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HENRY OF GUISE;

OR,

THE STATES OF BLOIS.

VOL. II.

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HENRY OF GUISE

OR,

THE STATES OF BLOIS.

BY

G. P. R. JAMES, ESQ.

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

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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HENRY OF GUISE;

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

All was bustle round the door of the little inn of Montigny; twenty or thirty horses employed the hands and attention of as many grooms and stable-boys; and while they put their heads together, and talked over the perfections or imperfections of the beasts they held, sixty or seventy respectable citizens, the great cloth merchant, and the wholesale dealer in millstones, the curé of the little town, the bailiff of the high-justiciary, the ironmonger, the grocer, and the butcher, stood in knots on the outside, discussing more important particulars than the appearance of the horses. The sign of the inn was the *Croix de Lorraine*, and the name of the Duke of Guise was frequently heard mingling in the conversation of the people round the door.

"A great pity," cries one, "that his Highness does not stay here the night."

"Some say that the King's troops are pursuing him," replied another.

"Sure enough he came at full speed," said a third; "but I heard his people talk about the reiters."

"Oh, we would protect him against the reiters," cried one of the bold citizens of Montigny.

"Well," said another, "if he be likely to bring the reiters upon us, I think his Highness very wise to go. How could we defend an open town? and he has not twenty men behind him."

"I will tell you something, my masters," said another, with an air of importance, and a low bow:--"When my boy was over towards Montreuil to-night, he heard a report of the reiters having been defeated near Gandelu."

"Oh, nonsense!" replied the courageous burgher; "who should defeat them if the Duke was not there?"

"But hark!" cried another, "I hear trumpets, as I live. Now, if these should be the King's troops we will defend the Duke at the peril of our lives. But let us look out and see."

"Come up to my windows," cried one.

"Go up the tower of the church," said the curé.

But another remarked that the sounds did not come from the side of Paris; and, in a minute or two after, a well-dressed citizen like themselves rode gaily in amongst them, jumped from his horse, threw up his cap in the air, and exclaimed, "Long life to the Duke of Guise! The reiters have been cut to pieces!"

"What is that you say, young man?" exclaimed a voice from one of the windows of the inn above; and looking up, the citizen saw a young and gay-looking man sitting in the open casement, and leaning out with his arm round the iron bar that ran up the centre.

"I said, my Lord," replied the man, "that the reiters have been cut to pieces, and I saw the troops that defeated them bring in the wounded and prisoners last night into La Ferté."

"Ventre bleu! This is news indeed," cried the other; and instantly turning, he quitted the window and advanced into the room.

While this conversation had been going on without, a quick conference had been going on between the personages whose horses were held without. The chamber in which they were assembled was an upstairs' room, with two beds in two several corners, and a table in the midst covered with a clean white table-cloth, and ornamented in the centre with a mustard-pot, a salt-seller, and a small bottle of vinegar, while four or five spoons were ranged around.

At the side of the table appeared the Duke of Guise, dining with as good an appetite off a large piece of unsalted boiled beef, as off any of the fine stews and salmis of his cook Maître Lanecque. Five or six other gentlemen were around, diligently employed in the same occupation; and one who had finished two bowls of soup at a place where they had previously stopped, now declaring that he had no appetite, had taken his seat in the window. The servants of the Duke and of his companions were at dinner below, and the landlord himself was excluded from the room, that dining and consultation might go on at the same time.

"It is most unfortunate," said the Duke of Guise, as soon as he had seated himself at the table, "it is most unfortunate that this youth has not kept his word with me. Our horses and men are both fatigued to death; and yet, after what happened the other day at Mareuil, it would be madness to remain here all night with only twenty horsemen."

"You have got timid, fair cousin," replied one of the gentlemen present. "We shall have you wrapping yourself up in a velvet gown, and setting up a conférrie, in imitation of our excellent, noble, and manly king."

The Duke w as habitually rash enough to be justified in laughing at the charge, and he replied, "It is on your account, my pretty cousin, that I fear the most. You know what the reiters have sworn to do with you, if they catch you."

"It is most unfortunate indeed," said an older and a graver man; "most unfortunate, that this Count de Logères should have deceived you. It might have been better, perhaps, to trust to some more tried and experienced friend."

"Oh, you do him wrong, Laval; you do him wrong," replied the Duke. "It is neither want of faith or good will, I can be sworn. Some accident, such as may happen to any of us, has detained him. I am very anxious about him, and somewhat reproach myself for having made him march with only half his numbers. Had his whole band been with him, he might have made head against the reiters, if he met with them. But now he has less than half their reputed number. Nevertheless," he continued, "his absence is, as you say, most unfortunate; for--with these Germans on our left, and the movements of Henry's Swiss upon our right--they might catch us as the Gascons do wild ducks, in the net, through the meshes of which we have been foolish enough to thrust our own heads. I pray thee, Brissac, go down to mine host of the house, and gather together some of the notable men of the place, to see if we cannot by any means purchase horses to carry us on. Who are you speaking to, Aumale?" he continued, raising his voice, and addressing the youth who sat in the window.

"Good news, good news!" cried the young man springing down, and coming forward into the room. "The reiters have been cut to pieces near Gandelu. There is a fellow below who has seen the victorious troops, and the wounded and the prisoners."

"My young falcon for a thousand crowns!" cried the Duke of Guise. "If that be the case, we shall soon hear more of him. Hark! are not those trumpets? Yet go out, Brissac; go out. We must not suffer ourselves to be surprised whatever we do. Aumale, have the horses ready. If they should prove the Swiss, we must march out at the one gate while they march in at the other."

But at that moment Brissac, who had run down at a word, and was by this time in the street, held up his hand to one of the others who was looking out of the window, exclaiming, "Crosses of Lorraine, crosses of Lorraine! A gallant body of some fifty spears; but all crosses of Lorraine.--Ay, and I can see the arms of Montsoreau and Logères! All is right, tell the Duke; all is right!" And thus saying he advanced along the street to meet the troops that were approaching.

The Duke of Guise, who had risen from the table, seated himself again quietly, drew a deep breath as a man relieved from some embarrassment, and filling the glass that stood beside him, half full of the good small wine of Beaugency, rested his head upon his hand, and remained in thought for several minutes.

While he remained in this meditative mood the sounds of the trumpets became louder and louder; the trampling of horses' feet were heard before the inn, and then was given, in a loud tone, the order to halt. Several of the companions of the Duke had gone down stairs to witness the arrival of the troops, and in a minute or two after, feet were heard coming up, and the Duke turned his head to welcome the young Count on his arrival. He was somewhat surprised, however, to see an old white-headed man, who had doffed his steel cap to enter the Duke's presence, come in between Brissac and Laval, and make him a low inclination of the head.

"Who are you, my good friend?" demanded the Duke. "And where is the young Count of Logères?"

"I know not, your Highness," replied the other. "I am the Count's seneschal, and expected to find him here. He set off four days ago with one half of his men, commanding me to join him at

Montigny with the rest, as soon as their arms arrived from Rhetel. They came sooner than we expected, so I followed him the day after."

"Then is it to you, my worthy old friend," said the Duke, "that the country is obliged for the defeat of this band of marauders?"

"No, your Highness," replied the old man bluntly. "I have not had the good fortune to meet with any thing to defeat, though, indeed, we heard of something of the kind this morning as we passed by Grisolles."

"I hope the news is true," said the Duke; "I have heard of many a victory in my day, where it turned out that the victors were vanquished; and I hear that these reiters numbered from a hundred to a hundred and fifty men. How many had your Lord with him, good seneschal?"

"He had fifty-one men at arms," replied the old soldier, "besides some lackeys and a page; and some men leading horses with the baggage he could not do without."

"I shall not be easy till I hear more of him," said the Duke, walking up and down the room. "However, your coming, good seneschal, will enable us to make good this place against any force that may be brought against it. Quick, send me up the aubergiste. We must despatch some one to bring us in intelligence: and now, good seneschal, rest and refresh your horses, get your men some food, and have every thing ready to put foot in stirrup again at a moment's notice; for if we find that your Lord has fallen into the hands of these reiters, we must mount to deliver him. Let their numbers be what they may, Henry of Guise cannot make up his mind to leave a noble friend in the hands of the foemen."

"We are all ready this minute, my Lord," replied the old seneschal. "There is not a man of Logères who is not ready to ride forty miles, and fight two reiters this very night in defence of his Lord."

"The old cock's not behind the young one," said the Chevalier d'Aumale to Brissac. But the Duke of Guise overruled the zealous eagerness of the old soldier; and as soon as the aubergiste appeared, directed him to send off a boy in the direction of Montreuil and La Ferté, in order to gain intelligence of the movements of the Count de Logères, and to ascertain whether the report of the defeat of the reiters was correct or not. His own horses he ordered now to be unsaddled, and casting off his corselet, gave himself up to repose for the evening.

