with humility, sometimes audaciously, there is to be found a theory—perhaps it merely deserves the name of an hypothesis—which attributes to the Deity, almost as an attribute, but, at all events, as a necessity, the endless variety of creations, and a satisfaction, if we may use the term, in viewing the infinite multiplicity of his own works.

Without presuming, however, to raise our eyes to scan things that are hidden from us, or to reason upon any attributes of God except such as he has deigned to reveal to us; without daring to lay down limits to infinity, or, like the stupid idolaters of ancient times, the Greek and Roman inventors of the most barbarous worship that ever, perhaps, was devised, who, after making to themselves gods, and clothing those gods with all the most infamous of human passions, ended by enchaining their very deities themselves, under the law of a necessity which bound all things, and left Godhead as impotent as humanity; without such audacity or such foolishness, we may well look round upon the universe exposed to our eyes, and, seeing that God has been pleased to render his creations infinite, we may at least feel certain that the varieties which he has displayed are in themselves excellent and beautiful, each deriving propriety from the other, and all forming a grand scheme in which the diversity of the parts is only one admirable feature. Our own eyes and our own senses, our own hearts and our own feelings, convince us of it every moment; and, from the glorious mountain to the minute blade of grass which grows by its side, from the boundless ocean to the small, bright, glistening drop that dashes in spray upon the rocks that bound it, every variety contributes visibly to our delight, and to the beauty of the wonderful scene in which we dwell.

Variety, then, forms a part of enjoyment; but let it not be supposed that the admission of this fact—derived, as we derive it, from the works of God himself—can ever have a tendency to produce evil, to generate the licentious desire of multiplying and changing pleasures, or to create the fickle and fluttering inconstancy which ranges dissatisfied from object to object. In the works of God, though the varieties be infinite, and the contrasts sometimes immense, there is still a

general and beautiful harmony, a fine and exact adaptation of every part to the other. Each change and each variation has its end and object, each step has its purpose, and each contrast ends in some grand result.

By the same rules, however, must the search for variety be guided, as the condition of producing happiness. Means of varying our pleasures, almost to infinity, have been given us by the Almighty, within the limits which he has himself assigned to us. The enjoyment of His own works, the contemplation of His goodness, the devotion to His service, were alone sufficient, were man rightly wise, to afford more varied exercise to the human mind than would fill many a long life, even if the Almighty had not loaded our pathway with opportunities of a thousand other gratifications, innocent in themselves, and endless in their combinations. In fact, the variety which we seek in our way through life must be framed, not partially, but entirely, upon the model of that which we see in creation. Each new endeavour, each alteration of pursuit, must have its high object, and in itself be good; and, as we and our existence are but parts of a great system, so must each change be part of the great system of our life.

In an humbler and in a lesser way, he who sits down to tell a tale—intended not alone to while away an idle hour for himself or for others, but also to do some good while it amuses—may well indulge in following every work of nature, and every page in the book of human life, and change the scene continually, varying the characters, the personages, the events which he depicts; but he must also bear in mind that each is a part of one general scheme, each tends to one particular and distinct object.

From the court of France and the gay scenes of the capital we must once more travel back to the rugged mountain passes among which our tale began, and to those in whose fate, to say sooth, we are the most interested. Although we are ourselves somewhat anxious to discover what has become of the fair Isabel of Brienne—how her escape has been effected—where she is now wandering—how she is guided, guarded, and protected—we must, nevertheless—though we suspect that her path was dangerous, thorny, and sorrowful—return to Baron de Rohan, and leave him no longer upon the side of the mountain.

The young cavalier rode on, accompanied by Corse de Leon, with as much speed as the rough and tortuous nature of the road would admit. The men who brought the horses followed quickly after; and, in about twenty minutes, they reached the spot in the valley where the two roads divided, which we have already mentioned more than once. Here Corse de Leon was about to proceed at the same pace up the shorter road, leaving upon the left hand that by which, upon a former night, he had brought back Isabel de Brienne to the castle of Masseran. One of his followers, however, instantly shouted to him: "Ho! signior, ho! you cannot go by that road except on foot. It was that which kept us so long. The stream is swelled, and the bridge is gone again, and we were obliged to come round the other way."

"The stream swelled!" said Corse de Leon, in a thoughtful tone. "There must be something going on farther up in the mountains. The snows must be melting, or some glacier breaking up! However, let us go on by this other road. One of you remain here and see if we are followed," he continued, turning to the men behind him; "let the other go down to the cross, and tell Pinchesne and the rest to come over the hill. Let them leave one or two in the valley in case they should be wanted. Now let us on!" and he rode forward more slowly than before, though the left-hand road which he pursued was the longer of the two. He seemed, however, in one of those moody fits during which bitter memories continually mingled with a natural current of powerful abstract thoughts, changing their character from the calm reasoning of a man of acute and high-toned mind and intelligence, to morose and misanthropical ponderings, wherein all the images were gloomy and harsh. At such times his whole conduct and demeanour varied according to the mood of the moment: even his corporeal gestures, the quickness or slowness of his pace, as well as his look and his tone of voice, were all affected by what passed in his mind. When on his guard, indeed, no one was more deliberate, thoughtful, and measured, in every look, word, and gesture; but that was a matter of habit and acquired self-command. By nature he was one of those whose whole corporeal frame is, as it were unconsciously, the quick and ready slave of the spirit.

A change had come over him since they had mounted their horses, and such was, in reality, the secret of his riding more slowly. He might be actuated, indeed, in some degree, by consideration for the animal on which he was mounted; for the way, as we have before said, was nearly two leagues longer, and the night was excessively hot and oppressive, so that the white foam was already about the horse's neck and bridle. The sky was clear of all clouds, however, and the stars were shining bright, though they seemed smaller and farther off than usual. As they turned, the distant pointed summit of an icy mountain was seen towering over one of the passes, white and glittering in the starlight, while around it, without any visible clouds, there played occasionally bright coruscations as of faint summer lightning. For some way Corse de Leon did not speak; but at length he said, putting his hand to his brow, "Were there any clouds in the sky, I should think there would be a storm to-night. It seldom happens that the elements, as is the case with human life, give us storms without clouds. We have generally some warning of the tempest."

"There is a moaning sound in the hills," said Bernard de Rohan, "and yet I feel no wind. But do you not think," he continued, reverting to what his companion had said, "do you not think that it generally happens in human life we have some forewarning of the storms that befall us?"

"Not from external things," replied Corse de Leon, "not from external things. Often, often without the slightest cause to fear a change, suddenly a thousand adverse circumstances combine to overwhelm us. It is true, indeed it is true, that there may be other indications of a different kind."

"Ay," answered Bernard de Rohan, "that is what I mean. Do you not think that when we have no external omens of what is coming—when no cloud blackens the sky—when no red sun announces the tempest of the following day—do you not think that even then, within us, there may be a warning voice which tells us of the storm that we see not, and bids us seek some shelter from its fury?"

"Like that low murmuring that we hear even now," said Corse de Leon.

"I remember," continued Bernard de Rohan, without marking his words particularly, "that, not many days ago, as I was crossing the mountains to come hither, a fit of gloom fell upon me: I knew not why; for all was bright and cheerful in the prospect before me. I could not shake it off for some time; and in vain I tried to scoff at my own feelings. They would have way: I felt as if some misfortunes were about to befall me; and, though not one of all the things which have since occurred could by any chance have been divined at the time, yet you see that misfortunes did assail me even within a few days."

"Do you call these misfortunes?" demanded Corse de Leon. "You are younger in heart than I even thought you were. But what you say is worthy of memory; if what you felt were really a presentiment of coming evils, take my word for it, they are scarcely yet begun: you will want watching and assistance," he added, thoughtfully; "you will need aid and help with a strong hand; I have not forgotten my promise, and I will keep it. But quick, let us ride on! Our horses feel that there is something coming, and I would fain reach Gandelot's inn before it comes."

"I should suppose," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that it offers very inefficient shelter. It is built so completely at the foot of the mountain, that I wonder the snows in winter do not overwhelm it."

"It has twice been crushed under an avalanche," replied his companion, "and they still build it up again on the same spot; but what the house has to fear is as much the water as the snow; and it is because it is no place of shelter that I would fain be there."

Bernard de Rohan understood him in a moment; and the thought of Isabel de Brienne was quite sufficient to make him spur on eagerly. About half a league farther, the road turned a projection of the mountain, and, shortly after they had passed the angle of the rock, the spray of a cataract dashed in their faces, while an immense volume of water rushed furiously down from a spot some hundred yards above them, looking in that dim hour like some vast giant robed in white and leaning against the mountain. The torrent itself gushed across the road, and Bernard de Rohan turned his eyes upon his companion, not recollecting such an obstruction in their way.

"Some four or five hours ago," said Corse de Leon, "when I passed by that spot, there was scarcely water enough to quench the thirst of a wolf, and now it is a torrent. There is some great commotion above there. But perhaps it is all past, and these may be the results. We must try and force our horses through, however; keep as close to the face of the rock as possible."

So saying, he spurred on; but it was with the greatest difficulty that either he or his companion compelled their horses to make the attempt to pass the torrent. The pattering of the spray and the roaring of the stream terrified and bewildered them; and when, at length, urged forward, partly by chiding, partly by gentleness, they did dash on, the animals bore their riders through the midst of the current, where the ground was rough and insecure. Twice the charger which bore Bernard de Rohan stumbled, and nearly fell, and twice, though drenched with the pouring of the water on his head, and gasping for breath under the rushing weight upon him, he aided the horse up with heel and hand till he reached the other side and stood on firm ground.

Wellnigh stunned and bewildered, he turned to look for Corse de Leon. The brigand was standing beside him dismounted from the horse, and holding the animal by the rein with one hand, while he raised the other towards the sky with a look of eager, yet solemn attention. The next instant he grasped the young cavalier's hand, exclaiming, "Stir not a step! It is coming, it is coming! Now, as ever, we stand in God's good will to live or die; but death is very near us."

At the same moment there came a roar as of distant cannon; many shot off at once; then a murmuring pause; then a roar again; and, as it came on, the deafening sound of the thunder itself would have been as nothing to the terrific rushing noise that echoed through the hollow valleys. It seemed as if a thousand sounds were mingled; for the howling of the wind still continued, as if imitating the screams and wailing of people in pain; while the crash of rocks falling upon rocks, and of the stout trees of the forest rent into shivers, and of rolling masses of earth and snow, crags and cliffs, with one half the mountain itself, was alone overpowering by the very sound that beat upon the ear, even had it not been accompanied by an awful pressure of the air which took away the breath, and a sense of coming annihilation which seemed to check the beating of the heart even before death had stilled it with his icy hand.

There was time for but one short prayer to Him on high, and one thought of her he loved, before the crumbling ruin came down into the valley, sweeping close, past the very place where Bernard de Rohan stood. Rocks and stones rushed on before it, and one immense mass struck his horse on the knees and chest, threw him backward on his haunches, and beast and rider rolled over the edge into the stream. For an instant he lost his consciousness; and then, waking to life, found himself in the valley below, dashed by the torrent against the rocky banks.

He had been thrown free, however, from the horse; and, though to swim was impossible, from the crags, the trees, the projecting stones, and the fierce struggling of the torrent, yet he contrived

to grasp a rugged branch that hung over the water, swung himself to the bank, and sprang upon the land. It was all impulse, for he hardly knew how he found the bough or reached the firm ground. Even when there, he was fain to cast himself down, and press his hands upon his forehead, for everything swam round with him: the earth seemed to shake beneath his feet; and the roar of falling rocks and crags still mingled with the loud voice of the turbulent waters from which he had just escaped. The mightier sound, however, had passed away—that awful rushing noise, unlike anything else on earth—and gradually, the others ceased also, till at length nothing was heard but the flowing of the river, as it foamed and struggled with the obstacles in its course.

When Bernard de Rohan could rise and look around him everything was dark, except where in the sky appeared the twinkling myriads of the night, beginning, he fancied, to look pale at the approach of morning. He listened in the hopes of hearing some voice; but, if there was any, it was drowned in the noise of the waters.

With a thousand painful apprehensions in his heart, with no way of relieving his anxiety, with nothing left but to wait for the return of daylight, he cast himself down again, after having called once or twice aloud upon Corse de Leon without receiving any answer. He could not distinguish whither he had been borne. He could see some large trees still standing near him, and some enormous black masses of rock lifting their heads around. The shadow of the giant mountain, too, rose up before him; but its form seemed changed, and he gazed as if to ascertain in what features it was altered.