During the next hour, or hour and a half, manifold were the reports which reached the town concerning the conflict which had taken place between the Count of Logères and the reiters on the preceding evening. All sorts of stories were told: every peasant that brought in a basket of apples had his own version of the affair; and the accounts were the most opposite, as well as the most various. The Duke of Guise, however, was too much accustomed to sifting the various rumours of the day, not to be able to glean some true information from the midst of these conflicting statements. It seemed clear to him that the reiters had been defeated, and without having any very certain cause for his belief, he felt convinced that Charles of Montsoreau was already upon his way towards Montigny.

"Come," he added, after expressing these opinions to the Chevalier d'Aumale, "we must at least give our young champion a good meal on his arrival. See to it, Brissac; see to it. You, who are a connoisseur in such things, deal with our worthy landlord of the Cross, and see if he cannot procure something for supper more dainty than he gave us for dinner."

"The poor man was taken by surprise," replied Brissac; "but since he heard that you were to remain here, there has been such a cackling and screaming in the court-yard, and such a riot in the dovecote, that I doubt not all the luxuries of Montigny will be poured forth this night upon the table."

In less than an hour after this order was given, the arrival of fresh horses was heard; and Laval, who went to the window, announced, that as well as he could see through the increasing darkness, for it was now night, this new party consisted only of five or six persons. In a few minutes, however, the door was thrown open by the aubergiste, and Charles of Montsoreau himself appeared, dusty with the march, and with but few traces of triumph or satisfaction on his countenance.

"What, my young hero!" cried the Duke, rising and taking him by the hand; "you look as gloomy as if you had suffered a defeat, rather than gained a victory. Are the tidings which we have heard not true then, or are they exaggerated? If you have even brought off your forces safe from the reiters, that is a great thing, so overmatched as you were."

"It is not that, your Highness," replied Charles of Montsoreau: "the numbers were not very disproportionate, but the reiters have certainly suffered a complete rout, and I do not think that they will ever meet in a body again. They lost a good many men on the field, and I fear the peasantry have murdered all the wounded."

"So much the better," cried the Chevalier d'Aumale; "so much the better. One could have done nothing with them but hang them."

"I fear then," said the Duke of Guise, addressing the Count, "I fear then that your own loss has been severe by the gloominess of your countenance, Logères."

"There are a good many severely wounded, sir," replied the Count; "but very few killed. This, however, is not the cause of my vexation, which I must explain to your Highness alone. I have, however, to apologise to you for not being here last night, as I fully intended. I did not go to seek the reiters, but fell in with them accidentally, and after the skirmish I was forced to turn towards La Ferté instead of coming here, in order to get surgeons to my wounded men. I find, however, sir," he continued, "that my good old seneschal has made more speed than his master, and has arrived here with his band before me. I must go and take order for the comfort of my people, and prepare lodging for the rest who are coming up, for I rode on at all speed as soon as I met with the messenger whom you had sent out to seek me. After that I will return and crave a few minutes' audience of your Grace alone."

"Come back to supper, dear friend," replied the Duke; "we must let our gay friends now sup with us; but then we will drive them to their beds, and hold solitary council together, and be not long Logères, for you need both refreshment and repose."

When the young Count returned to the apartments of the Duke, after he had seen the rest of his troop arrive, and had taken every measure to secure the comfort of the men under his command, he found that Prince standing in one of the deep windows speaking in a low tone with the page Ignati, while his own officers were gathered together in the window on the other side.

The Duke instantly took him by the hand as he approached, and said in a low but kindly tone, "You see I have been questioning the spy I set upon you, Logères, and he has let me into a number of your secrets; but you must not be angry with him on that account, for Henry of Guise will not abuse the trust. Come, let us sit down to table, and we will afterwards find an opportunity of talking over all these affairs. You have acted nobly and gallantly, my young friend, and have served your country while you benefited me. For your brother's conduct you are not responsible: but I think this morning's events, if the boy speaks correctly, must bar your tongue from speaking his praises for the future."

"Indeed, my Lord," exclaimed the young Count, "my brother may----"

"Hush! hush!" cried the Duke. "There is nothing sits so ill upon the lips of a noble-hearted man as an excuse for bad actions, either in himself or others. It is false generosity, Charles of Montsoreau, to say the least of it. But let us to table. Come, Aumale. See! our good Aubergiste looks reproachfully at you for letting his fragrant ragouts grow cold. Come, we will to meat, gentlemen. Sit down, sit down, We will have no ceremony here at the Cross of Lorraine."

Thus saying, the Duke seated himself at table, and the rest took their places around. The supper proved better than had been expected, and wine and good appetites supplied the place of all deficiencies. The Chevalier d'Aumale indeed had every now and then a light jest at some of the various dishes: he declared that a certain capon had blunted his dagger, and asked Charles of Montsoreau whether it was not tougher than a veteran reiter. He declared that a matelote d'anguille which was placed before him, had a strong flavour of a hedge; but added, that as his own appetite was viperous, he must get through it as best he might. He was not without a profane jest either, upon a dish of pigeons; but though he addressed the greater part of these gaily to the young Count de Logères, he could hardly wring a smile from one who in former days would have laughed with the best, but whose heart was now anxiously occupied with many a bitter feeling.

Charles of Montsoreau was eager, too, that the meal should be over, for he longed for that private communication with the Duke which weighed upon his mind in anticipation. He felt that it would be difficult to exculpate his brother; and yet, in pursuance of his own high resolutions, he longed to do so: and then again he eagerly hoped that the powerful prince beside whom he sat would find some means of delivering Marie de Clairvaut from the hands into which she had fallen; and yet he feared, from all he heard and saw, that that deliverance might be difficult and remote.

Thus the banquet passed somewhat cheerlessly to him; and it was not very much enlivened by a little incident which happened towards the close of supper, when the landlord, who had come into the room followed by a man dressed in the garb of a surgeon, whispered something in the Duke's ear which called his attention immediately.

"How many did you say?" demanded the Duke.

"Only two at present, your Highness," replied the surgeon; "but three more sinking, I think."

"All in the same house?" said the Duke.

"No, my Lord, in different houses," replied the man; "but near the same spot."

"The only thing to be done," replied the Duke, "is to draw a barrier across the end of that street, and mark the houses with a white cross."

"What is the matter, your Highness?" said Laval, from the other end of the table.

"Oh, nothing," replied the Duke of Guise, "only a few cases of the plague; and because it was very bad last autumn at Morfontaine, the people here have got into a fright."

The Duke of Guise concluded his supper as lightly and gaily as if nothing had happened, for his mind had become so accustomed to deal with and to contemplate things of great moment, that they made not that impression upon him which they do upon those whose course is laid in a smoother and evener path.

Charles of Montsoreau, however, could not feel in the same way. "War and pestilence!" he thought, "bloodshed and death! These are the common every-day ideas of men in this unhappy country, now. Perhaps famine may be added some day soon, and yet there will be light laughter, and merriment, and jest. Well, let it be so. Why should we cast away enjoyment because it can but be small? Life is at best but made up of chequered visions: let us enjoy the bright ones while we may, and make the dark ones short if we can."

While he thus thought, the Duke of Guise whispered a word or two to the Count of Brissac, and that gentleman nodded to Laval. Shortly after, both rose; and, with an air of affected unwillingness, the Chevalier d'Aumale followed their example. The two or three other gentlemen who had partaken of the meal, but who either from inferior situation or natural taciturnity had mingled but little in the conversation, left the table at the same time, and accompanied the others out of the room, so that the Duke of Guise and the young Count were left alone.

CHAP. II.

The weak-minded and the vulgar are cowed by the aspect of high station; the humble in mind, and the moderate in talent, are subdued by high genius, and bend lowly to the majesty of mind; the powerful, the firm, and the elevated spring up to meet their like, and with them there is nothing earthly that can overawe but a consciousness of evil in themselves, or a sensation of abasement for those they love.

Such was the case with Charles of Montsoreau, who undoubtedly was a man of high and powerful mind. He was in his first youth, it is true; he had no great or intimate knowledge of the world, except that knowledge of the world which, in a few rare instances, comes as it were by intuition. He had been bred up from his youth in love and admiration for the princes of the House of Lorraine, and especially of Henry, Duke of Guise; and yet, when he had met him for the first time, and recognised him at once in the inn at Mareuil, he felt no diffidence--no alarm. Nor had this confidence in himself any thing whatsoever to do with conceit: he thought not of himself for a moment; he thought only of the Duke of Guise and his situation, and impulse guided by habit did the rest. Seeing that the Duke had assumed an inferior character, he treated him accordingly; and acting as nature dictated to him, he acted right.

Neither, at Rheims, when the Duke appeared surrounded by pomp and splendour, did the young nobleman feel differently. He paid every tribute of external reverence to the Prince's station and high renown; but he conferred with him upon equal terms, feeling that if in mind he was not absolutely equal to that great leader, he was competent to appreciate his character, and was not inferior to him in elevation of thought and purpose.

But now, how changed were all his feelings, when, sitting by one whom he venerated and respected--more than perhaps was deserved--he had to discuss with him the painful subject of a brother's errors, and torture imagination to find excuses which judgment would not ratify! He sat humiliated, and pained, and hesitating: he knew not what to say, and he felt that any thing he could say was vain.

For a few minutes after the rest of the party quitted the room, the Duke of Guise remained silent, sometimes gazing down, as was his habit, upon his clasped hands, sometimes raising his eyes for a single moment to the countenance of his young companion. He seemed to feel for him, indeed; and when he did speak, led the conversation to the subject gradually and delicately.

"Well, my dear Count," he said, "let us speak of this affair of the reiters. You made me as many excuses but now, for defeating our enemies, as if you had let them defeat you. Such gallant actions are easily pardoned, Logères; and if you but proceed to commit many such faults, Henry of Navarre and Henry of Guise had both need look to their renown. There was a third Henry once," he continued, half closing his eyes, and speaking with a sigh, as he thought of Henry III. and fair promises of his youth; "there was a third Henry once, who might perhaps have borne the meed of fame away from us both: but that light has gone out in the socket, and left nothing but an unsavory smell behind. However, there was no excuse needed, good friend, for cutting to

pieces double your own number of German marauders."

"My excuse was not for that," replied the Count, calmly, "but your Highness directed me to go no farther than Montigny, and I went to La Ferté, on account of the wounded men."

"That is easily excused too," said the Duke. "But now give me your own account of the affair. The boy told me the story but imperfectly. How fell you in with the reiters at first?"

Charles of Montsoreau did as the Prince required, giving a full and minute, but modest, account of all that had taken place. But when he spoke of retreating up the river to the spot where the banks were deeper, and the stream more profound, Guise caught him by the hand, exclaiming eagerly, "Did you know that the banks were steeper? Did you see that they would guard your flank?"

"That was my object, my Lord," replied the young Count, somewhat surprised. "I noticed the nature of the ground as we charged them at first."

"Kneel down!" cried the Duke; "kneel down! Would to God that I were a Bayard for thy sake!--In the name of God, St. Michael and St. George, I dub thee knight;" and drawing his sword he struck him on the collar with the blade, adding with a smile, in which melancholy was blended with gaiety, "Perchance this may be the last chivalrous knighthood conferred in France. Indeed, as matters go, I think it will be: but if it should, I can but say that it never was won more nobly."

The young Count rose with sparkling eyes. The memory of the chivalrous ages was not yet obliterated by dust and lichens; the fire of a more enthusiastic epoch was not yet quite extinct; and he felt as if what had passed gave him greater strength to go through what was to come.

The Duke, however, relaxing soon into his former manner, made him a sign to proceed; and Charles of Montsoreau went on to detail the complete defeat and dispersion of the different bodies of reiters. He then began to hesitate again: but Guise was determined to hear all, and said, "But your brother; where did you find your brother? Be frank with me, Logères."

Thus pressed, the young Count went on to say, that he did not again meet with his brother till he found him in the market-place at La Ferté. "My brother," he continued, "having been driven by the party that pursued him beyond the carriage, and judging that I was coming up with a superior force, imagined that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut and her attendants had fallen under my protection: but finding that such was not the case, he mounted his horse again, and proceeded to seek for her during the greater part of the night, while I did the same in another direction."

He was then hurrying on as fast as possible to speak of the following morning, but the Duke interrupted him, demanding, "There was a sharp dispute in the market-place, I think; was there not, Monsieur de Logères? Pray let me hear the particulars."

But Charles of Montsoreau, driven to the point, answered boldly and at once, "It was a dispute between two brothers, my Lord; in regard to which none but God and their own consciences can judge. You will therefore pardon me if I keep that which is private to my private bosom."

Guise gazed at him for a long--a very long time, with eyes full of deep feeling, and then replied, "By Heaven! you are one of the most extraordinary young men I ever met with. I know the whole, Monsieur de Logères; and the words there spoken let me into the secrets of your bosom which I wished to know. I now understand how to deal with you; and while I do my best to secure your happiness, trust to the Duke of Guise to avoid, as far as possible, any thing that is painful to you in the course. But go on; let me hear the rest."

"If you know all, my Lord," said Charles of Montsoreau, a good deal affected by the Duke's kindness, "will you not spare me the telling of that which must be painful to me?"

"I fear I must ask you to go on," replied the Duke. "What you have now to tell me is the most important part of all to me at the present moment, for by it must my conduct be regulated, in regard to the measures for rescuing our poor Marie from the hands of that----." He checked himself suddenly, and then added, "the King, in short. A single word may cause a difference in our view of the matter; and therefore I would fain hear you tell it, if you will do me that favour."

"All that I know, my Lord, I will tell," replied the Count; "but of my own knowledge I have little to tell, for the principal part of my information was derived from the boy with whom you have already spoken. All then that I personally know is, that, having slept long from great fatigue, I was roused by the boy in the morning; that he told me my brother was about to depart; and that, on descending, I found his report true. My brother was already on horseback, and his troop in the act of setting out; but he was accompanied by a gentleman whom I had never seen before, whose name is Colombel, and who, I found afterwards, is an officer in the service of the King."

"Oh yes," said the Duke of Guise; "I have heard him named; a person of no great repute, but some cunning."

"My conversation with my brother," continued the Count, "was not the most agreeable. On his side it was all taunts; but the only part of which it is needful to inform your Highness, was, that when I asked tidings of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, he would afford me no information, except

that she was in safe hands. I am grieved, also, to be compelled to say that he told me, if I did not join you before he did, I should be long parted from you."

"We have lost an ally," replied the Duke; "but one which, to say sooth, I do not covet. If he be not treacherous, he is at best unsteady; but I cannot help fearing, Charles of Montsoreau, that your brother himself, apprehending that my regard for you might not suit his purposes, has had some share in suffering Marie to fall into the hands of Henry."

"Oh no, my Lord, oh no!" exclaimed Charles of Montsoreau; "you do him wrong, believe me. My Lord, a few words will explain to you the cause of his conduct. He is possessed with a passion for Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, so strong, so vehement, so intense, as to have a portion of madness in it,--a sufficient portion to make him cast away his former nature altogether, to hate his brother, to abandon his friends, to abjure all the thoughts and feelings of his youth, and to follow her still where-ever she goes, seeking to obtain her by means which the very blindness of his passion prevents him from seeing are those which must insure his losing her."

"This is the passion of a weak and unstable mind," said the Duke. "Love, my young friend, is in itself a grand and ennobling thing, leading us to do great actions for the esteem and approbation of her we love. The love of a bright woman," he added, "the love of a bright woman--I speak it with all due reverence," and he put his hand to his hat, "is the next finest sensation, the next grand mover in human actions, to the love of God. The object is undoubtedly inferior, but the course is the same, namely, the striving to do high and excellent things for the approbation of a being that we love and venerate. Alas that it should be so! but in this world I fear the love of woman is amongst us the strongest mover of the two: the other is so remote, so high, so pure, that our dull senses strain their wings in reaching it. The love of woman appeals to the earthly as well as to the heavenly part of man's nature, and consequently is heard more easily. Perhaps--and Heaven grant it!--that, as some of our fathers held, the one love may lead us on to the other, and the perishable be but a step to the immortal. However," he added, "such love as that which you say possesses your brother, will certainly never lead him on to any thing that is great, or high, or noble. Most certainly it will not lead him to the hand of Marie de Clairvaut as long as Henry of Guise can draw a sword. If he have not betrayed me, he has abandoned me; if he have not shown himself a coward, he has shown himself a weak defender of those intrusted to his charge; and under such circumstances, had he the wealth of either India and the power of Cæsar, he should never wed Marie de Clairvaut." He laid his hand upon the shoulder of Charles of Montsoreau, and he said, "You have heard my words, good friend; those words are irrevocable: and now knowing that your brother can never be really your rival, act as you will. I would fain have your confidence, Charles, but I will not wring it from you. This girl is beautiful and sweet and fascinating; and if I judge right, you love her not less but more nobly than your brother. Tell me, or tell me not as you will, but we all feel pleased with confidence."

"Oh, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "how can I deny you my confidence when you load me with such proofs of your goodness? I do love Mademoiselle de Clairvaut as deeply, as intensely, as passionately, as my brother,--more, more a thousand fold than he or any body else, I believe, is capable of loving. I had some opportunities of rendering her services, and on one of those occasions I was betrayed into words and actions which I fancied must have made her acquainted with all my feelings. It was after that I discovered, my Lord, how madly my brother loved her: it was after that I discovered that the pursuit of my love must bring contention and destruction on my father's house. Had I believed that she loved me, nothing should have made me yield her to any one; for I had the prior claim, I had the prior right: but when I had reason to believe that she had not marked, and did not comprehend all the signs of my affection; when I felt that I could quit her without the appearance of trifling with her regard, though not without the continued misery of my own life, my determination was taken in a moment, and I determined to make the sacrifice, be the consequences what they might. Such, my Lord, is the simple truth; such is the only secret of all my actions."

The Duke of Guise bent down his eyes upon the ground with a smile, in the expression of which there was a degree of cynical bitterness. It was somewhat like one of the smiles of the Abbé de Boisguerin; but the Duke's words explained it at once, which the Abbé's never did.