Gradually the summit of the hill, warmed into a dusky brown, caught some of the rays of the rising sun, and—while every moment it assumed a brighter hue, till it crowned itself, and decorated the mists which surrounded it with gold—a sober twilight crept into the valley; and Bernard de Rohan found himself standing in the gray morning with a world of ruin and desolation around him, without a trace of road or human habitation, and with the narrow pass along which his way had been bent completely blocked up by the huge masses of the fallen mountain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

With that strange, dizzy sensation which we feel when awaking from the first stunning effects of any great catastrophe, Bernard de Rohan continued to gaze around him for some minutes, as the morning rose brighter and brighter upon the wild scene of destruction in the midst of which he stood. He was himself much bruised and injured: blood was upon various parts of his garments; his strong, muscular arm would scarcely support him as he leaned against the rock, and his brain still reeled giddily from time to time with the fall and the blows he had received: but his own corporeal pain engaged less of his attention than the terrible picture which the rising light displayed. Everywhere appeared vestiges of the desolating phenomenon of the preceding night. The order of all things around him, and especially to the northeast, seemed to have been entirely broken up and changed. The granite rocks from the higher summits of the mountain were now piled up in immense masses below, mingled with vast tracts of the most dissimilar substances, slate, and sandstone, and common vegetable earth, with here and there a thick layer of snow protruding through the chasms, marked in long streaks by the various kinds of earth over which it had passed. Shivered fir-trees, and immense fragments of oak, with their green foliage still waving in the air, stuck out here and there in scattered disarray from the tumbled chaos of rock, and sand, and earth; and the fragments of a cottage roof, which lay reversed high up the side of the mountainous pile that now blocked up the valley, showed that the sweeping destruction had, at all events, reached one of the homes of earth's children.

Such was the scene towards the northeast: but it was evident that the fallen masses had not yet firmly fixed themselves in the position which they were probably to bear for ages afterward. From time to time a rock rolled over, but slowly, making its way down into the valley with increasing speed, sometimes pausing and fixing itself in a new bed part of the way down. None of these, however, in their descent, reached the spot where Bernard de Rohan stood, for he was at least three hundred yards from the base of the mountain which had thus been produced during the night. As it came down, indeed, the immense body had been accompanied by the fall of large masses of stone, which were scattered on all sides, so that the green bosom of the valley—which, on the preceding day, had been carpeted by soft and equal turf, only broken here and there by a tall tree, or clumps of shrubs and bushes, or else by large fantastic lumps of rock or stone, fallen immemorial ages before, and clothed by the hand of time with lichens or creeping plants—was now thickly spotted with fresh fragments, which from space to space had shivered the trees in their descent, and in other places was soiled with long tracks of various-coloured earths, which had showered down like torrents as the great mass descended farther on.

The stream, swollen, turbid, and furious, was rushing on amid the rocks in the middle of the valley; but the traces of where it had lately been evidently showed that it was rapidly decreasing in volume, and had already much diminished. Bernard de Rohan traced it up with his eye to the spot where it descended from the hill, crossing the road, which ran along the top of a steep bank on the opposite side. The cataract through which he had forced his horse the night before was there visible, and still showed a large column of rushing water, though it, too, was greatly lessened. This waterfall, however, gave the young cavalier some mark by which to judge of the

distances; and he found that he must have been carried down the stream nearly three hundred yards before he recovered himself and got to land. He thus perceived how near the chief mass of falling mountain must have passed to the spot where he had been standing, and he felt that the detached rock, which had struck his horse and cast him down into the stream before the whole fell, had probably saved his life.

But what had become of his companion? he asked himself. What had become of that being who, strange, and wild, and erring as he doubtless was, had contrived, not only to fix himself strongly upon his affections, but to excite, in a considerable degree, his admiration and esteem? Had he perished in that awful scene? Had he closed his wild and turbulent existence in the tremendous convulsion which had taken place? He feared it might be so; and yet, when he looked up and saw distinctly that—though ploughed up by the heavy stones that had fallen, and thus, in many places, rendered impassable—the road was still to be traced by the eye for some thirty yards beyond the cascade, he did hope—though the hope was but faint—that Corse de Leon might have escaped.

If so, traces of him and of the way that he had taken might yet be found. But another possibility soon presented itself to the mind of Bernard de Rohan, The brigand might have been thrown over the precipice by some of the falling rocks, like the young cavalier himself, and might even then be lying mutilated and in agony not far off. Without a moment's delay, Bernard proceeded to search along the course of the stream, which was far too much swollen to permit of his passing it.

Nothing of Corse de Leon could he see, however; not a vestige, not a track; but a few yards from the spot where the cascade, after striking the road, bounded down again into the valley below, he found, in the bed of the stream, crushed and mangled in an awful manner, the carcass of the poor horse which he had himself so lately ridden. The size of the animal had caused it to be entangled sooner among the rocks in the bed of the stream than he had been, but it had evidently been killed by the blow of the first fragment of stone which struck it, for its two front legs were broken, and its chest actually dashed in.

It was a painful and a sickening spectacle in the midst of a scene so wild, so awful, and extraordinary; but one additional horror which might well have been there was wanting. The vultures, which are said to be scared from their pursuit of prey by no portent, had, nevertheless, not approached as yet; and Bernard de Rohan, with his arms crossed upon his chest, remained for a moment looking at the dead body of the animal, as it lay half out of the water and half hidden by the rushing stream, with many a dark and gloomy association crossing his mind, though vaguely and unencouraged.

As he stood and gazed, a small bird upon an opposite tree, which had escaped uninjured throughout the late catastrophe, burst out in a wild and somewhat melancholy song; and Bernard de Rohan, with his heart heavier than before, turned and retraced his steps, in the hopes of finding some place where he could cross the torrent farther down the valley. In this expectation he was disappointed; the stream only grew larger, and deeper, and more impetuous, swelled by the different rivulets that were pouring down the sides of the mountains; and at length, after wandering on more than three miles, it plunged through a deep chasm in the rock, which left no footing for the young cavalier to make his way farther on that side of the valley. Could he have passed the waters, it would have been easy to have made his way up to the little mountain road by which he had passed the preceding night, and which was now before his eyes. But he was shut in between the torrent on one side and the high mountain on the other; and, although he saw some sheep-paths and other tracks, he knew not where they led to, but had only the certainty that they must take him to a distance from the spot which he wished to reach immediately, in order to relieve the darkest anxiety of all the many that were at his heart. Turning back, then, he made a desperate, but ineffectual effort to pass the masses of the mountains which had been thrown down, and by midday he was forced to retread his steps nearly to the same spot where he had found himself in the morning.

In much pain from the bruises he had received, and exhausted with exertion and want of food, he sat down for a time to rest, and drank of the waters of the stream, although they were still troubled. He then took the resolution of endeavouring to climb the mountains which formed that side of the valley where he then was, trusting that he might find some one to show him the nearest way to the inn on the eastern slope of the hills. The path was rugged and winding, the mountain bleak and arid, and several hours elapsed while he wandered on, before he heard the sound of any living creature, or saw any moving thing, except when once or twice some object of the chase started away from his path, and when the golden lizards, basking in the sun, turned round their snake-like heads to gaze on the unwonted human form that passed them.

At length, however, towards five o'clock in the evening, completely tired out, without having tasted food, and with no drink whatsoever but that one draught from the stream, he heard—as may well be supposed, with joy—the barking of a dog; and, looking up, he saw upon a point of the crag above a noble animal of the Alpine breed, baying fiercely at the step of a stranger.

Bernard de Rohan went on; and, following the dog as it retreated before him, he soon heard the bleating of some sheep, and, in a minute or two after, beheld a small white wreath of smoke rising in the clear mountain air, with the roof of a little cottage in a sheltered nook of the hill. It was as poor a habitation as can be conceived; but the sight was a glad one to the young cavalier, and he approached the little low-walled yard, which served as a sort of fold, with feelings of infinite joy.

The barking of the dog brought forth the shepherd, holding a large pot of boiling ewe-milk in his

hand. He was a small, plain-featured man, not very intelligent, who, notwithstanding his solitary life, had not acquired that desire of knowing more of his fellow-creatures which is so constantly the result of voluntary seclusion in monasteries. He was, however, hospitable and kind-hearted, and received the young stranger with a gladdening welcome. He set before him, in the very first place, the best of all he had; and asked, with some eagerness, of news from the valley; for he was already aware of what had occurred during the preceding night, and, indeed, knew far more than Bernard de Rohan himself.

The young cavalier told him all that he had to tell, and then questioned him rapidly and anxiously in turn. His first question, as may be easily supposed, referred to Gandelot's inn; and oh! how much more freely did he seem to breathe when the old-man replied, "Oh, that is quite safe! The fall did not come within half a league of it."

"Are you sure, quite sure?" demanded Bernard de Rohan.

"My son was down there to-day with cheeses," answered the man, "and saw them all. He will be home with the rest of the sheep presently, and will tell you more about it."

"Was there a young lady there?" Bernard de Rohan inquired, with as much calmness as he could command.

"Yes, he talked of a stranger lady from France," replied the shepherd, "with a number of soldiers and attendants belonging to some French lord, for whom they were all grieving and weeping bitterly, because he had been killed somehow."

"How long will it be ere your son returns?" asked Bernard de Rohan, eager, notwithstanding all the fatigues that he had suffered, to reach the inn that night.

The answer he received was one of those vague and indefinite replies which are always given on such occasions by persons to whom, as to the shepherd, time seems of little or no value. He said that the lad would be back very soon; but hour after hour passed, and he did not appear.

The young cavalier became impatient; and, finding that it was impossible, from any direction the old man could give, to learn the path which he ought to pursue, he urged him, with many promises of reward, to conduct him to Gandelot's small hostelry himself.

Had he proposed to the good shepherd, however, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, it would not have seemed more impracticable. He declared that it was perfectly out of the question; that, now his wife was dead, there was nobody to remain in his cottage; that the distance was fully four leagues, and that it would take them as many hours to go. "It will be dark in half an hour," he continued, "and we should but break our necks over the rocks and precipices."

Bernard de Rohan found that it was impossible to move him; the son did not come home till the evening was beginning to grow gray, and the young cavalier was obliged, unwillingly, to resign all hopes of rejoining his bride before the next day.

With the shepherd and his son, the use of any other light but that of the broad sun was unknown except in the depth of the winter; and, though Bernard de Rohan could have sat up for many an hour questioning the younger man upon all he had seen and heard at the inn, but a short period was allowed him for so doing ere they retired to repose.

The information that he obtained was but little, for neither the elder nor the younger mountaineer was very intelligent or very communicative. The latter, indeed, seemed to divine at once, what had never struck the old man, that the young cavalier who had become their accidental guest was no other than the person by whose supposed death the lady whom he had seen at the inn had been plunged into such deep grief.

"She will be mighty glad to see you," he said, taking the matter for granted; "and, if we set off by daylight to-morrow, you will just catch her as she wakes, for you nobles are sad lie-abeds."

"Pray tell me, however, before we sleep," said Bernard de Rohan, "how the lady obtained information of the danger I have so fortunately escaped. Was it from Corse de Leon?"

The young man started, and gazed earnestly in his face by the dim light which still found its way into the cottage. "Corse de Leon!" he said, "Corse de Leon! that is a name we never mention in these parts of the country. No! no! I know nothing about Corse de Leon, though they do say that he has as many poor men's prayers as rich men's curses."

Bernard de Rohan found that that name had effectually closed the young shepherd's mouth, and not a word more upon the subject could be obtained from him.

He interrupted their habits of early sleep no longer, but made the best of such means of repose as they could give him, and, wearied out with long exertion, soon fell asleep, with the happy certainty that she whom he loved was free, and corporeally well, while the mental anguish which he knew she must be suffering he had the means of joyfully removing on the succeeding day.

The pain of the bruises which he had received woke the young cavalier as soon as excessive fatigue had been in some degree relieved. But the nights were at that season short; daylight soon appeared; the shepherds rose with the first ray of the sun; and, without other breakfast than a draught of warm milk, Bernard and his guide set off across the mountains. The time occupied by their journey was fully as much as the old man had said; for mountain leagues are generally long

ones, and the road was rough and difficult to tread.

At length the view of a plainer country broke upon the eye; and as they descended a steep hill by a footway upon the open mountain side, Bernard de Rohan saw before him the rich lands towards Chambery, and, at the distance of about half a mile, the little inn of Gandelot, seated quietly at the foot of the passes. It looked tranquil and happy in the morning light; but why or wherefore the young gentleman could not tell, a feeling of uneasiness took possession of him at the very quietness which the whole scene displayed. There were none of his people hanging about the door, passing a morning half hour in listless idleness. There were none at the gates of the stables rubbing down horses or cleaning trappings and arms. There was no busy bustling about of attendants and stable-boys. There was nothing, in short, to be seen, but one or two domestic animals at the entrance of the farmyard, and the servant of the auberge, in a bright-coloured petticoat, cleaning some culinary utensils at the door of the inn.

The young cavalier hurried his pace, and, getting before the guide, advanced close to the girl before she saw him. She looked up at the approaching step, and then uttered a loud scream, which Bernard de Rohan easily understood to be her comment upon seeing the dead alive again. He passed on at once, however, through the half-opened door into the kitchen, but, to his dismay, it presented the complete picture of an inn after guests have departed. Everything had been put in order, and looked cold and vacant. The neatly-swept hearth possessed not more fire than might have lain in the hollow of one's hand, and over it the hostess was cooking a mess for the breakfast of herself and her husband; while the aubergiste stood at a well-washed table, counting some money, which he covered over with his hand at the girl's scream, and looked anxiously towards the door.

The surprise of good Gandelot seemed scarcely less than that of the servant, although it only took the outward form and expression of a deadly paleness. He recovered himself in a moment, however, and then, with a look of honest joy and satisfaction, in spite of all difference of rank and habitual restraint, he seized Bernard de Rohan by the hand, exclaiming, "Jesu Maria! Well, there have been many tears shed to no purpose. Why, bless my soul, how happy the poor lady's heart will be!"

"Where is she?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, eagerly. "Where is she? It seems as though there were nobody here."

"No, indeed," replied Gandelot. "What you say is very true. There is nobody here but your lordship's humble servant and his good wife. Why, what a pity that you came not yesterday at this hour! You would have saved the poor lady many a weary minute."

"Where is she, then! Where is she?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, more eagerly than ever. "When did she go? Where is she gone to? Where are my servants, too, and my men-at-arms?"

"Alack, and a well-a-day, sir!" replied the host, "they have all taken wing, and are scattered away like a flock of plovers. Here the lady arrived at the inn, with good Father Willand and some ten or twelve of your men, on the day before yesterday, late in the evening; and then there were consultations after consultations as to what was to be done, for every one knew and had heard by that time that you were a prisoner in the castle of Masseran; and the gentleman who came at the head of your men—not the servants, but the men-at-arms that came after you—vowed that he would attack the castle, and blow open the gates with a petard, and set you free. But when he had talked very high in this way for some time, Father Willand told him to hold his tongue; for, in the first place, the walls of the castle of Masseran were made of stones hard enough to break his teeth, and, in the next, as he had got no petard to blow the gates open with but the one in his mouth, it would be of very little service. With that there came not long afterward a messenger from one whom I must not name, telling the lady and the priest and all to keep as quiet as might be, for that you would be liberated before daylight on the next morning; and, as his word never fails, they all did keep quiet, but we sat up and watched to see what would come of it. A terrible night you know it was; but we were to have a more terrible morning, for by daylight news came up the valley—"

"That I was killed in the land-slip," said Bernard de Rohan, interrupting him.

"No, no," replied the aubergiste, "not that at all; but that the tower which was called the prison-tower of the castle of Masseran had taken fire and fallen, crushing the dungeon in which you had been placed, and you along with it, in the ruins. The lady went half-distracted, though she would not believe that it was true till Father Willand himself went up near the castle, with a body of your men to prevent any of the Masseran people from taking him, and then came back and told her it was all too sure. He told her, besides, that the people of the castle vowed it was some one on her part seeking to deliver you who had set fire to the tower, and the good priest advised her to get across the frontier with all speed. But she was so cast down with grief that she seemed to care little more about herself in this world, and lay, my wife said, partly kneeling by her bedside, partly lying upon it, with her face buried in the clothes, and the sobs coming so thick and hard that it was painful to hear. She could not be got to speak or answer a word to any one; and in the midst of all this came in some one whom you know."

"Who? who?" demanded Bernard de Rohan.

The aubergiste whispered, in a scarcely audible voice, the name of Corse de Leon; and the young cavalier exclaimed, with feelings of as much joy as he could feel at that moment, "Then he is safe, at least; that is some satisfaction."

"Ay, so far safe," replied the man, "that he is not killed as he might have been. But when he came here his left shoulder was out, and would have been useless for ever if he had not made four of us pull it in by main force, and never winked his eyes or uttered a word till it went in with a great start, and then only shut his teeth close."

"But he could have told them," exclaimed Bernard de Rohan, "he could have told that I had escaped before the tower took fire."

"I don't know how it is," replied the landlord; "but, sure enough, he thinks you dead as well as they do. He had a long conversation apart with Father Willand in that little room, out of the corner there, which you have never seen, and, mayhap, did not know of, for the door is in the dark, behind the closet and the chimney. What they talked about I don't know, but in the end I heard him say, 'Tell her nothing about it till she can bear to hear more. As he is dead, it matters not much how it happened.' Then the priest went to the lady, and, with great persuasion, got her down from her chamber, and made her take some wine, and, in the end, got her to set off, with some eight or ten of your people accompanying them. That was about twelve o'clock yesterday morning; and, in an hour or two after, the rest of your people went away over the mountains to join the good Maréchal de Brissac, by the directions of the person you know."

"This is unfortunate," said Bernard de Rohan, musing, "this is most unfortunate. Do you know which way the lady has taken?"

"She went first to Bonvoisin," replied the host; "but whither she was to turn her steps after that, I know not."

"And I am left here alone," continued the young gentleman, "without horse or arms, at the moment I need them most. Can you furnish me with a horse, good Gandelot?"

"Faith, I have none to give, sir," answered the man, "or I would willingly trust you, if you did not pay me till this time twelvemonth."

"Nay," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I wanted not to be your debtor, Gandelot. Money, thank God, I have with me, but my resource must be Corse de Leon. Where can he be found?"

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed the aubergiste, terrified at the loud tone in which his companion pronounced the name of the brigand. "Hush! hush! for Heaven's sake. There is somebody talking all this time to the girl outside the door."

"It is but the shepherd who guided me hither," replied the young cavalier. "But answer my question, good Gandelot: where is he to be found?"

"If you will sit here for an hour or two," replied the other, "my wife shall get you something ready to break your fast, and I will go up the side of the hill to see after the person you mention."

"But I wish to proceed immediately," exclaimed Bernard de Rohan. "If I could but get a horse, I would set out at once."

"There is no one who can get you either horse or arms within five leagues," replied the aubergiste, "except the man we were talking of. He can do both, and more too, for he can tell you where the lady is to be found, which I can't. So you have nothing for it but to confer with him. However, it will be better to send this shepherd back at once to his own place, and for you either to go into that little room there to the left, or up the stairs into your room above, for it would be a sad thing to be stopped again; and, although we stand on free land here, yet this Lord of Masseran's people are no ways scrupulous into whose face they poke their fist, or into whose soup they dip their spoon."

Though feeling sick at heart with impatience, the young cavalier saw that the plan suggested was the only one he could follow. Having rewarded the shepherd for his trouble in guiding him thither, he allowed the good aubergiste to lead him to his place of concealment; and, urging him in the strongest terms to lose no time, he sat himself down to while away the hours as best he might, with all the checkered thoughts of the past and the future.

CHAPTER XIX.

Bernard de Rohan waited long; and, though his imagination was not an active one in regard to difficulties or dangers in his own case, yet, when he thought of Isabel de Brienne, nurtured with care, and tenderness, and softness, never having known during life the want of protection, or the necessity of acting for herself, never having been an hour without protection—when he thought that she must now go forward to Paris alone, without any one loved or known to sooth and guide her; without any other protection but that of a few menials; with the bitter thought of having lost him she loved for ever, as the chief recollection of the past, and with the expectation of meeting her mother, who had been always harsh, and her stepfather, who had treated her with treachery and baseness, as the chief anticipation of the future—his heart burned to speed on, without the loss of a single moment, to protect, to console, and to relieve her from the deep sorrow which he knew too well must overshadow her.

Still one hour passed after another, the sun began to decline from the meridian, and the good

hostess only visited him on two occasions. In the first place, to tell him that a party of travellers who stopped for half an hour at the inn were only peasants from a neighbouring village; and, in the next place, to beseech him not to go near the windows, or to show himself in any way, as a party of the Lord of Masseran's men had just passed, and another was speedily to follow.

At length the aubergiste himself appeared, heated and dusty, and, closing the door carefully, told him that he had found the man he went to seek, and had brought back with him a few words written on a strip of leather. They were deciphered with difficulty, but were to the following effect: "I thought you gone for ever. But, as you are still destined to remain with the rest of us, so let it be. I will visit you to-night, and you shall soon find the lady; but on no account go on till you have seen me! By so doing you will endanger her, endanger yourself, and delay your meeting."

Bernard de Rohan gazed upon the writing, and then turned a dissatisfied look towards the sky. "This is trifling," he thought: "I must be across the frontier as speedily as possible. Well might Isabel think me cruel if I remained here an hour longer, knowing that she is in danger, sorrow, and anxiety."

"Have you heard aught of a horse, my good Gandelot?" he said: "I cannot wait as he requires me. How far is it to the frontier?"

"Two hours' journey on horseback," replied the host, "and four or five afoot. But there is no horse to be found, and you must not think of trying it on foot, my noble lord. You do not know that the people from the castle are scouring the whole road between this and Bonvoisin."

"But they do not know me," answered Bernard de Rohan. "There is scarce one among them that has ever seen me. Five hours? that is long, indeed! But I could buy a horse at Chambéry."

"Not before nightfall," replied the host; "and you had a great deal better wait here to see one who can help you more speedily than anybody else."

"Why cannot I go to him?" demanded Bernard de Rohan. "If you can find him, so can I."

"Oh, surely," replied Gandelot, "but you run a great risk of being taken."

"If that be all," answered the young cavalier, "I should think that there was less chance of being taken on the hillside than here. Something must be risked, at all events, Gandelot. Get me a peasant's frock, good friend, and a large hat: my own I lost in the fall, you see. When I am so dressed, I shall pass unknown, I'll warrant, should it be through the midst of this Lord of Masseran's men."

"I must show you the way, however," replied the innkeeper. "But stay a minute, and I'll get what you want: it is no bad plan."

Thus saying, Gandelot left him; but the aubergiste was not long before he returned, bringing with him a peasant's frock and belt, and a large straw hat, such as we have mentioned in describing the dress of good Father Willand at the beginning of this true history. The very act of putting them on was a relief to the mind of Bernard de Rohan; for, to a man accustomed to action, inactivity adds an almost insupportable burden to grief and anxiety. When the frock, however, was cast over his shoulders, and his head was covered with the hat, Gandelot gazed upon him with a smile, saying, "I must take care, my lord, that I don't mistake you for a peasant, and ask you to sell me eggs. Well, I did not know how much the dress made the man before."

Passing over the bad compliment of his host without notice, Bernard de Rohan only expressed his eagerness to set out; and Gandelot, after having gone down to look round the inn on every side, and to ascertain that no one was watching, returned in a few minutes, carrying in his hand a short sword and dagger, such as were worn commonly by what were called the New Bands, warring in Piedmont for the service of France.

"Nobody can tell what may happen, my lord," he said, "so you had better tuck those up under your gown; but don't draw the belt too tight, or the hilt will appear."

Bernard de Rohan grasped the weapon as he would the hand of an old friend, and, concealing it carefully under the frock, he followed the innkeeper, who led him out through the back court of the auberge upon the side of the mountain, where a steep pathway led up between the rocks, and over the lower part of the hill, into one of the valleys, which, without plunging deep into the alpine scenery around, led through a softer but still uncultivated country, in the direction of Albens. The innkeeper strolled on, and the young nobleman followed, both keeping a profound silence till the inn and all the neighbouring objects were out of sight.

When they had fully plunged into the valley, however, good Gandelot spoke, but still in a low voice, saying, "We are pretty safe here; the danger was up yonder."

Bernard de Rohan made no direct reply, but asked whether the road they were taking did not lead him farther from that which he had afterward to travel. Assured, however, by the good innkeeper that it did not, he went on in silence, finding by the length of way that his companion had lost no time upon the previous journey he had made during the morning. At length Gandelot turned a little towards the north, up a smaller valley, which, winding away with many bends and angles, never exposed more than one or two hundred yards of hillside to the view at once. At the end of about a quarter of an hour after entering this dell, a solitary house presented itself, as desolate in appearance as well might be. It was old, and built of cold gray stone, with a roof of

slates; and a low garden wall which surrounded it enclosed a space of ground amounting to perhaps an acre or an acre and a half, but in no degree impeded the view of the house.

The hills in that spot were quite bare: much lower, indeed, than the scenery from which Bernard de Rohan had just come, but far more naked and arid. Not a shrub, not a tree was to be seen. Nothing but scanty turf, broken by scattered stones, with occasional crags here and there, covered the slopes; and, had it not been for those thin, short blades of grass, one might have fancied one's self in the world before the vegetable creation had been called into being.