"I fear, my young friend," he said, "that the science of women's hearts is a more difficult one than the science of war. You have learnt the one, it would seem, by intuition; in the other you are yet a novice. However, you shall pursue your own course, bearing with you the remembrance that I swear by my own honour--"

"Oh swear not, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau; "circumstances may change; she may love him; her love may alter him, and lead him back to noble things."

The Duke smiled again. "What I have said," he answered, "is as good as sworn. But have it your own way; I thank you for the confidence you have reposed in me. And now, to show you how I can return it, I have a task to put upon you, an adventure on which to send forth my new made knight. I do not think that Henry either will or dare refuse to give up to me my own relation and ward. The king and I are great friends, God wot! But still I must demand her, and somebody must take a journey to Paris for that purpose. To the capital, doubtless, they have conveyed her; and I trust, my good Logères, that you will not think it below your dignity and merit to seek and bring back a daughter of the House of Guise."

Charles of Montsoreau paused thoughtfully for a moment, ere he replied. All the difficulties and dangers to which he might be exposed, in acting against the views of the King of France, were to him as nothing; but the difficulties and dangers which might arise from his opposition to his own brother, were painful and fearful to him to contemplate. He saw not, however, how he could refuse the task; and it cannot be denied that love for Marie de Clairvaut had its share also in making him accept it. He doubted not for a moment, that if she were in the hands of the King, she was there against her own will; and could he, he asked himself, could he even hesitate to aid in delivering her from a situation of difficulty, danger, and distress? The thought of aiding her, the thought of seeing her again, the thought of hearing the sweet tones of that beloved voice, the thought of once more soothing and supporting her, all had their share; the very contemplation made his heart beat; and lifting his eyes, he found those of the Duke of Guise fixed upon his countenance, reading all the passing emotions, the shadows of which were brought across him by those thoughts. The colour mounted slightly into his cheek as he replied, "My Lord, I will do your bidding to the best of my ability. When shall I march?"

"Oh, you mistake," said the Duke, laughing; "you are not to go at the head of your men, armed *cap-à-pie*, to deliver the damsel from the giant's castle; but in the quality of my envoy to Henry; first of all demanding, quietly and gently, where the Lady is, and then requiring him to deliver her into your hands, for the purpose of escorting her to me, where-ever I may be. You shall have full powers for the latter purpose; but you must keep them concealed till such time as you have discovered, either from the King's own lips--though no sincerity dwells upon them--or by your own private inquiries and investigations, where this poor girl is. Then you may produce to the King your powers from me, and to herself I will give you a letter, requesting her to follow your directions in all things. Now, you must show yourself as great a diplomatist as a soldier, for I can assure you that you will have to deal with as artful and as wily a man as any now living in Europe."

"I will do my best, my Lord; and to enable me to deal with them before all their plans are prepared, I had better set out at break of day to-morrow, with as many men as your Highness thinks fit should accompany me."

The Duke mused for a moment or two; "No," he said, "no; I must not let you go, Logères, without providing for your safety. You have risked your life sufficiently for me and mine already. You go into new scenes, with which you are unacquainted; into dangers, with which you may find it more difficult to cope than any that you have hitherto met with. I cannot then suffer you to depart without such passports and safeguards as may diminish those dangers as far as possible."

"Oh, I fear not, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "the King and your Highness are not at war. I have done nothing to offend, and--"

"It cannot be, it cannot be," replied the Duke. "You must go back with me to Soissons. I will send a messenger from this place to demand the necessary passports for you. No great time will be lost, for a common courier can pass where you or I would be stopped. Then," he continued, "as to the men that you should take with you, I should say, the fewer the better. Mark me," he continued, with a smile, "there are secret springs in all things; and I will give you letters to people in Paris, which will put at your disposal five hundred men on the notice of half an hour. Ay, more, should you require them. But use not these letters except in the last necessity, for they might hurry on events which I would rather see advance slowly till they were forced upon me, than do aught to bring them forward myself. No; you shall go back with me to Soissons, guarding me with your band; and I doubt not, our messenger from Paris will not be many hours after us. Now leave me, and to rest, good Logères, and send in the servant, whom you will find half way down the stairs."

The young Count withdrew without another word, and he found that while the conversation between himself and the Duke had been going on, a man had been stationed, both above and below the door of the apartment, as if to insure that nobody approached to listen. Such were the sad precautions necessary in those days.

Early on the following morning the whole party mounted their horses, the wounded men of Logères were left under the care and attendance of the good townsmen of Montigny, and the young Count riding with the party of the Duke of Guise, proceeded on the road to Soissons. No adventure occurred to disturb their progress; and, as so constantly happens in the midst of scenes of danger, pain, and difficulty, almost every one of the whole party endeavoured to compensate for the frequent endurance of peril and pain by filling up the intervals with light laughter and unthinking gaiety. The Duke of Guise himself was not the least cheerful of the party, though occasionally the cloud of thought would settle again upon his brow, and a pause of deep meditation would interrupt the jest or the sally. It was late at night when they arrived at Soissons, and the Duke, after supping with the Cardinal de Bourbon, retired to rest, without conversing with any of his party. It was about eight o'clock on the following morning, and while, by the dull grey light of a cloudy spring day, Charles of Montsoreau was dressing himself, with the aid of one of his servants, that the door opened without any previous announcement, and the Duke of Guise, clad in a dressing-gown of crimson velvet trimmed with miniver, entered the room, bearing in his hand a packet of sealed letters, and one open one. A page followed him with something wrapped up in a skin of leather, which he placed upon one of the stools, and instantly retired.

"Send away your man, Count," said the Duke, seating himself; "resume your dressing-gown, and kindly give me your full attention for half an hour. You will be so good," he continued, turning to the man who was quitting the chamber, "as to take your stand on the first landing-place below this door. You will tell any body whom you see coming up to pass by the other staircase; any one you may see coming down, you will direct to pass by this door quickly."

There was a stern command in the eye of the Duke of Guise which had a strong effect upon those it rested on; and the man to whom he now spoke made his exit from the room, stumbling over twenty things in his haste to obey. As soon as he was gone, the Duke turned to his young friend, and continued, "Here is the King's safeguard under his own hand, and the necessary passports for yourself and two attendants. Here is your letter of credit to him in my name, requiring him to give you every sort of information which he may be possessed of regarding the subjects which you will mention to him; and here is a third letter giving you full power to demand at his hands the person of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, for the purpose of escorting her and placing her under my protection. This, again, is to Mary herself, bidding her follow your counsels and direction in every thing; and these others are to certain citizens of Paris, whose names you will find written thereon. If you will take my advice, you will again take with you the boy Ignati, and one stout man-at-arms, unarmed, however, except in such a manner as the dangers of the road require. You understand, I think, clearly, all that I wish."

"I believe, my Lord, I do," replied the Count. "But how am I to insure safety for Mademoiselle de Clairvaut on the road, without an adequate force?"

"Write to me but one word," replied the Duke of Guise, "as soon as she is delivered into your hands, and I will send you with all speed whatever forces I can spare. But I have one or two things to communicate to you, which it is necessary for you to know, both for your own security and the success of your mission. The principal part of my niece's lands lie in the neighbourhood of Chateauneuf, between Dreux and Mortagne in Normandy. It is not at all unlikely, that, if driven to remove her from your sight, Henry may be tempted to send her thither, well knowing that it is what I have always opposed, and that I preferred rather that she should dwell even in Languedoc than be in that neighbourhood. For this I had a reason; and that reason is the near relationship in which her father stood to the most daring and the most dangerous man in France. One of the first of those whom you will see near the person of the King, the man who governs and rules him to his own infamy and destruction, in whose hands the minions are but tools and Henry an instrument, who, more than any one else, has tended to change a gracious prince, a skilful general, and a brave man, into an effeminate and vicious king, is René de Villequier, Baron of Clairvaut. He was first cousin to Marie de Clairvaut's father, and he is consequently her nearest male relation out of the family of Guise. He has, indeed, sometimes hinted at a right to share in the guardianship of his cousin's daughter. But such things a Guise permits not. However, with this claim upon the disposal of her hand, Henry may, perhaps, hesitate to yield her, unless with the consent of Villequier. With him, then, you may be called upon to deal; but Villequier, I think, knows the hand of a Guise too well to call down a blow from it unnecessarily. However, he is as daring as he is artful, and impunity in crime has rendered him perfectly careless of committing it. He is Governor of Paris, one of the King's ministers, a Knight of the Holy Ghost. Now hear what he has done to merit all this. More than one assassin broken on the wheel has avowed himself the instrument of Villequier, sent to administer poison to those he did not love. Complaisant in every thing to his King, he sought to sacrifice to him the honour of his wife: but she differed from him in her tastes; and, on the eighteenth of last September, in broad daylight, in the midst of an effeminate court, he murdered her with his own hand at her dressing-table. Nor was this all: there was a girl--a young sweet girl--the natural daughter of a noble house, who was holding before the unhappy lady a mirror to arrange her dress when the fatal blow was struck. The fiend's taste for blood was roused. One victim was not enough, and he murdered the wretched girl by the side of her dead mistress. This was done in open day, was never disowned, was known to every one, and was rewarded by the order of the Holy Ghost--an insult to God, to France, and to humanity.[1]
However, as with this man you may have to deal, I have to give you two cautions. Never drink wine with him, or eat food at his table; never go into his presence without wearing under your other dress the bosom friend which I have brought you there;" and he took from the leathern skin in which it was wrapped, a shirt of mail, made of rings linked together, so fine that it seemed the lightest stroke would have broken it, and yet so strong, that the best tempered poinard, driven by the most powerful hand, could not have pierced it. "Have also in your bosom," continued the Duke of Guise, "a small pistol; and if the villain attempts to lay his hand upon you, kill him like a dog. This is the only way to deal with René de Villequier."

The young Count smiled: "And is it needful my Lord Duke," he asked, "to take all these precautions in the courtly world of Paris?--Do you yourself take them, my Lord?--I fear not sufficiently."

"Oh! with regard to myself," replied the Duke, it is different. "I am so marked out and noted, they dare not do any thing against me. They would raise up a thousand vengeful hands against them in a moment, and they know that, too well to run such a risk. Neither Henry nor Villequier would hold their lives by an hour's tenure after Guise was dead. But you must take these precautions, my young friend. And now I have nothing more to say, except that, whatever you do to withdraw Marie de Clairvaut from the hands into which she has fallen, I will justify. If any ill befall you, I will avenge you as my brother; and if you deliver her from those whom she hates and

abhors, she shall, give you any testimony of her gratitude that she pleases, without a man in France saying you nay."

"Oh, my Lord, it is not for that I go!" exclaimed Charles of Montsoreau, with the blood rushing up again into his cheek. "It is not; surely you believe--"

"Hush! hush!" replied the Duke. "I have fallen into the foolish error of saying too much, my good young friend. But now, fare you well. Make your arrangements as speedily as you can; mount your horse, and onward to Paris, while I apply myself to matters which may well occupy every minute and every thought."

CHAP. III.

It was about nine o'clock at night, in the spring of the year 1588, that Charles of Montsoreau, with two companions, his faithful Gondrin and the little page, presented himself at the gate of Paris which opened upon the Soissons road. A surly arquebusier with a steel cap on his head, his gun upon his shoulder, and the rest thereof in his hand, was the first person that he encountered at the bridge over the fosse. Some other soldiers were sitting before the guardhouse; and the wicket-gate of the city itself was open, with an armed head protruded through, talking to a country girl with a basket on her arm, who had just passed out of the gate, none the better probably for her visit to the city.

The arquebusier planted himself immediately in the way of the young cavalier and his followers, and seemed prepared to stop them, though on the young Count applying to him for admission, he replied in a surly tone, "I have nothing to do with it. Ask the lieutenant at the gate."

To him, in the next place, then, Charles of Montsoreau applied; but though his tone was somewhat more civil than that of the soldier, he made a great many difficulties, examining the young nobleman all over, and looking as if he thought him a very suspicious personage. The Count after a certain time grew impatient, and asked, "You do not mean, I suppose, to refuse the passport of the King?"

"No," replied the other grinning. "We won't refuse the passport of the King, or the King's passport; but in order that the passport may be verified, it were as well, young gentleman, that you come to the gates by day. You can sleep in the faubourg for one night I take it."

"Certainly not without great inconvenience to myself," replied the Count, "and more inconvenience to the affairs of the Duke of Guise."

"The Duke of Guise!" said the man starting. "Your tongue has not the twang of Lorraine."

"But nevertheless," replied the Count, "the business I come upon is that of the Duke of Guise, which you would have seen if you had read the passport and safe-conduct. Does it not direct therein, to give room and free passage, safeguard, and protection to one gentleman of noble birth and two attendants, coming and going hither and thither in all parts of the realm of France, on the especial business of our true and well-beloved cousin, Henry, Duke of Guise? and is there not written in the Duke's own hand underneath, 'Given to our faithful friend and counsellor, Charles of Montsoreau, Count of Logères, for the purposes above written, by me, Henry of Guise?'"

The man held the paper for a moment to a lantern that hung up against the heavy stonework of the arch, and then exclaimed in a loud voice, "Throw open the gates there, bring the keys. Monseigneur, I beg you a thousand pardons for detaining you a minute. If I had but seen the writing of the Duke of Guise the doors would have been opened instantly."

As rapidly as possible the heavy gates, which had remained immoveable at the order of the King, swang back at the name of the Guise, and one of the attendants and the captain of the night running by the side of the Count's horse to prevent all obstruction, caused the second gate to be opened as rapidly, and the Count entered the capital city of his native country for the first time in his life.

The streets were dark and gloomy, narrow and high; and as one rode along them looking up from time to time towards the sky, the small golden stars were seen twinkling above the deep walls of the houses, as if beheld from the bottom of a well. Charles of Montsoreau had not chosen to ask his way at the gate, and though utterly unacquainted with the great city in which he now plunged, he rode on, trusting to find some shop still open where he might inquire his way without the chance of being deceived. Every booth and shop was then shut, however; and for a very long

way up the street which he had first entered, he met with not a single living creature to whom he could apply for direction. At length, however, that street ended abruptly in another turning to the left, and a sudden glare of light burst upon his eyes, proceeding from a building about a hundred yards farther on, which seemed to be on fire.

There was no bustle, however, or indication of any thing unusual in the street; and Charles of Montsoreau riding on, found that the blaze proceeded from a dozen or more of flambeaus planted in a sort of wooden barricade[2] before a large mansion, which fell back some yards from the general façade of the street, while a fat porter clothed in manifold colours, with a broad shoulder-belt and a sword by his side, walked to and fro in the light, trimming the torches with stately dignity. The young Count then remembered having heard of the custom of thus illuminating the barriers, which were before all the principal mansions in Paris during the first part of every night; and riding up towards the porter, he demanded whose hotel it was, and begged to be directed to one of the best inns in the neighbourhood.

The man gazed at him for a moment with the evident purpose of looking upon him as a bumpkin; but the porters of that day were required to be extremely discriminating, and the air and appearance of the young Count were not to be mistaken, and bowing low he replied, "I see you are a stranger, sir. This is the house of Monsieur d'Aumont. As to the best inn, inns are always but poor places; but I have heard a good account of the White House in the next street, at the sign of the Crown of France. If you go on quite to the end of this street and then turn to your right, you will come into another street as large and longer, at the very end of which, just looking down to the Pont Neuf, you will see a large white house with a gateway and the crown hanging over it. I have heard that every thing is good there, and the host civil; but he will make you pay for what you have."

"That is but just," replied the young Count; and giving the porter thanks for his information, he rode on and took up his abode at the sign of the Crown of France.

The aspect of the inn was very different from that of an auberge in the country; for, though the court-yard into which Charles of Montsoreau rode was littered with straw, and a large and splendid stable appeared behind, it was not now grooms and stable-boys that appeared on the first notice of a traveller's approach, but cooks and scullions and turnspits; while the master himself with a snow-white cap upon his head, a jacket of white cloth, and a white apron turned up sufficiently to show his black breeches and stockings with red clocks, appeared more like what he really was, the head of the kitchen, than the master of the house.

He looked a little suspiciously, at first, at the young stranger arriving with only two attendants, and with no other baggage than a small valise upon each horse, and an additional upon that of Ignati, to render the boy's weight equal to that of his fellow travellers. But the host was accustomed to deal with many kinds of men; and like the porter, after examining the Count for a moment, seeing some gold embroidery, but not much, upon his riding-dress, gilded spurs over his large boots of untanned leather, and a sword, the hilt and sheath of which were of no slight value, he also made a lowly reverence, and conducted him to one of the best apartments in his house. It consisted of three rooms, each entering into the other with a small cabinet beyond the chief bed-room; and the arrangements which the Count made at once--placing Gondrin's bed in the antechamber, and having the page's truckle-bed removed from his own bed-side to occupy the cabinet beyond--gave the host of the Crown of France a still greater idea of his importance.

Charles of Montsoreau did not fail to examine the face of the aubergiste, and to remark his proceedings with as much accuracy. The man's countenance was intelligent, his eyes quick and piercing, but withal there was an air of straightforward frankness, tempered by civility and habitual politeness, which was prepossessing; and as the young Count knew that he might have occasion to make use of him in various ways during his stay in Paris, he resolved to try him with those things which were the most immediately necessary, and which at the same time were of the least importance.

"Stop a minute, my good host," he said, as the man was about to withdraw to order fires to be lighted and suppers to be cooked. "There are some things which press for attention, and in which I must have your assistance."

"This youngster speaks with a tone of authority," thought the aubergiste; but he bowed low and said nothing, whilst the young Count went on, "What is your name, my good friend?" demanded Charles of Montsoreau.

"I am called Gamin la Chaise," replied the aubergiste with a smile.