"You will find him there, my good young lord," said Gandelot, pointing forward to the house: "I will stay here. But you had better whistle, as you know how, when you go up, that he may know you are coming. If you find that you are not likely to come back before night—and it is getting somewhat late now—send me out word, and I will hie me home."

"Nay, leave me, leave me, good Gandelot," replied the young cavalier. "I will find my way back: I never forget a path I have once trodden."

Thus saying, he advanced towards the desolate-looking house which stood before him, and, at a short distance from it, imitated, as well as he could, that peculiar whistle which he had heard more than once among the companions of Corse de Leon. The sounds had scarcely issued from his lips ere the brigand himself appeared at the door, and, apparently without the slightest apprehension or hesitation, walked forward to meet him. He was habited in the same large cloak and hat which he had worn on the night when Bernard de Rohan first beheld him, so that the young nobleman could plainly see he bore his left arm supported by a bandage from his neck.

The moment they met he grasped Bernard warmly by the hand, saying, "So you are living! you are living! I never thought we should see each other again in this world, though I did think we might meet in that where the compensations are reserved to confound the workings of the great bad spirit to whom this earth is given up for evil. But I fell into a sad mistake, and have let your sweet lady go away in the belief that you are dead."

"It is on that account," said Bernard de Rohan, "that I am so eager to set out, in order to put her mind at ease; but I know not where she is to be found, or which road she has taken. Neither have I horse nor arms, nor, I fear, enough in my purse both to buy them and carry me on my way also."

"And you come to me for all!" said Corse de Leon, with a smile: "who would ever have thought this, some seven or eight years ago, when the young Lord of Rohan struck down to the earth the intendant of the Countess of Brienne for wronging the sister of a poor soldier far away fighting for his country? Who would have thought that the poor soldier would ever have been able to aid the young lord in marrying her he loved, or to furnish him with horse, and arms, and money, in an hour of need? There is a retribution in this world! Ay, there is a retribution even here! But come, my lord, I am your humble servant; but, perhaps, a truer friend than any whom you meet with in your own rank and class. Let us into the house, and rest you for the remainder of the day. You will travel quicker, better, more safely in the night. Ere the sun goes down you shall have all that you want; and between this and tomorrow's nightfall you may well overtake the lady."

Corse de Leon saw that, notwithstanding the reasons he gave, Bernard de Rohan was not well pleased with even the short delay that he proposed. He was not one who loved long explanations of any kind, but he could feel for an impatient disposition; and he added, as if in reply to his companion's look, "It cannot be otherwise: I have had to send a four hours' journey for the horses, and they cannot be here till night, though the messenger has been absent now near two hours. You would make no greater speed by going back to the inn. Come in, sit down, then, rest you, and bear what is unavoidable as patiently as may be; for, though half the difference between great men and little ones in this world lies in their judgment of what can be done and what cannot be done, and though half the things men despair of are as easy as to drink from a stream, yet, nevertheless, there are things that are impossible, and in those cases it is useless to struggle."

Thus saying, he led the young nobleman into the house, the door of which had remained unclosed. Though Bernard de Rohan could hear several voices speaking in one of the rooms as he walked along the passage, it was into a small vacant chamber, on the left-hand side, that Corse de Leon conducted him. The windows commanded a view down a considerable part of the valley, but still the aspect of the whole place was so undefended and unguarded, that the young cavalier, knowing the state of hostility with the great and powerful in which Corse de Leon lived, could not help feeling some surprise at his choosing such an abode.

"Are you not," he said, gazing from the window, "are you not in a sadly-exposed situation here? Why, the Lord of Masseran, or any other of those small tyrants, could attack you at any time without the possibility of your escape."

"You are mistaken," replied Corse de Leon, shortly: "before he came within two leagues of me, I should know his whole proceedings, and either scatter over the hill, and reach coverts which it were wiser to search for the deer or the chamois than for Corse de Leon, or else offer the good lord some hospitality on his coming which he might neither be willing to receive nor able to return. We have resources that you are not aware of, and neither he nor any one else knows more of them than to make him fear."

"That you yourself have infinite resources in your activity and experience," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I can easily believe; but, depend upon it, if you were to trust the guidance of such

hazardous matters to other men, they would soon be overthrown."

"Not so, not so," replied his companion; "I know the contrary. Twice, for ends and objects of my own, I have traversed all France, leaving my men behind me; and, though perhaps not quite so busy as when I am here—ay, and somewhat cruel and disorderly when left to their own course—no evil has happened to themselves. I am now about to do the same, and I do it in all confidence."

"Do you propose to go soon?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, in some surprise.

"Ay," replied the brigand, "soon enough to meet you in Paris some day, perchance, or even to overtake you on the road; and, as we now talk about those things, let me caution you never to speak to me unless I speak to you: then take the tone that I take, whether it be one of strangeness or of former acquaintance. Recollect, too, that there is no such person as Corse de Leon beyond the frontiers of Savoy; but that, in many a part of France, the Chevalier Lenoir is known, and not badly esteemed."

"I will be careful," replied the young lord. "But now, my good friend, tell me whither has my poor Isabel directed her steps."

"First to Grenoble," replied Corse de Leon, "in the hope of finding her brother there; but, should she not meet with him, she goes thence at once to throw herself at the feet of the king."

"But are you perfectly certain," demanded Bernard de Rohan, "that she has escaped from the pursuit of this base man who has married her mother?"

"Perfectly," replied Corse de Leon: "I saw her across the frontier yesterday. Besides, as I told you before, the Lord of Masseran himself is absent, carried by fears regarding the discovery of his own treachery into the very jaws of the lion, power. Power is the only true basilisk. Its eyes are those alone in this world which can fascinate the small things hovering round it to drop into its mouth. But the lady is safe. Be satisfied, and you can well overtake her ere she reaches Grenoble. I bade them send back a man to tell me if she found not her brother there; for, as I am going to Paris also, I thought perchance it might be better to keep near her on the road, and bring her help in case she needed it. But your own men are enough, I do not doubt, and I can but take few with me, if any."

"But is it not dangerous," said the young nobleman, "for you to travel immediately after receiving so severe an injury?"

"Dangerous!" said Corse de Leon; "oh, there is no danger in such things. I do believe these mountains that I love will crush me at last; for twice have I escaped almost by a miracle. But it is this injury, as you call it, that has determined me to go now. I can be of but little active use here till I can climb a rock again, and use this left arm as well as the right. No man has a title to remain an hour in idleness, whatever be his calling. Sleep itself I do not rightly understand: it is a lapse in the active exertion of our being which is very strange, a sort of calm pool in the midst of a torrent: I suppose it is solely for the body's sake. There could have been no sleep before death came into the world; for, not being subject to decay, the earthly frame could require no refreshment any more than the spirit. However, as I was saying, idle and inactive drones pretend that they must have rest and pause: if the head aches or the hand is hurt, they declare that they can neither think nor labour; but the wise man and the energetic man makes his spirit like that monstrous serpent which I have heard of, and which, when one head was smitten off, produced at once another. If a man cannot walk, he can ride; if a man's right arm be broken, let him use his left; if his eyes be put out, his ears will hear but the better—let him use them. Our manifold senses are but manifold capabilities; and if the mind is debarred from using one of its tools, it must use another. No man need want employment for the senses, the limbs, and the means that he has left, if he chooses to seek for it. For a while I shall be of no good upon the mountain, and therefore I am going to the city. Some time or another I must go, and therefore I may as well go now. But here comes the old woman with my mess of food. You must take some with me. No one knows better than she does how to cook the chamois, or the venison, or to roast the shining trout in the ashes, or the snow-fowl over the fire; and as for wine, the cellar of an archbishop or of a prior of a monastery could not give you better than this lonely house can produce. Nay, nay, shake not your head; you must eat and drink, let your impatience be what it may: every man needs strength; and that we should take food is a condition of our flesh and blood."

In conversation of this kind passed away the hours, Bernard de Rohan and his strange companion remaining almost altogether alone, though once two young men, dressed like herdsmen, came to the door of the room, and, leaning against the doorposts, addressed to Corse de Leon a few words, apparently of no great import, and upon ordinary subjects, but to which Bernard de Rohan imagined some occult meaning was attached.

At length, much to the satisfaction of the young cavalier, a perceptible shade of twilight came over the valley, along which the shadows of the hills had been creeping for some time. The twilight grew grayer and more gray, and Bernard de Rohan rose and walked to the window, with his impatience for the arrival of the horses increasing every moment. Corse de Leon was looking at him with a slight smile when he turned round; but, in a few minutes after, the brigand rose, left the room, and returned with the two young men whom Bernard de Rohan had seen before. They were now loaded, however, with various kinds of arms and habiliments of different sorts, which seemed to have been gathered from many a quarter of the earth. These were spread out, some upon the table and some on the floor; and this being performed without a word, those who bore them retired, only appearing again to furnish the chamber with a light.

Corse de Leon glanced his eye to the young cavalier, and then gazed upon the pile with a somewhat cynical smile.

"This seems to be an abundant harvest," said Bernard de Rohan, whose doubts as to the means employed to procure such rich habiliments were many.

"You say true," replied the brigand; "but you must remember, we are many reapers. This has been going on, too, for very many years, so that you will find here garments of various ages and of different nations. Look here," he continued, taking up a black velvet surtout richly embroidered with gold; "this is a coat cut in the fashion of forty or fifty years ago, and belonged to some fat Englishman, who doubtless came over to France with that arch heretic and blood monger Henry, who has not been many years dead. Then, depend upon it, he would see foreign countries, and go to Italy, and has left part of his fine wardrobe here behind him in the mountains."

"An unwilling legacy, I should think," replied Bernard de Rohan.

"Yes," answered the brigand; "but that is not a shot-hole you are looking at so curiously. Our traditions say, I believe—for we have our traditions—that the good gentleman got safe home, though somewhat thinner of purse and scantier in apparel than when he came away. However, choose yourself out some quiet suit that will not attract attention, for you must not go riding through France like a Savoyard peasant. There, that black hat and feather, which would become some sober student of Padua, making his first effort to look the cavalier. Then there is that stout buff coat I would recommend, with black loops and borders. Ay, it is somewhat heavy, but there is a secret in that: dagger or sword point will not well make its way through the jacked doublings of those hides, and a pistol-ball would strike but faintly, even if it did pass. Then there are those horseman's boots: they will be no bad addition to the rest. That long sharp sword, too, in the black sheath, will suit the hat, and none the less fit the hand. It is true Toledo. Now seek for two daggers somewhat like it, and a pair of pistols for the saddlebow. By the Lord that lives, if the horse they bring be but a gray Spanish charger, with a tail longer than ordinary, they will take you for some one who has been studying the black art at Salamanca, or perhaps for some lay officer of the Inquisition in disguise. Is the coat large enough? Oh, ay! it fits well. Now for a cloak to match."

With the assistance of his companion, Bernard de Rohan fitted himself with new garments, which somewhat disguised, but did not ill become his powerful form. After he had done, the brigand opened the mouth of a little sack which had been brought with the rest, saying, "Take what you will: you can repay me hereafter."

The young cavalier, however, took no more of the gold pieces which appeared shining within than was absolutely necessary, replying to the remonstrance of Corse de Leon that, as he approached nearer to Paris, there were many who would be willing to assist him.

"Well, well," replied the brigand, "it matters not. I shall not be far from you. But now let us away. I hear the horses, and you are impatient to be gone. We can meet them, therefore, as they come."

Though Bernard de Rohan heard nothing of the sounds which his companion's fine ear had discovered, he gladly followed him out to the mountain-road, and walked on with him for some way before the horses appeared. Their feet were soon heard, however; and at length a man, mounted on a charger and leading another, was seen coming rapidly towards them. The animal he led was powerful, and yet apparently swift: some short time was spent in adjusting the arms and the stirrups; and then, after offering many thanks to his strange companion for all that he had done, Bernard de Rohan grasped his hand, sprang into the saddle, and rode away in the direction of Chambery.

CHAPTER XX.

It was in a small cabinet in the princely chateau of Fontainebleau, some eight days after the grand entertainment at the Louvre which we have before mentioned, that Henry the Second of France was seated, conversing with one of his most trusted servants and most faithful friends, the well-known Maréchal de Vieilleville. The cabinet, the ceiling of which was of dark black oak, carved and ornamented with small stars of gold, was hung with rich but very ancient tapestry, still beautiful, though the colours had faded in the passing of years. The dark green which formed the principal hue was no longer enlivened by the gorgeous red and yellow draperies which had once ornamented the principal figures, and a dim and melancholy hue pervaded the room, to which the fact of the light passing through some leafy trees without did not a little contribute.

It was not, however, the peculiar colouring of the hangings, nor the light passing through the green trees, that gave an unusual paleness to the countenance of the king, as, laying down the pen with which he had been writing, he gazed up in the face of Vieilleville, "What is it you tell me, maréchal?" he said. "Dead? Crushed under one of the towers of the castle? The very best and most promising soldier France could produce! The dear friend of Brissac—lauded even by Montmorency! Heaven and earth! Did you say he was returned, this Lord of Masseran? Send for him instantly. Let a messenger be despatched to the capital at once. By my crown, if I thought that he had any hand in this, I would have his head off in the court before tomorrow's sun set.

Send off a messenger for him, I say!"

"Sire, he is even now in the palace," replied the maréchal. "It was seeing him pass along the court, in order to crave an audience, that made me intrude upon your majesty just now. I heard this sad business last night by a letter from Brissac; but I would not tell your majesty, lest it should spoil your rest after so bustling a day."

"What, you are one of those, Vieilleville, are you," said the king, with a slight smile, "who can believe that the death of a faithful subject may chase slumber from even a royal pillow? However, these despatches must be written. Leave me for an hour, and then bring hither this Lord of Masseran. Keep a good eye upon him, for he is as deceitful as a cat: but he shall find that I am not to be trifled with."

"I will venture to beseech you, sire," said the statesman, "in all that you do with this man, to recollect that he is himself a sovereign prince; for, were you to forget it, the example might be dangerous."

"If I make him an example, it shall be for good, not for evil, Vieilleville," replied the king. "Some of these petty princes need an example how they may be punished for treachery and double-dealing. I have heard more of him since he last set out for Savoy than I ever did before, and I much doubted that he would return to France again. But watch him well, good Vieilleville, and bring him hither in an hour. I shall have finished ere that."

The maréchal withdrew; and, ere the hour was expired, a page sought him again from the king, requiring his presence, with that of the Lord of Masseran, whom Vieilleville, on quitting the cabinet, had informed that Henry could not yet receive him.

The angry spot was still upon the king's brow when they entered; but he spoke to the Lord of Masseran in a courteous tone, saying, "Well, my good lord, this is somewhat unexpected. I knew not that you could go to Savoy and return so quickly. How is it that you have shortened the way so well?"

"A melancholy interruption, sire," replied the Savoyard, "a melancholy interruption caused me to return ere half my journey was complete. Somewhat on this side of Lyons, I met a messenger coming with all speed to seek me, and bearing this letter, which I beg to lay at your majesty's feet."

The king took it and read, examining every line as he did so, in order to see whether it bore about it the marks of truth and authenticity. There was nothing, however, to make him doubt it. It seemed simply a letter from some seneschal or other officer, left behind by the Lord of Masseran to command during his absence, announcing to him that the prison tower of the castle had taken fire and fallen, crushing under its ruins the chamber in which the young Baron de Rohan had been confined. It went on to state that works had been already commenced to supply its place in the walls, and gave some account of the probable expense which those works would occasion.

"That would be dear," muttered Henry, in a low voice, and between his teeth. "That would be dear payment to get rid of a troublesome friend. I rather suspect it can be done cheaper in Savoy. Have you no news, Monsieur de Masseran," he said aloud, "of how this terrible catastrophe occurred?"

"I have shown your majesty all the information I have received," replied the Marquis of Masseran. "I returned to Paris with all speed after having met with the messenger, and, not finding you there, came hither."

"What say you, De Vieilleville?" said the king: "you had letters last night, methinks, from some one in that neighbourhood."

"They bear the same sad news, sire," replied the Maréchal de Vieilleville. "But they add, that everybody in that country marvelled much how this event could have occurred in a tower detached from the castle, built almost entirely of stone, and doubtless intrusted to a faithful guard."

"It is, indeed, most strange," said the Marquis of Masseran, thoughtfully. "There must have been some base neglect."

"This must be inquired into," said the king, "this must be inquired into. My good Lord of Vieilleville, call the page for these despatches. It behooves you, my Lord of Masseran, to make strict and immediate inquiry into the whole of this affair, in which you shall be aided and assisted by a commissary on our part. There are the despatches, boy. Why wait you? What is it now?"

"May it please your majesty," replied the page, "there is a lady without craving earnestly to see you. She calls herself the sister of the Count of Brienne, and I remember her well at the court some months ago. She seems in much grief, and—"

"Give her admission," said the king, "give her instant admission. She may throw some light upon all this affair, my good Lord of Masseran."

The marquis turned somewhat pale; for the appearance of Isabel of Brienne in the king's presence was not at all what he wished or calculated upon. He had hoped for an opportunity of telling his own tale, and causing his wife to tell hers so as to corroborate all he said, without the actual appearance of Isabel herself. He knew that the Count de Meyrand, though apparently

taking no part in all that occurred since their arrival in Paris, had been continually and skilfully preparing the way for the development of his part in the transaction; had been labouring to make friends and gain supporters among those who possessed the king's ear, and had been apparently not a little successful, even with the fair Duchess of Valentinois herself.

It must not be supposed, however, that good Monsieur de Masseran was moved by any personal love or regard for the Count de Meyrand: there was but one tie between them, the tie of interest; and the moment that the Lord of Masseran saw that more was to be lost or risked by the Count de Meyrand than to be gained, that instant he was prepared to put an end to his affection for his noble friend. He was, however, as we have seen, in various respects, in the count's power; and he had trusted that their united operations would be sufficient to induce the king to act without listening to the fair girl herself. He had, moreover, believed, when he heard of the death of Bernard de Rohan, that one great obstacle being removed, the rest would be comparatively easy. The arrival of Isabel, however, was most inopportune; for he saw that, in the king's angry mood at the moment, the disclosure of all that had taken place within the last few weeks might be ruinous in another way, and not only overthrow his future schemes with regard to Mademoiselle de Brienne herself, but bring punishment on his head for what had occurred before.

As the interview, however, could be prevented by no means within his reach, he sought eagerly in his mind for excuses and defences for his conduct: but he had hardly time to arrange any plan ere Isabel herself entered, supported by the arm of one whom he felt far more inclined to fear than even herself. That person was good Father Willand; and his surprise and dismay were not a little increased by seeing the king receive the priest with a gracious smile as an old acquaintance, and, grasping his arm familiarly, ask him what had made him return from banishment.

"Why, to bring this poor lamb back to your majesty's fold," replied Father Willand, in his usual gay and unceremonious tone. "By my faith, sire, if all shepherds were like you, and mistook the wolf for the watch-dog, mutton would soon be dear in France."

"How so? how so, good father?" demanded Henry, laughing; and, at the same time, taking Isabel's hand in his own, he prevented her, with a kindly gesture, from throwing herself at his feet. "Cheer up, fair lady," he said, "cheer up. The king will protect you, and be a father to you. But how now, bold priest? How have I been so unwise a shepherd as to mistake the wolf for the watch-dog?"

"Why," answered Father Willand, boldly, and looking full in the face of the Lord of Masseran, "by giving one of the best of your flock"—and he pointed with his hand to Isabel—"into the care of a Savoyard wolf."

"Hush! hush! my good father," cried the king. "By Heavens! if you use such language, you will get yourself into a worse scrape, in your cure of Saint John of Bonvoisin, than that for which I was obliged to send you away from Paris, to keep your ears out of the way of knives. On my soul, we must find a bridle for that tongue of yours."

"Indeed, sire," exclaimed the Lord of Masseran, marking with pleasure a slight frown that had come upon the king's brow, "indeed, sire, such a bridle is most necessary; for that tongue is not only insolent, but mendacious."

"Hush, sir!" exclaimed the king, sternly; "you speak of one of the honestest men in France;" and he held out his hand to Father Willand, who kissed it respectfully. "Would that we had many such!" the king went on: "for the men who tell truth in the cabinet as well as in the pulpit, are those that are very needful here: albeit," he added, with a smile, "they may occasionally, in their hatred of hypocrites and knaves, give their tongue some license, and their conduct too. However, my good father, you will never be wise, so that I fear some day I shall have to make you a bishop, merely to keep you out of the way of strong fists and crabsticks. Now let us turn to the case of this young lady. The page told me, fair one, that you were anxious to see me immediately. What is it you would have?"

"Protection, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne, raising her fair face towards the king, filled with an expression of deep and hopeless grief, which touched the kind heart of the monarch, and made his tone even more kindly than it was before as he replied,

"And you shall have it, lady. But let me hear how it is that protection is needed: have you not a mother and a brother to protect and help you?"

"Alas! sire," replied Isabel de Brienne, "my mother is no more my father's wife nor my father's widow. She is now the wife of one to whose will she shows all dutiful obedience; but unto me the mother's care and tenderness are at an end."

"Fair lady," said the king, "the time that I can spare you is but short, and it may save you both trouble and grief, and, perhaps, from one cause or another, may likewise spare you a blush, if I tell you that I know the past. Lest you should suspect that my ears have been wronged and your conduct falsely told, the brief history of the facts is this: You have loved and been beloved by a very gallant gentleman, one who has served his king and country well and faithfully; and your mother, not holding him as dearly and highly as we may do or you have done, has opposed your marriage with the man of your choice, and endeavoured, as far as may be, to separate you from him. He, in the somewhat indiscreet eagerness of love, persuaded you, it would seem, to fly with him secretly, and unite your fate to his by a clandestine marriage, which, upon every principle of law and reason, must be null and void. However, at the very altar, I am told, your worthy

stepfather here present surprised and separated you from this bold gentleman, took means to ensure that you should not meet again, and was bringing or sending you to Paris, when you contrived to escape. Thus far we know; what is there more? The tale that we have heard is very simple."

As the king ended, he looked round with a slight smile, which certainly might be interpreted either "This matter is very clear," or else "I know there is another version."

The person who answered it first, however, was the good priest. "That is the story, sire," he said. "Tis a most excellent piece of goods, but smells somewhat of the manufacturer."

"How so, sir? But let the lady speak, and say if this be true or not."

"True, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne, much to the surprise of the Lord of Masseran. "It is all true; but there is much besides to be said, and some things which I must say, but which, perhaps, I cannot prove, especially now, when deep grief masters me. As your majesty has said—and no blush will stain my cheek while I do own it—I loved and was beloved by as noble a gentleman as ever graced this land; but I trust that I loved him wisely too, for to that love I have been plighted since my fifteenth year. My father—my good father, sire, who in times past has stricken in many a battle by your side, and also in many another well-fought field—joined my hand to his with promises which I, his daughter, was but too willing to fulfil. My mother, it is true, always looked somewhat coldly on him I loved, ever since he struck to the ground a base man, her intendant, for wronging an unprotected girl; but still my mother was present when we were plighted to each other; still she was present when my father, on his deathbed, made me promise that I would wed the man whom he had chosen. Oh, how willingly I promised! oh, how gladly I would have kept that promise! but they have rendered it vain;" and, unable to restrain herself, the tears burst forth, and she wept bitterly.

Henry had carried his eyes from her to the countenance of the Lord of Masseran from time to time while she spoke, and now, taking her hand kindly, he said, "Be comforted, dear lady, be comforted. This changes the matter greatly. What else have you to add?"

"Oh, much, much, sire," replied Isabel, wiping the tears from her eyes; "but I will be brief, sire; indeed I will be brief, and not waste your most precious time. Bernard de Rohan, my promised husband, went to serve his king in Italy—"

"And did serve him there right well," said the king. "But go on."

"He had been absent some time," she continued, "and I was longing for his return, when a nobleman of your majesty's court sought my hand, to my great surprise, with my mother's countenance. Thinking that he had been deceived, I told him the whole truth, but still he pursued his suit. I wish, sire, that it were not needful for me to give his name, but I fear I must."

"The Count de Meyrand," said the king. "He has already urged his suit to us. What more of him, fair lady?"

"He urged it upon me, sire," she answered, "after he knew that my heart was given and my hand was promised to another, that other being his own friend. He sought me, sire, he persecuted me, he used words that I will not repeat, nay, menaces, all with the countenance of my mother, who acted, I believe—nay, I know—under the commands of her new husband. I was in hopes of some relief when my Lord of Masseran here took us so suddenly to Savoy, but we were soon followed by the gentleman you have named. I was now told to think no more of Bernard de Rohan. I was informed that my hand was destined for the man whom, by this time, I detested, and that means would be found to make me obey. Vague and terrible fears came over me; but I obtained an opportunity of writing one letter to him I loved. Would that I had never done so! for that letter has killed him."

"Methinks, sire, it would have been better," said the Lord of Masseran, in a sneering tone, "if the fair lady was so tyrannically used in my poor dwelling, to write to her brother in the capital."

"I did," replied Isabel of Brienne, "often and most sorrowfully."

"But did you ever ask him to come to you?" demanded the Lord of Masseran. "He says not."