"Well then, Master la Chaise, as you see," he continued, "I have come hither to Paris on some business which required a certain degree of despatch, and have ventured with few attendants and little baggage. As however the business on which I did come will call me into scenes where some greater degree of splendour is necessary than perhaps either suits my taste or my general convenience, I must before I go forth to-morrow morning, have my train increased by at least six attendants, who are always to be found in Paris ready fashioned I know; and therefore I must beseech you to find them for me in proper time, having them equipped in my proper colours and livery, according as the same shall be described to you by my good friend Gondrin here. This is the first service you must do me, my good host."

"Sir," replied the landlord, "the six lackeys shall be found and equipped in less time than would roast a woodcock. They are as plenty as sparrows or house-rats, and are caught in a moment."

"Yes, but my good host," answered the Count, "there is one great difficulty which you will understand in a moment. Amongst the six, I want you to find me one honest man if it be possible."

The landlord raised his shoulders above his ears, stuck out his two hands horizontally from his sides, and assumed an appearance of despair at the unheard of proposition of the Count, which had nearly brought a smile into the young nobleman's countenance. "That indeed, sir," he said, "is another affair; and I believe you might just as well ask me to catch you a wild roe in the garden of the Louvre, as to find you the thing that you demand. Nevertheless, labour and perseverance conquer all difficulties: and now I think of it, there is a youth who may answer your purpose; he knows Paris well too; but, strange to say, by some unaccountable fit of obstinacy, he would not tell a lie the other day to the Duke of Epernon in order to pass an item of the intendant's accounts, which would have come in for a good round sum every month if he would but have sworn that he used five quarts of milk every week to whiten the leather of his master's boots. He would not swear to this, and therefore the intendant discharged him, as he was a hired servant."

"Let me have him; let me have him," cried the Count. "I will only ask him to tell the truth, and hope he may not find that so difficult."

The Count then proceeded to speak about horses, and the host readily undertook, finding that money was abundant, to procure all the horse-dealers in Paris with their best steeds, before nine o'clock on the following day. The demeanour of the young nobleman, it must be confessed, puzzled the good aubergiste a good deal; and on going down to his own abode, he acknowledged to his wife, what he seldom acknowledged to any one, that he could not make his guest out at all.

"I should think," he said, "from the plenty of money, and the expensive way in which he seems inclined to deal, that he was some wild stripling from the provinces, the son of a rich president or advocate lately dead, who came hither to call himself Count, and spend his patrimony in haste. But then, again, in some things he is as shrewd as an old hawk, and can jest withal about rogues and honest men, while he keeps his own secrets close, and lets no one ask him a question."

On the following morning, at an early hour, the six attendants whom he had required were brought before him in array, exhibiting, with one exception, as sweet a congregation of roguish faces as the great capital of roguery ever yet produced. The countenance of the lad who had been discharged from the service of the Duke of Epernon pleased the young Count much, and without waiting till he was farther equipped, he put Gondrin under his charge for the purpose of notifying at the palace of the Louvre that he had arrived in the capital, bearing a letter from the Duke of Guise to the King, and of begging to have an hour named for its delivery. He found, however, with some mortification--for his eager spirit and his anxiety brooked no delay--that the King was at Vincennes; and his only consolation was that the communication which he had sent to the palace, bearing the fearful name of the Duke of Guise, was certain to be communicated to the monarch as soon as possible. Some short time was expended in the purchase of horses, and in making various additions to his own apparel, well knowing the ostentatious splendour of the court he was about to visit.

We have indeed remarked that there was perhaps a touch of foppery in his own nature, though it was but slight. Nevertheless, splendour of appearance certainly pleased him, even while a natural good taste led him to admire, and to seek in his own dress, all that was graceful and harmonising, rather than that which was rich or brilliant.

He was thus engaged, with several tradesmen around him, ordering the materials for various suits of apparel, which a tailor standing by engaged to produce in a miraculously short time, when the door of his apartment was opened, and a somewhat fat pursy man in black was admitted, entering with an air of importance, and receiving the lowly salutations of the good citizens who were present. Charles of Montsoreau gazed at him as a stranger; but the good man, with an air of importance, and an affectation of courtly breeding, besought him to finish what he was about, adding, that he had a word for his private ear which he would communicate afterwards. The young Count, without further ceremony, continued to give his orders, examining his new visiter from time to time, and with no very great feelings of satisfaction.

The countenance was fat, reddish, and, upon the whole, stupid, with an air of indecision about it which was very strongly marked, though there was every now and then a certain drawing in of the fringeless eyelids round the small black eyes, which gave the expression of intense cunning to features otherwise dull and flat.

When he had completely done with his mercers, and tailors, and cloth-makers--who had occupied him some time, for he did not hurry himself--Charles of Montsoreau dismissed them; and turning to his visiter said, "Now, sir, may I have the happiness of knowing your business with me?"

"Sir," replied the other, rising and speaking in a low and confidential tone, "my name is Nicolas Poulain. I am Lieutenant of the Prévôt de l'Isle."

He stopped short at this announcement; and the Count, after waiting a moment for something more, replied somewhat angrily, "Well, sir, I am very happy to hear it. I hope the office suits Nicolas Poulain, and Nicolas Poulain suits the office."

A slight redness came into the man's face, rendering it a shade deeper than it ordinarily was; but finding it necessary to reply, as the Count, without sitting down, remained looking him stedfastly in the face, he answered, "I thought, sir,--indeed I took it for granted, sir, that you might have some communication for me from the Duke of Guise."

"None whatever, sir," replied the young Count drily. "Have you any thing to tell me, Monsieur Nicolas Poulain, on the part of his Highness?"

"No, sir, no," replied the other, attempting to assume an air of spirit which did not become him. "If you have not seen him more lately than I have, I am misinformed."

"And pray, my good sir," demanded the Count, "who was it that took the trouble of informing you of any thing regarding me?"

"That question is soon answered, sir," replied Nicolas Poulain, "though you seem to make so much difficulty in regard to answering mine. The person who informed me of your arrival was good Master Chapelle Marteau, who saw you last night at the gates when you entered."

The name immediately struck the young Count as the same with one of those written on the letters which the Duke of Guise had given him to be used in case of need; but feeling how necessary it was to deal carefully with any of the faction of the Sixteen, to which both Chapelle Marteau and Nicolas Poulain belonged, he determined to say not one word upon the subject of his mission to any one. Much less, indeed, was he inclined to do so in the case of Nicolas Poulain, in whose face nature had stamped deceit and roguery in such legible characters, that the young Count, had he been forced to trust him with any secret, would have felt sure that the whole would be betrayed within an hour. All, then, that he replied to Master Nicolas Poulain was, that though he knew well the personage he mentioned by name, he had not the pleasure of his personal acquaintance.

The answers were so short, the tone and manner so dry, that the worthy citizen found it expedient to make his retreat; and taking a short and unceremonious leave of one who had given him so cool a reception, he left the Count's apartments, and descended the stairs. The moment he was gone, some suspicion, which crossed the young cavalier's mind suddenly, made him call the page, and bid him follow his late visiter till he marked the house which Master Nicolas entered, taking care to remember the way back.

The boy set off without a word, and returned in less than half an hour, informing the young Count that he had tracked Master Nicolas Poulain into a large house, which, on inquiry, he found to be the private dwelling of the Lord of Villequier.

"The Duke is betrayed by some of these leaguers,--that is clear enough!" thought the young Count. "I have heard that many of his best enterprises have been frustrated by some unknown means. Who is there on earth that one can trust?" And leaning his head upon his hand he fell into deep thought, for to him the question of whom he could trust was at that moment one, not only entirely new, but one of deep and vital importance also. In his journey to Paris he had two great and all-important objects before him. To find out his brother, and, if possible, to persuade him to change a course of conduct which he felt to be dishonourable to himself and to his house, was one of these objects; and he doubted not that--if he could fully explain, and make the Marquis comprehend, his own conduct and his purposes--if he could show him that his only chance of obtaining the hand of Marie de Clairvaut was by attaching himself to the House of Guise, and that he had not a brother's rivalry to fear--Gaspar de Montsoreau might be induced to return to the party he had quitted, and not finally to commit himself to conduct so little to his own interest as that which he was pursuing.

The other object, however, was much more important even than that, to the heart of Charles of Montsoreau; and the feelings which were connected with it--as so often happens with the feelings which affect every one in human life--were sadly at variance with other purposes. That object was to discover and guide to the court of the Duke of Guise, her whom he himself loved best on all the earth; to free her from the hands of the base and dangerous people into whose power she had fallen, and to leave her in security, if not in happiness.

When he thought of seeing her again,--when he thought of passing days with her on the journey, of being her guide, her protector, her companion, the overpowering longing and thirst for such a joyful time shook and agitated him, made his heart thrill and his brain reel; and, bending down his face upon his hands, he gave himself up for a long time to whirling dreams of happiness. But then again he asked himself if, after such hours, he could ever quit her; if--following the firm purpose with which he had left Montsoreau--he could resist all temptation to seek her love further, and after plunging into the contentions of the day could dedicate his sword and his life, as he had intended, to warfare against the infidels in the order of St. John? There was a great struggle in his mind when he asked himself the question--a great and terrible struggle; but at length he answered it in the affirmative. "Yes," he said; "yes, I can do so!" But there was a condition attached to that decision. "I can do so," he said, "if I find that there is a

chance of her wedding him; if I find that, in reality and truth, the first bright hopes I entertained were indeed fallacious."