"Never," replied Isabel of Brienne. "On the contrary, I besought him not to come. I concealed half my grief, the daily anguish of witnessing my mother's sorrow, the taunts, the sneers, the bitterness, which, like the Egyptian pestilence, made our very food swarm with reptiles; I concealed much, much that I might have told, and still besought him not to come."

"May I ask why, madam?" said the king, with evident surprise. "De Vieilleville, there is something under this. I must hear the whole," he added, seeing her hesitate. "Lady, it must be told."

"It was, sire," said Isabel de Brienne, in a low but distinct voice, "it was that I feared, if brother and sister should be in the same house beyond the pale of your majesty's realm—in a place where few questions are asked, and secret acts do not easily transpire—I feared, I say, I feared much for my brother's safety."

"I understand," said the king, "I understand. But there must be great objects for such doings."

"Everything reverts, sire," said Vieilleville, addressing the king in a low voice, "everything reverts to the mother in case of the death of the son and daughter without children."

"These, sire, however," said Isabel, "were but suspicions, and perhaps were unjust—"

"Oh, most unjust, I do assure your majesty," said the Lord of Masseran, who had more than once shown a disposition to break in, but had been restrained by a gesture from the king. "Such base designs never entered my mind."

"Perhaps such suspicions were unjust, sire," continued Isabel; "but to speak of facts. I had been forced out more than once to hunting-parties where the Count of Meyrand joined us; and at length, on one occasion, I was told that I must needs go forth with my Lord of Masseran to visit a house of his farther in the mountains. I went with fear, sire, on many accounts. First, the hour he chose was strange, just before sunset; next, my mother was not with us; and next, the train appointed to accompany us was smaller than usual. Scarcely had night fallen, when we were suddenly attacked and overpowered by a large body of men—"

"Was this with violence?" demanded the king. "Was any one killed or hurt?"

"None but some of the old and faithful servants of my family," replied the young lady, "who forgot where they were, and how situated, and defended their young mistress with their lives. One of them escaped, and fled to a little inn for help; but, in the mean time, we were, as I have said, overpowered and carried off farther into the hills, my Lord of Masseran as well as myself; though I cannot help thinking that he went somewhat willingly, for certainly among the assailants there was one, if not more, of the attendants of his good friend the Count de Meyrand. When we had gone some way—a long way, indeed, it seemed to me—a cavalier who had been found at the inn, none other than Monsieur de Rohan, came to our rescue, having gathered together a number of persons sufficient to deliver us—"

"A number of brigands!" said the Lord of Masseran, interrupting her: "brigands, you mean, young lady! brigands!"

"Ha! ha!" cried the priest, "wonderfully good! That bolt was smartly shot, my good Lord of Masseran. But, as you have put a word to the lady's story, I will put another; she says 'persons,' you say 'brigands,' I say anybody he could get. I was one of the number: there were other people from the inn, and the brigands, it is very true, came and joined us; not liking, as your majesty may easily conceive, that the good Lord of Masseran, or any other lord, should take the trade out of their hands. However, we refused no help where we could get it. The Chevalier de Meyrand, who was at the inn when the man came crying for aid, remained at the table with the capons and the bottles of wine, not liking, as may well be supposed, to frustrate his own schemes or fight against his own people; and Bernard de Rohan, with what assistance he could get, set free the young lady, ay, and the Lord of Masseran to boot."

"Then there were, in truth, brigands with you, my good father," said the king.

"In sooth were there, sire," replied the priest; "some of the best brigands between this and Naples; and I have a shrewd notion that Corse de Leon was there himself."

"Indeed!" said the king, with a smile; "then I wish I had been there also: I would give half a province to see that man, who seems to have been born for a general, and become a brigand by accident."

"Brissac writes me word, sire," said the Maréchal de Vieilleville, "that Corse de Leon has served you better in Piedmont than any three captains in your service."

"That may well be," said the king; "but yet we must not too openly favour such gentry. Now, lady, we have interrupted you too long."

"I have but little more to say, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne: "as those who had delivered us were carrying us back to the castle in safety, I had full opportunity—the first time for years—of speaking with my promised husband, who informed me that he came, not only to seek my hand, but to bear despatches from Monsieur de Brissac to my Lord of Masseran there. What I have to tell farther is not altogether of my own knowledge; but let him deny the facts if he can, for there are persons who can prove them if he does deny them. He received intelligence that Monsieur de Rohan brought him despatches and directions of an unpleasant kind, and he left the chateau that he might not receive them. He also ordered that admittance should be refused both to my mother and myself; and I had reason to believe that a new scheme was formed for compelling me to wed the Count de Meyrand. In these circumstances, your majesty, I saw no chance of escape but in doing as I did do. I was far from your protecting arm; I was, in fact, in the power and at the disposal, not of my mother, but of a stranger to our house and nation; and I knew that if I delayed or hesitated, even for a few days, I was likely to be borne far away beyond the power of rescue or deliverance. I held that my father's will and wishes justified me in what, at other times, might have been a rash, perhaps an improper act; and, having the opportunity both of seeing him I loved and escaping with him, I did not hesitate; our purpose being immediately to seek your presence, and cast ourselves at your majesty's feet, entreating your gracious pardon. We were afterward seized at the altar, as your majesty has been told; and I was then carried away, as if with the purpose of taking me to some remote place, but, in reality, to give the opportunity of a mock deliverance by the Count of Meyrand;" and she gave a brief account of what had taken place after the count came apparently to her rescue. "I doubt not that he was carrying me to Paris," she continued, "and might ultimately have brought me to your majesty's presence; but I neither chose to be entirely in his power and at his disposal after all that had happened, nor to quit that part of the country where I had reason to believe my brother was or might soon be, and

where my husband—yes, sire, my husband, for a vow had been spoken which nothing but death could do away—where my husband lay a captive in the hands of that dangerous man. With the aid of Father Willand here I made my escape; but alas! alas! it was only to find that he who had loved me well and truly was no longer in life to protect and guide me. I found, sire, that he had died a horrible death in the castle of Masseran, by the falling of the tower under which he was confined."

She spoke, to all appearance, calmly; even the last words were distinct, though low; but she kept her eyes bent down, and, closing them for a moment, the drops of tears broke through the long black lashes like a crushed diamond.

"I grieve for you, dear lady," said the king, "and I sympathize with you also; for I loved this young gentleman well. But tell me, have you any suspicion that his death was brought about unfairly?"

"No, sire, no," she replied; "I have no cause to suppose so. I know nothing farther than that it is as I have told you."

"You see, sire," said the Lord of Masseran, "that she exculpates me from blame in this matter."

"No, my lord, no," replied the king. "Of the manner of this gentleman's death she knows nothing, but in regard to your preceding conduct she does anything but exculpate you. She says, or I am mistaken, that she had good reason to know a scheme had been formed for compelling her to marry the Count de Meyrand, and also for bearing her far away beyond the possibility of rescue or deliverance. Call you this exculpating you?"

"But I deny that this is the case, sire," replied the Lord of Masseran. "How could she tell what were my schemes or what were my plans? These are but vague suspicions, engendered by disappointment and anger."

"No, my lord, they are not," replied Isabel de Brienne. "They are not vague suspicions: they are certainties which I have never yet fully told to any one, no, not even to him I loved, because you are my mother's husband; but may I put you in mind of a German courier who was with you secretly on the twenty-ninth of last month—not the first that came that day—ay, and of the Spaniard who came two days afterward—"

The Lord of Masseran turned paler than his ruff, and clasped his hands together as if about to pray for mercy; but Isabel went on, "With his majesty's permission, I will first tell you in your ear, my lord, what I know of those couriers. Then, if you will have it so, and still deny the fact, I will speak aloud, and call on those who can prove it."

The king bowed his head in token of consent; and, while Isabel spoke for a few moments with the Lord of Masseran apart, he said to Vieilleville, with a thoughtful look, "You see Brissac's information was good."

"Might it not be better, sire," said Vieilleville, "to send this man for a few days to the Bastile, in order to ascertain how the case now stands?"

"It is not worth while," replied the king, in the same under voice; "the treaty will so soon be concluded that he can do no mischief, especially while we keep him about the court. On the contrary, Vieilleville, I hope and trust he will not drive this poor girl to say any more; for I suspect, if she were to tell all, I should be obliged to punish him; and that same sword of justice is the heaviest and most unpleasant one to wield I know. Well, fair lady, does your penitent admit the facts?"

"He does not deny, my lord," replied Isabel de Brienne, "that I had good cause for suspicion; and he has moreover promised me, both in his own name and in that of my mother, that I shall never be farther pressed to give my hand to any one, but shall be permitted to do the only thing that now remains for me to do in life—to retire from a world where I have known little but sorrow, and vow myself to the altar for ever."

"Nay, nay," said the king. "Not so, fair lady, not so. We will have you think of this better. Such charms as yours were never made for the cloister. At all events, let the first shadow of this grief pass away: you know not what may happen to change your views."

"Nothing can ever do so, sire," replied Isabel de Brienne. "Your majesty must not forget, that with him who is gone I have been brought up all my life. The sweet years of childhood, the happiest period that I have ever known, are in remembrance full of him and of his affection. To him all my thoughts have been given, all my wishes linked from childhood until now: the thoughts so nurtured have become part of my being. His glory I have felt as my glory, his happiness I have prayed for before my own, and his praise has been to my heart the most tuneful of all sounds. I can never think otherwise than I have thought, sire; and I will beseech your majesty not to give this good Lord of Masseran any motive to withdraw the word that he has plighted to me."

"Nay, I will not do that," replied the king. "I will hold him bound by that word, that neither he nor your mother shall offer any opposition to your wishes in this respect; but still, at the king's request, you must delay the execution of such a scheme, at least for a short time."

"I fear, sire," said the Lord of Masseran, "that it will be in vain. As your majesty well knows, and as I do not scruple to confess, I had other views and wishes for her; but I know that she is of so fixed and determined a nature, that when, believing she is right, she has made up her mind to a

certain course of action, nothing will move her to abandon it."

"We shall see, we shall see," said the king. "I would fain not lose one of the brightest ornaments of our court. Vieilleville," he continued, "unto your care I will commend this young lady. Take her with you to the apartments of your daughter and of my daughter Claude. Bid the princess love her and sooth her, and consult with the queen where she can best be placed in the chateau, so as to have comfort, and ease, and repose, with as little of the bustle and gayety of a court as may be, for the time. Such things will be harsh to you, I know, young lady. Monsieur de Masseran, we will be father and mother also to her for a while. Father Willand, let me see you at nightfall: I have somewhat to say to you, my good friend."

"I shall make the almoner in waiting jealous," said Father Willand; "but I hope your majesty will order me some dinner: for I doubt much if, in your whole palace, I should find any one charitable enough to bestow an alms on a poor wandering priest like myself."

"You are mistaken, good father," said Vieilleville. "You will find your cover at my table: come with me; we must no farther occupy his majesty's time."

Thus saying, he led Isabel de Brienne to the door; but, before he had gone out, the king called him back, and said in a low voice, "Do not let the Savoyard quit the court. Should need be, tell him I require his presence the day after to-morrow. Discourage these ideas of nunneries. Poor Meyrand is madly in love with this girl; and it is strange to see how passion mixes itself up with his supercilious air of indifference. Perhaps she may be brought to yield."

"I think not, sire," replied Vieilleville, bluntly; and, with a low bow, he left the room.

CHAPTER XXI.

The horse was strong and fresh, and Bernard de Rohan rode on rapidly. The stars came out brighter and brighter as the night deepened, and the clear, deep, lustrous purple of those fair southern skies became mingled with yellow light, as the moon, looking large and defined, rose over the deep black summits of the eastern hills. It was not long before the French frontier was passed; and in those days, as Savoy was completely in the occupation of the French, no guards watched upon the way to stop or question the stranger coming from the neighbouring land.

Judging the distance which Isabel must have gone, even at a slow pace, to be considerable, Bernard de Rohan did not think fit to pause at any of the first towns or villages which he met with, but, avoiding man's habitation as far as possible, went on till his horse's speed began to flag, and he found it necessary to stop for repose and refreshment. He had now gone on, however, for about five hours, so that it was by this time the middle of the night, and with difficulty he made himself heard in a small hamlet on the road to Grenoble. He procured, at length, some refreshment for himself and for his horse, but no tidings whatsoever which could lead him to judge whether Isabel and his servants had or had not taken the same road which he himself was following. He remained, however, for two hours, to allow the horse time to rest, and then, once more putting his foot in the stirrup, rode onward at a slower pace.

About an hour after, the day once more began to dawn, and he found himself winding in and out among the beautiful hills which border the Isere. Everything was rich, and fertile, and picturesque, and upon those scenes the eye of Bernard de Rohan could have rested with infinite pleasure at any other time; but now anxious eagerness hurried him on, scarcely remarking the objects around for any other purpose than to judge where he was, and how far from Grenoble. A little after five in the morning he passed through the small village of Montbonnat, and heard with gladness the assurance of the people of the place that he was not much more than two leagues from Grenoble.

After giving his horse a draught of water, he went on his way again through that beautiful district of streams and mountains, constantly ascending and descending, till at length, not far from the hamlet of Imfray, he saw before him a single horseman coming slowly on, the first person, in fact, whom he had met upon the road since he had set out the night before.

When the young cavalier first perceived him, the man was at the distance of some two hundred yards; but it was with no small pleasure that Bernard de Rohan at once recognised one of his own servants, named Pierre Millort, an honest but somewhat weak man, who had been born upon his own estates, and had served him for many years. He now felt certain of obtaining speedy news of Isabel de Brienne, and rode directly towards the other horseman, expecting that the man would remember his lord's person at once. The young nobleman, however, dressed in the habit which had been given him by Corse de Leon, bore not at all his usual aspect, and good Pierre Millort also devoutly believed him to be dead. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he looked upon the person who approached him as a complete stranger; and, fancying that there was something in his appearance of a very doubtful nature, he drew his sword a little forward as he saw the strange cavalier riding directly up to him, and prepared to defend himself, in case of need, as well as might be.

When Bernard de Rohan called him by his name, however, asking if he did not recollect him, astonishment, not a little mingled with superstitious fear, made the man nearly fall from his

horse, and he felt strongly inclined to argue the matter with his young master, in order to persuade him that he was really dead. At length, becoming fully convinced that such was not the case, and that Bernard himself, in a bodily and corporeal form, was before his eyes, he gave him the information which he desired regarding Isabel de Brienne, though that information was by no means satisfactory to the young cavalier.

The lady had arrived at Grenoble, he said, on the very same day that she had set out from Gandelot's inn; but, finding that her brother was not there, and had not sent any notice of his coming to the house in the city where she expected to hear of him, she had taken her departure on the following morning, in order to reach the capital and throw herself upon the protection of the king as speedily as possible. She hoped to arrive at Vienne in one day, the man continued, and had sent him off at once to convey intelligence of her route to somebody he was to meet at Gandelot's inn.

"Then how happened you not to be there last night?" demanded Bernard de Rohan. "Had you pursued your journey, you would have saved me the trouble of coming to Grenoble, and would have enabled me to cut across the country and join her at Vienne this morning. Now she will be two whole days in advance of me."

"And not a horse will you get in Grenoble with which to pursue your way," replied the man; "for that's the reason, sir, why I did not come on at once."

"Had you not your own horse?" demanded Bernard de Rohan, somewhat angrily.

"Yes, sir," answered the servant, "I had; but a sad accident happened to him, poor fellow. I left Grenoble at the very same moment that the lady set out for Vienne; but I had not got far beyond La Tronche, when, the road being covered with loose stones which had rolled down from the hill, my horse slipped and fell, cutting both his knees to pieces. I was obliged to lead him back into the town, and no horse could I get for love or money, till at length I made a bargain with a peasant from Bachat to change with me, he taking my fine beast on the chance of curing him, and giving me this wretched animal in his stead, to enable me to go on my way. It is not, however, an hour since he brought the beast in. So you see, Sir, I have lost no time."

"That is enough," said Bernard de Rohan, thoughtfully, "that is enough. I must go on to Grenoble now, however. Come with me; you will not be wanted at Gandelot's inn;" and, thus saying, he rode on to the town, where it was necessary to give his own horse a long time to rest, for the distance which he had come was more than fifty miles, and the road steep, difficult, and fatiguing.

Judging by the rate at which Isabel was proceeding, it was clear that she must reach Lyons before that day closed; for, though she might not accomplish her purpose of arriving at Vienne on the day before, yet the distance to Lyons itself was but two easy days' journey.

Every means that long military experience suggested was employed by Bernard de Rohan to refresh and invigorate his horse more speedily, and those means were very successful, although some of them may appear to us, in this age, somewhat fantastic. Balls of spice were given to the animal, his feet and pasterns were bathed in red wine, and various other proceedings of the same kind were adopted with a similar view. It was impossible, however, to go on till towards the evening, and even then the young cavalier found that it was in vain to seek Vienne that night, as neither his own horse nor that of his attendant could accomplish the distance. They proceeded as far as possible, however, so as to leave a moderate day's journey between them and Lyons; and on the succeeding evening Bernard de Rohan had the pleasure of seeing the fair city of the Rhone spread out before his eyes, and of knowing that there could not well be more than one day's journey between him and her he loved.

The great difficulty, however, now was to discover at what inn Isabel had lodged on the preceding night, in order to ascertain what route she had followed on her farther journey. Lyons, even at that time, was a very large and important city, filled with inns of every sort and description; and, as in those days despotic suspicion had not invented the fetter-lock of passports; as there was no tyrannical police, no licensed spies to whom the abode of every citizen, the sleeping-place of every traveller, the movements of every being in the realm were known, as is now the case in France, Bernard de Rohan had no other means of ascertaining the resting-place of Isabel during the preceding night than his own conjectures or inquiries made at all the principal places of public reception.

When he had himself passed through Lyons some time before, he had been in command of a considerable body of soldiers, and had lodged at an inn in the suburb of La Guillotiere. That suburb was not so large in those days as at present; but it possessed at that period one of the best inns which Lyons could boast of; and, as the servants who now accompanied Isabel de Brienne were then with him, and he had remained for several days there, he judged it not at all unlikely that they might have conducted his fair bride to the resting-place where they had previously lodged. He rode, then, directly to the same inn, which was surrounded by its own court and gardens; but the faces that presented themselves were strange to him; for, among all the mutable things of this earth, there are few more mutable than the servants of an inn.

In general, at all the auberges on the road, a man on horseback was sure to meet with attention and good treatment; but, in such a city as Lyons, luxury had of course brought fastidious notions along with it; and the frequent visits of persons with large trains, ladies in immense rumbling carriages or clumsy horse-litters, made the horseman with his single attendant and weary horses

an object of very little importance in the eyes of the drawers and ostlers.

Perceiving some slackness of civility, the young cavalier ordered the host to be sent to him, and the landlord of the Checkers—for so the inn was called—presented himself, gazing upon the young gentleman at first as a perfect stranger. A moment after, however, the face of the Baron de Rohan came to his remembrance, at first connecting itself vaguely with considerable sums of money received, and numerous expensive attendants, horses, arms, banners, *et cetera*; so that his satellites were very soon surprised by seeing various low and profound inclinations of his head, as he welcomed "his lordship" back to Lyons; hoped that the campaign had gone well with him. Gradually recollecting more of the circumstances, he recalled even his visiter's name itself, and, in tones of indignant haste, bade the stable-boys take Monseigneur de Rohan's horses, and the chamberlain show monseigneur himself to the best apartments of the inn, while he followed, bowing lowly every time the young cavalier turned round.

Bernard de Rohan's first inquiries were for Isabel de Brienne; but the good host was far too wise and practised in his profession to satisfy the young gentleman fully before he had fixed him at his own inn. Oh yes, undoubtedly, he said, such a lady had been there, and had set off that very morning, with just such attendants as monseigneur described. He would come back and tell him more, he continued, in one minute, when he had merely given orders for a nice little supper to be sent up, and had seen that the horses were properly cared for. But, when he at length made his appearance, after being absent till the supper he talked of was nearly ready, and the young gentleman actually sent for him, it then turned out, of course, that the lady he spoke of was quite a different person, some forty years of age, and the widow of some famous marshal dead many years before.

Bernard de Rohan was disappointed, but he did not suffer his equanimity to be disturbed at finding some little want of sincerity in an innkeeper. He partook but lightly, however, of the good host's supper; and then, directing the attendant who accompanied him to make inquiries at all the inns in the suburb where they then were, he himself set out on foot, and, passing the bridge, pursued the search throughout the town of Lyons. That search, however, proved vain; and not the slightest tidings of Isabel and her train had Bernard de Rohan been able to find before the sun went down.

He was preparing to return to the inn, in the hope that his servant might have been more successful than himself, when, in passing down one of the long, narrow streets which led from the great square, he was met by a crowd of people so dense that he found it would be absolutely impossible to traverse it, and he accordingly turned (little caring what had caused the assemblage) in order to pass round by the Church of the Feuillans, and make his way homeward by another street.

The pavement of the good town of Lyons is by no means pleasant or easy to walk upon in the present day, being entirely composed of round, slippery stones, on which the feet seem to have no hold. In those times it was even worse, for it was irregular in construction as well as bad in material; and Bernard de Rohan himself, though strong and active, found it no easy task to outwalk, even by a pace or two, a crowd of persons better accustomed to tread those streets than himself. He had contrived to get a few steps in advance, however, and had reached the long, narrow street which passes round by the side of the church, when he was stopped, just as he was about to pass down it, by another crowd as dense as the first, by which he was forcibly borne along. The two currents, meeting in the more open street he had just quitted, carried him forward in the midst of them; and, finding it impossible to escape, he gave himself up for the time, and, turning to a lad who was near, inquired what was the occasion which called so many persons together.

"Why, where do you come from, seigneur," said the young man, "that you don't know all this business?"

"I come from Italy," replied Bernard de Rohan, "where I have been with the army; but, once again, what is all this about?"

"Why, I should have thought it might have reached there," replied the lad. "But don't you know they are bringing along Jamets, the great heretic printer, to burn him in the Place de Terreaux?"

"Indeed!" said Bernard de Rohan. "Pray what has he done to merit such a terrible punishment?"

"What has he done?" cried the young man, with a look of indignation. "He is a heretic; is not that enough? Don't they all mock the holy mass? What has he done? I should not wonder if you were a heretic yourself."

"No, no, my good youth," replied Bernard de Rohan, "I certainly am not that. But they were not so strict about these matters a year or two ago, when I went with the army into Italy."

"There is much need they should be strict now," replied the boy, who, as usual, thought it manly to outdo the follies of his elders, "for the poisonous vermin have infected the whole place. Don't push so, Peter," he continued, speaking to one of those behind him, who was urging him forward exactly in the same manner that he was pressing on those before him.

"Get on! get on! or we shall not see the sight," cried the other. "They have taken him on through the lane."

In a few minutes the crowd began to issue forth into the Place de Terreaux; and, before he could

disengage himself, the terrible preparations for burning one of the unfortunate victims of superstition were before the eyes of Bernard de Rohan. A space was railed off in the centre of the square, and kept clear by guards; but in the midst thereof, at the distance of about thirty yards from the young cavalier, appeared an elderly man, with a fine and intelligent countenance, pale as ashes, and evidently fully sensible of all the agonies of the death he was about to endure. He was chained upright to an enormous post or stake driven into the ground, and one of the brutal executioners was seen fastening the chain tighter round his neck, though another had by this time lighted the fagots which had been piled up underneath and around his feet. From time to time the victim closed his eyes, and his lips moved as if murmuring forth a prayer; at other moments he cast a wild and fearful glance round upon the people; but, in general, he remained still and quiet, as if striving within himself to subdue the natural repugnance of the flesh to the endurance of pain and death.

Bernard de Rohan loved not such sights nor such acts; and as in that open space the crowd was thinner around him, he was turning away once more to pursue his path homeward, when a capuchin friar approached the unfortunate man, and, holding up a crucifix, seemed to exhort him to abandon his faith. At that point, however, all the firmness which had supported him through imprisonment and trial came back, and, waving his hand indignantly, he turned away his head with a gesture of disgust.

The capuchin raised both his arms towards the sky; and a roar of furious exultation burst from the people, as the flames, almost at the same moment, were seen to rise up round the unfortunate victim, and the convulsive gasp of agony distorted his countenance.

Bernard de Rohan forced his way on; but, as he did so, some one touched his arm from behind, evidently intentionally, and, looking in that direction, he beheld, to his great surprise, the countenance of Corse de Leon.

The brigand gazed upon him for a moment, but without speaking, then turned his head away; and, recollecting the warning which he had received, not to notice him unless spoken to by him, Bernard de Rohan made his way out through the people, and reached the inn just as it was growing dark. He now found that his attendant had been as little successful as himself in the search for Isabel de Brienne; but the landlord informed him that a gentleman named the Chevalier Lenoir had been there to inquire for him; and Bernard de Rohan, trusting that Corse de Leon might possess some better means of information than himself concerning the course which Isabel had taken, waited impatiently for the brigand's return.

CHAPTER XXII.