To say the truth, doubts had come over his mind as to whether he had construed Marie de Clairvaut's conduct rightly. Those doubts had been instilled into his imagination by the words of the Duke of Guise. Fancy lingered round them: shall we say that Hope, too, played with them? If she did so, it was against his will; for he was in that sad and painful situation where hope, reproved by the highest feelings of the heart, dare scarcely point to the objects of desire. Terrible--terrible is that situation where Virtue, or Honour, or Generosity bind down imagination, silence even hope, and shut against us the gates of that paradise we see, but must not enter. These, indeed, are the angels with the flaming swords.

Charles of Montsoreau would not suffer himself to hope any thing that might make his brother's misery; but yet fancy would conjure up bright dreams; and knowing and feeling that if those dreams were realised, a complete change must come over his actions and his conduct, he saw that it would be needful to use guarded language to his brother,--or rather to use only the guard of perfect frankness. He resolved, then, to tell him fully his purposes, but to tell him at the same time the conditions under which those circumstances were to be executed.

As he pondered, however, and thought over the changed demeanour of his brother, over the fiery impetuosity and impatience of his whole temper and conduct, he remembered that it might be with difficulty that he could obtain a hearing for a sufficient length of time to explain himself fully, and he consequently determined to write clearly and explicitly, so that there might be no error or mistake whatever, and that his conduct might remain clear and undoubted; and sitting down at once, he did as he proposed, that he might have the letter ready to send or to deliver as soon as he discovered where his brother was.

The epistle was short, but it was distinct. He referred boldly and directly to his conversation with the Abbé de Boisguerin; he explained his conduct since; and he told his decided and unchangeable purpose of seeking in no way the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, unless he had reason to believe that the deep attachment which he felt and acknowledged towards her were already returned. He ended by exhorting his brother to do that which his pledges and professions to the Duke of Guise had bound him to do, to guide back Mademoiselle de Clairvaut himself to the protection of her uncle, and to avert the necessity of his seeking her and conducting her to Soissons.

In thus letting his thoughts flow on in collateral channels from subject to subject, he had deviated from the original object of his contemplations, which was, the method to be pursued for instituting private inquiries throughout the city, in regard to the arrival, both of his brother and Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. Unacquainted with any persons in Paris, he knew not how to set on foot the inquiry; and his mind had just reverted to the subject, which appeared more and more embarrassing each time he thought of it, when he was informed, with an air of great importance, by the host, that Monsieur Chapelle Marteau demanded humbly to have the honour of paying him his respects.

The Count ordered him instantly to be ushered in; and, during the brief moment that intervened before he appeared, considered hastily, whether he should employ this personage in any way in making the inquiries that were necessary. He knew that he was highly esteemed by the Duke of Guise; but yet it was evident that, by some of the members of, or the followers of, the League in Paris, the Duke was himself entirely deceived; and yet Charles of Montsoreau was more inclined to trust this man's sincerity than that of the person who had left him some short time before, inasmuch as the Duke had addressed one of the private letters we have before mentioned to him, while he had never named the other. The countenance and appearance of Chapelle Marteau confirmed any prepossession in his favour. It was quick, and intelligent, and frank, though somewhat stern; and he had moreover the air and bearing of a man in the higher ranks of life, although he held but an office which was then considered inferior, that of one of the Masters in the Chamber of Accounts.

"I come, sir," he said, as soon as the first civilities were over, "to ask your pardon for some quickness on my part in refusing you admittance at the gates last night. The fact is, that bad-intentioned people have been endeavouring to introduce into the city of Paris, under the King's name, a multitude of soldiery, in twos and threes, for the purpose of overawing us in the pursuit of our rights and liberties."

"Say no more, say no more, Monsieur Chapelle," said the Count; "I doubt not you had very good reasons for what you did."

He then paused, leaving his companion to pursue the subject as he might think fit; and the leaguer seemed somewhat embarrassed as to how he should proceed, though his embarrassment showed itself in a different manner from that of Master Nicolas Poulain. At length he said, "I entertained some hope, sir, that you might bring me a communication from the Duke of Guise, as, when I had the honour of seeing him at Gonesse three days ago, he gave me the hope that he would write to me ere long."

"No, Monsieur Chapelle," replied the Count deliberately; "I have no message for you. His Highness directed me indeed to apply to you in case of need; and I know that he has the highest

esteem for you, believing you to be a zealous defender of our holy faith, and a man well worthy of every consideration;--but I have no present message to you from the Duke; and the case in which it may be necessary to apply to you for assistance, according to his Highness's direction, has not yet arrived."

"Most delighted shall I be, my Lord[3] Count," replied the leaguer, "to afford you any aid or assistance or council in my power, both on account of his Highness the Duke of Guise and on your own. Might I ask what is the case foreseen, in which you are to apply to me?"

The Count smiled. "In case, Monsieur Chapelle," he said, "that I do not succeed in objects which the Duke has entrusted to me by other means, you shall know. At present, however, I have had no opportunity of ascertaining what may be necessary to be done, finding that the King is at Vincennes. In the mean time I am employing myself about some personal business of my own, which I am afraid is likely to give me trouble."

He spoke quite calmly; but a look of intelligence came immediately over the countenance of Chapelle Marteau, and he said, "Perhaps I might be enabled to assist your Lordship. My knowledge of Paris, and all that is transacted therein, is very extensive."

"You are very kind," replied the Count, "and I take advantage of your offer with the greatest pleasure. The matter is a very simple one. My elder brother, the Marquis de Montsoreau, set out some time ago to join the Duke of Guise, having under his charge and escort a young lady, named Mademoiselle de Clairvaut."

"Daughter of the Duke of Guise's niece," said Chapelle Marteau with some emphasis.

"I believe that is the relationship," answered the young nobleman. "But, however, the facts are these: I have reason to believe that my brother was interrupted in his journey by the attack of a party of reiters, and was obliged in consequence to put himself and Mademoiselle de Clairvaut under the protection of a body of the King's troops coming to Paris. Now, my wish is, to ascertain whether he or any of his party, either separately or together, are now in Paris, and where they are to be found."

The leaguer gazed in his face for a minute or two with an inquiring look, and then replied, "I can tell you at once, my Lord, that no considerable party whatever has entered the gates of Paris under the protection of the King's troops for the last ten days, no party of even ten in number having the ensigns of Valois having appeared during that time. But the party you mention may have come in by themselves without the King's troops; and I rather suspect that they have so done. However, I will let you know the exact particulars within four and twenty hours from this moment, and every other information that I can by any means glean regarding the persons you speak of; for I very well understand, my Lord, that there may be more intelligence required about them than you choose to ask for at once."

The young Count smiled again, but merely replied, "Any information that you can obtain for me, Monsieur Chapelle, will be received by me most gratefully; and in the mean time will you do me the honour of partaking my poor dinner which is about to be served?"

The leaguer, however, declined the high honour, alleging important business as his excuse; and, after having dined, the young Count rode out through the streets of Paris, endeavouring to make himself somewhat familiar with them, and feeling all those sensations which the sight of that great capital might well produce on one who had never beheld it before. On those sensations, however, we must not pause, as matters of more importance are before us. A couple of hours after nightfall he received a note to the following effect:--

"The Marquis de Montsoreau, with a body of horsemen, bearing no badge or ensign, entered Paris yesterday at about four o'clock, and lodged at the Fleur-de-lis. He is not there now, however, and is supposed to have quitted Paris. Mademoiselle de Clairvaut is not known to have entered the capital; but a carriage, containing ladies and waiting-women, was escorted to Vincennes this morning by a body of troops of Valois. The name of one of the ladies was ascertained to be the Marquise de Saulny."

Charles of Montsoreau received these tidings with a beating heart, and sleep did not visit his eyelids till the clock of a neighbouring church had struck five in the morning.

CHAP. IV.

Dark heavy clouds hung over the world, and totally obscured the face of the sky; the morning was chill, the air keen, and the eye of the peasant was often turned up towards the leaden-looking masses of vapour above his head, as if to inquire whether their stores would be poured forth in lightning or in snow; and as Charles of Montsoreau rode on through the park to the Donjon of Vincennes, he felt the gloomy aspect of the whole scene more than he might have done at any other time.

There, before his eyes, with the whole face of nature harmonising well with its dark and frowning aspect, rose the grey gigantic keep, which the vanquished opponent of Edward III., the rash and half-insane founder of the race of Valois, erected at an early period of his melancholy reign. Story above story, the large quadrangular mass, with its flanking towers, rose up till it seemed to touch the gloomy sky above; but in those days it had at least the beauty of harmony, for no one had added to the harsh and solemn features of the feudal architecture the gewgaw ornaments of a later age. The gallery of Marie de Medici was not built, and nothing was seen but the antique form of the Donjon itself, with the mass of walls surrounding its base with their flanking turrets, a pinnacle or two rising above--as if from some low Gothic building within the walls--and the still dark fosse surrounding the whole.