Bernard de Rohan waited for nearly an hour before the person whom he wished to see made his appearance. At length, however, the aubergiste entered; and—with a face of so much mystery and importance as almost to make the young gentleman believe that he was acquainted with the character and pursuits of the brigand—he announced that the Chevalier Lenoir had called again to know if the Baron de Rohan had returned. In a minute or two after, Corse de Leon himself entered the room; and Bernard could not but feel some surprise at the manner in which the wild, bold, vehement rover of the mountain side conformed to the usages of society, and bent down his energies, if we may so say, to the customary trammels of an artificial mode of life.

He shook hands with Bernard de Rohan as an old friend, put down his hat upon the table by his side, remarked that the dust had soiled his plume, spoke of the heat of the past day, and with such empty nothings carried on the interview till the aubergiste had retired and closed the large oaken door behind him.

The moment he was gone, however, the brigand said abruptly, "I came hither before, to lead you to the scene whither it seems you had gone without me. Is not that a lovely sport?" he continued, with a curling lip and a flashing eye; "is not that a lovely sport for keen, sleek priests, after feasting in the refectory? Is not that a sweet amusement for these holy and gentle pastors to go to, with the grease of their patties still sticking upon their lips? Pastors! why our pastors of the Alps would teach them better than that: they take the wool and use the milk, but they roast not the lambs of their flock, as the people of the plains do. By Heaven, it would do my soul good to make yon bloodthirsty capuchin eat the flesh he has cooked this night. They call us lawless brigands," he continued. "Pray God that we may ever be lawless, so long as there are such laws as these. I came to show you this spectacle, for I once told you I would make you witness such things, but you had gone without me."

"I went not willingly," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I was caught in the crowd, and could not disentangle myself. I hate and abhor such sights, and think that these acts are disgraceful and ruinous to our religion. If anything could justify heresy, such persecution surely would do it."

"Think not, think not," cried Corse de Leon, eagerly, "think not that this is a crime of our religion alone, or of any other. It is man, and man's infamous laws, and the foul vice of that strange compact which rogue has made with rogue, and villain with villain, and tyrant with tyrant, and fool with fool, in order that the cunning may have the best means of outwitting the strong; that the criminal may torture and destroy the innocent, and the virtuous be for ever the prey of the

vicious. Catholic or Protestant, heretic, infidel, Turk, it is all the same: man is bound together, not by a league for mutual defence, but by a league for mutual destruction and corruption. Here you yourself have a friend and comrade, who fights by your side, and whom you trust. What is the first thing that he does! Betrays you—seeks to injure you in the darkest way—plots—contrives—cabals—"

"There is a day of reckoning coming," replied Bernard de Rohan.

"Ay, and it may come soon," answered Corse de Leon, "for that very man is now in Lyons."

Bernard de Rohan started up and laid his hand upon his sword, which he had thrown down upon a chair beside him; but the brigand went on, saying, "Not to-night, not to-night. Let it be in the open day; and it were better, too, before the whole court of France."

"I will not wait for that," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Where I find him, there will I punish him. But, as you say, it must be in the open day. Yet I must not let him escape me; I will write to him this instant."

"The way of all others to make him escape you," replied Corse de Leon. "He might, on this occasion, refuse to meet you hand to hand; he might—"

"No," answered Bernard de Rohan, "no, he dare not. There is no French gentleman who dares to be a coward. To those whom he has wronged he must make reparation, even though it were with life. Besides, this is not a man to turn away from the sword's point."

"I know not," answered Corse de Leon, "for I am not one of you; but methinks—though there is nothing upon all the earth now living that could make me turn aside from my path—there would be something very terrible to me in a wronged friend. However, this man may have an excuse you know not of to refuse you that which you desire: he may say that the matter is before the king, which, as I learn, it is. Be persuaded: wait till to-morrow: then let him be narrowly watched: meet him alone; and, when your sword is drawn upon him, then, as you say, he cannot well evade you."

"He shall not," answered Bernard de Rohan. "But still it is not him that I now seek, it is my own dear Isabel; and here, in this town of Lyons, I have lost all trace of her, though she must have been here last night."

"Perhaps not," replied the brigand. "I have no certain tidings of her any more than you have; but listen to what I do know. I reached this place in haste to-day; and during the morning, at the inn called the Dolphin, near the old church by the river, I saw a man who had been with this Meyrand in Savoy, his guide, and assistant, and confidential knave. He knew me not, and indeed, perhaps, had never seen me; for I see many, but am seen by few. I made inquiries, however, and I found that this man had preceded his lord from Paris on business, it was said, of mighty moment. He was preparing rooms for him, gaining intelligence, and, in fact, making all things ready for whatever knavery so skilful a master might have in hand. I inquired farther, and found that yesterday, shortly after the man's arrival, a lady and her train had paused for some moments at the same inn; that one of his servants had spoken to this serviceable villain, and that, without descending from her litter, she had gone on, it was said, towards Geneva. To-day I waited and watched for the arrival of your enemy, and the moment he did come, he was closeted with his knave. A minute after, the host was summoned, and much inquiry made for fresh horses to go towards Geneva. By this time, however, it was late; none but tired beasts could be found, and the journey was put off till daybreak to-morrow morning."

"We will travel the same road," said Bernard de Rohan, "we will travel the same road. But what can have induced Isabel to take the way to Geneva?"

"We know not that this lady was the same," replied Corse de Leon; "but, supposing her to be so, forget not that she believes you to be dead. I have told you that the matter is before the king; and she may fear that, as this Count de Meyrand is a known intimate of a woman all too powerful in this land of France, some constraint may be laid upon her will in order to make her give her hand to him."

"They shall find," replied Bernard de Rohan, "that there is one whose claim upon her hand is not so easily to be cast off; and, even were I dead, I am full sure that to the last day of her existence she would look on one who could betray his friend with nothing but abhorrence and disgust."

"It may be so," replied the brigand; "but you have yet one thing to learn. Your claim upon her hand is already disallowed. On that the king's decision has gone forth three days ago. An edict, which has just reached Lyons, was then registered in the Parliament of Paris, rendering all clandestine marriages, past or future, null and void. This was aimed at you, depend upon it, for both the wily Italian and the artful Frenchman were then at the court of France."

Bernard de Rohan covered his eyes with his hand, and paused thoughtfully without reply. "All this," he said at length, "all this shows, my friend, the absolute need there is of my being speedily in Paris. Wherever Isabel may turn her steps, she will soon hear that I am living if I appear before the king; and in another point of view, also, my speedy appeal to Henry himself may do good. There is one whom you have mentioned who does certainly possess much power—far too much for any subject in the realm; but yet I judge not of her so harshly as you perhaps may do. She has a noble spirit, and I think would not willingly do wrong. Besides all this, she is the trusted friend of one who loves me well—the Maréchal de Brissac; therefore I do believe that especially she would not wish to injure me. When I have seen her, she has always seemed to regard me highly;

and I will own—although I must regret that any one should hold such authority in the land of France as often to overrule the king's wisest ministers—I do believe that, for her own personal advantage, she would in no degree seek what is unjust to another, or do that which might be dangerous to her country. I have no doubt that one of her first wishes is to promote, in every way, such plans as she considers just and wise; and although, of course, she may from time to time be biased, like every other person, by blinding mists of prejudice or of self-interest, yet I do think that she is less so than any other being who ever yet filled a situation of splendid disgrace and ill-bought authority. I believe, then, that with her, as with the king, a few plain words of remonstrance and explanation will win that support which is alone needful to my just claims."

"Then go thither at once," said Corse de Leon, with a dissatisfied air. "If you will still trust to those whom you have not tried, go thither, and encounter whatever the consequence may be. Were I you, my conduct would be different."

"What would you do, then?" asked Bernard de Rohan. "I do not propose to go to the court *at once*, but merely after I have done all that I can to trace my Isabel on the road that she has taken. Say! what would you do were you situated as I am?"

"It matters little," replied Corse de Leon, "for we are differently formed. You are like the stately warhorse, doubtless strong and full of fire, but broken down to the bit and rein of custom, and trained to pace hither and thither, as the great riding-master called society wills. Your affections may be vehement, your courage high, your heart sincere, but you are not fitted and formed for the wild life of freedom, or for a desperate and deadly struggle against the trammels of habit, and the lash and spur of opinion. I, on the contrary, am the lion—or, if you will, the tiger, or the wolf. No hand tames me and goads me on—my mouth knows no bit and curb—the desert is my home—solitude my society—my own will my law—and they who strive to take and chain me, to break me down to the world's habits, or to bind me by man's opinions, will either rue the bite of the free wild beast, or see him die before the hunters, in silence and despair. If you would know what I would do, I would take my revenge of that bad man; I would seek the lady till I found her; I would tell her that dangers, obstructions, impediments, and the vain idleness of a world's laws were before us if we did not trample upon that world's judgments; I would ask her to cast off for me and with me the prejudices of country and connexions; I would make my native place of the first land of freedom I could find; I would find my friends and my relations among the brave, and the free, and the good, wherever I met them; I would press out from the grape of liberty the wine of my own happiness, and I would drink of the cup that my own hand had prepared. But such counsels are not for you; such things are not parts of your nature."

"I believe not," replied Bernard de Rohan; "but still the first part of your advice I shall follow, and at daybreak to-morrow will set out to meet this man upon the way, and bid him draw his sword where there is none to interrupt us."

"Should he refuse?" said the brigand. "He is well accompanied—has many men with him, and some who seem to bear a high rank and station. He may refuse to draw his sword, and say that the matter is before the king: what then?"

"I will spurn him as a cur," replied Bernard de Rohan. "I will strike him in the midst of his people; call him a coward as well as a knave, and send him back with the brand of shame upon his brow. It matters not to me who are with him! If gentlemen be there, so much the better; Bernard de Rohan's name is not unknown, Bernard de Rohan's honour bears no stain; and they shall hear his treachery and baseness blazoned in the open day by a tongue unknown to falsehood."

Corse de Leon gazed upon him for a moment with a grave, perhaps one might call it a pitying smile. "You have forgotten," he said, "or never fully known, the court of France. There has there risen up," he added, "within my memory, a habit, an affectation of indifference, if you like to call it so, to all things on this earth; which indifference is born of a corrupt and a degraded heart, and of sated and exhausted appetites. To a high mind, furnished with keen and vigorous faculties, nothing on earth can be indifferent; for acuteness of perception—a quality which, in its degree, assimilates us to the Divine nature—weighs all distinctions. As God himself sees all the qualities of everything, whether minute or great, and gives them their due place, so, the grander and the more expansive the intellect may be, the more accurately it feels, perceives, and estimates the good or evil of each individual thing. The low and the base, the palled taste of luxury, the satiated sense of licentiousness, the callous heart of selfishness, the blunted sensibilities of lust, covetousness, gluttony, effeminacy, and idleness, take refuge in indifference, and call it to their aid, lest vanity—the weakest, but the last point to become hardened in the heart of man—should be wounded. They take for their protection the shield of a false and tinsel wit, the answer of a sneer, the argument of a supercilious look, and try to gloze over everything, to themselves and others, with a contemptuous persiflage which confounds all right and wrong. Thus will this count and his companions meet you; and you will gain neither answer nor satisfaction, but a jest, a sneer, or a look of pity."

"It matters not," replied Bernard de Rohan, "it matters not! There are some things that men cannot laugh away! Honour, and courage, and virtue are not columns planted so loosely that a light gale can blow them down; and I will mark his brow with such disgrace that an ocean of laughter and light jests will never wash the stain off again. When I have done that, I will seek my Isabel, and by her own wishes shall our future conduct be guided. You have reasoned like a learned scholar, my good friend; but yet you see you have not converted me to your thoughts, though I will own that it much surprises me to find you have such varied knowledge of courts, and, I should think, of schools also."

"I have of both," replied Corse de Leon: "the one I have seen, though in an humble sphere; the other in my youth I frequented, and gained there knowledge which those who taught me did not know that they communicated. However, I wished not to convince you or to overrule your determination, for that determination is not wrong. I only desired that you should go to its execution with a full knowledge of all that you might meet with. Follow your plan, therefore, as you have laid it down, and in executing it I will not be far from you in case of need. There is no knowing what a bad man may do, and you ride too slightly attended to offer much resistance in case they sought to do you wrong."

"Oh, I fear not, I fear not," replied Bernard de Rohan. "Here, on the soil of France, I have no fear of any acts of violence, such as that from which I suffered in Savoy."

"Have you not seen to-night," said his companion, "have you not seen this night what wrongs are daily done, even here? However, as I have said, I will not be far from you; so, for the present, farewell, and let not daylight see you a lingerer in this dark city."

Thus saying, he turned and left his young companion, who remained for some time plunged in deep thought; and, though the light of bright hope continued still unextinguished before him, mists and clouds came across the flame from time to time, making it wavering, uncertain, and obscure.

END OF VOL. I.

[1] The first time I ever find the word claret used, it is applied to the wine of Avignon.

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