We form but a faint idea to ourselves--a very very faint idea of the manners and customs of feudal times; but still less, perhaps, can we form any just idea of the every-day enormities, crimes, and vices, that were committed at the period we now speak of, and of what it was to live familiarly in the midst of such scenes, and to hear daily of such occurrences. The mind of most men got hardened, callous, or indifferent to acts of darkness and of shame, even if they did not commit them themselves; and the world of Paris heard with scarcely an emotion that this nobleman had been poisoned by another--that the hand of the assassin had delivered one high lord of this troublesome friend or that pertinacious enemy--that the husband had "drugged the posset" for the wife, or the wife for the husband--or that persons obnoxiously wise or virtuous disappeared within the walls of such places as Vincennes, and passed suddenly with their good acts into that oblivion which is the general recompense of all that is excellent upon earth. No one noted such deeds; the sword of justice started from the scabbard once or twice in a century, but that was all; and the world laughed as merrily--the jest and the repartee went on--sport, love, and folly revelled as gaily through the streets of Paris, as if it had been a world of gentleness, and security, and peace.

Though of course Charles of Montsoreau felt in some degree the spirit of the day--though he thought it nothing at all extraordinary to be attacked by reiters in his own château, or stopped by fifty or sixty plunderers on the broad highway--though it seemed perfectly natural to him that man should live as in a state of continual warfare, always on his defence, yet the whole of his previous life having passed far from the daily occurrence of still more revolting scenes, in spots where calm nature and God's handiwork were still at hand to purify and heal men's thoughts, he had very different feelings in regard to the events and customs of the day from those which were generally entertained by the people of the metropolis. Thus, when he gazed up at the gloomy tower of Vincennes, and thought of the deeds which had been committed within its walls, together with the crimes and follies that were daily there enacted, a feeling of mingled horror and disgust took possession of his bosom; and had he not been impelled by a sense of duty, he would not have set his foot upon the threshold of those polluted gates.

The order to appear before the King at Vincennes had been communicated to him early in the morning, and notice of his coming had been given to the officers at the gates of the castle. He was punctual to a moment at the appointed time, and was instantly led into the château, and conducted up a long, darksome, winding stone staircase in one of the towers. Everything took place almost in silence; few persons were to be seen moving about in the building; and, while winding up those stairs, nothing was heard but the footfalls of himself and the attendant who conducted him.

Charles of Montsoreau certainly felt neither awe nor fear as he thus advanced, though some of the warnings of the Duke of Guise might cross his mind at the moment; but at the end of what seemed to be the first story, the attendant said, "Wait a moment;" and, pushing open a door, entered a room to the right. There was another door beyond, but both were left partly unclosed, and the previous silence was certainly no longer to be complained of, for such a jabbering, and screaming, and yelling, and howling, as was now heard, was probably never known in the palace of a king, before or since.

Human sounds they seemed certainly not to be, and yet words in various languages were to be distinguished, so that conjecture was quite put at fault, till after an absence of several minutes the attendant returned, and, bidding the young nobleman follow him, led the way once more into this den of noise and confusion.

The scene that then burst upon the eyes of Charles of Montsoreau was as curious as can well be conceived. Innumerable parrots, macaws, and cockatoos were ranged on perches and in cages along the sides of a large apartment, with intervals of monkeys and apes rattling their chains, springing forward at every object near them, mouthing, chattering, and writhing themselves into fantastic forms; six or seven small beautiful dogs of a peculiar breed were running about on the floor, snarling at one another, barking at the stranger, or teazing the other animals in the same room with themselves; baskets filled with litters of puppies were in every corner of the room; and several men and women were engaged in tending the winged and quadruped favourites of the

King. Not only, however, were the regular attendants present, but, as one of the known ways to Henry's regard, a great number of other persons were always to be found busily engaged in tending the monkeys, parrots, and dogs. Amongst the rest here present, were no less than five dwarfs, four others being in actual attendance upon the King. None were above three feet and a half in height, and some were deformed and distorted in the most fearful manner, while one was perfectly and beautifully formed, and seemed to hold the others in great contempt. The voices of almost all of them, however, were cracked and screaming; and it was the sounds of their tongues, mingled with the yelping of the dogs, the chattering of the monkeys, and the various words repeated in different languages by the loquacious birds along the wall, which had made the Babel of sounds that reached the ears of Charles of Montsoreau while he stood without.

Passing through this room, with the envious eyes of the dwarfs staring upon his fine figure, the young Count entered the chamber of the pages--where, as if for the sake of contrast, a number of beautiful youths were seen--and was thence led on into the royal apartments, in which every thing was calm splendour and magnificence. Here and there various officers of the royal household were found lounging away the idle hours as they waited for the King's commands; and at length, in an ante-room, the young Count was bade to wait again, while the attendant once more notified his coming to the King. He was scarcely detained a moment now, however; but, the door being opened, he was ushered into the monarch's presence.

Henry on the present occasion presented an aspect different from that which the young Count had expected to behold. The Monarch had recalled, for a moment or two, the princely and commanding air of his youth, and received the young Count with dignity and grace. His person was handsome, his figure fine, and his dress in the most exquisite taste that it was possible to conceive. It was neither so effeminate nor so overcharged with ornament as it sometimes was; and the black velvet slashed and laced with gold, the toque with a single large diamond on his head, the long snowy-white ostrich feather, and the collar of one or two high orders round his neck, became him well, and harmonised with the air of dignity he assumed.

There were two or three gentlemen who stood around him more gaudily dressed than himself, and amongst them was the Duke of Epernon, whom Charles of Montsoreau remembered to have seen at his father's château some years before. All, however, held back so as to allow the monarch a full view of the young cavalier, as he advanced.

"You are welcome to Vincennes, Monsieur de Logères," said the King. "Our noble and princely cousin of Guise has notified to us that he has sent you to Paris on business of importance; and, having given you that praise which we are sure you must merit, has besought us to put every sort of trust and confidence in you, and to listen to you as to himself, while you speak with us upon the affairs which have brought you hither. We beseech you, therefore, to inform us of that which he has left dark, and tell us how we may pleasure our fair cousin, which is always our first inclination to do--the good of our state and the welfare of our subjects considered."

"His Highness the Duke of Guise, Sire," replied Charles of Montsoreau, not in the slightest degree abashed by the many eyes that were fixed upon him, scrutinising his person and his dress in the most unceremonious manner, "his Highness the Duke of Guise, Sire, has sent me to your Majesty, to ask information regarding a young lady, his near relation, who, he has reason to believe, was protected by a body of your Majesty's troops in a situation of some difficulty, for which protection the Duke is most grateful. She was then, he understood, conducted to this your Majesty's castle of Vincennes, doubtless for the purpose of affording her a safe asylum till you could restore her to his Highness, who is her guardian."

Henry turned with a sneering smile towards a dark but handsome man, with a somewhat sinister expression of countenance, on his left hand, saying, in an under tone, "Quick travelling, Villequier! to Soissons and back to Paris in four and twenty hours, ha! Had the swallow ever wings like rumour?"

This was said affectedly aside, but quite loud enough for the young nobleman to hear the whole. He, of course, made no reply, as the words were not addressed to him; but waited, with his eyes bent down, apparently in thoughtful meditation, till the King should give him his answer.

"You have given us, Monsieur le Comte de Logères," said the King, "but a faint idea of this business; and, as unhappily the commanders of our troops are but too little accustomed to afford us any very full account of their proceedings, we are ignorant of the occasion on which any one of them rendered this service to the young lady you mention."

This affected unconsciousness, displayed absolutely in conjunction with a scarcely concealed knowledge of the whole affair, Charles of Montsoreau felt to be trifling and insulting: but he lost not his reverence for the kingly authority; and he replied, with every appearance of deference, "I had imagined, Sire, that the quick wings of rumour must have carried the whole particulars to your Majesty, otherwise I should have been more particular in my account. The service was rendered to the young lady very lately, between Jouarre and Gandelu. I am not absolutely aware of the name of the officer in command of the troops at the time, but one gentleman present bore the name of Colombel."

"And pray what was the name of the young lady herself?" demanded the King, with a sneer. "The Duke of Guise has many she relations, as we sometimes find to our cost. It could not be our

pretty, mild, and virtuous friend, the Duchess of Montpensier, nor the delicate and fair-favoured Mademoiselle de St. Beuve; for the one is staying in Paris in disobedience to the orders of the King, and the other is remaining there, waiting for the tender consolations of the Chevalier d'Aumale."

The young Count turned somewhat red, both at the coarseness and the scornfulness of the King's reply. "The young lady," he answered, however, still keeping the same tone, "is named Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, daughter of the late Count de Clairvaut."

"Your first cousin, Villequier," said the King, turning to his minister. "You should know something of this affair?"

"Not more than your Majesty," replied Villequier, bowing low, and perceiving very clearly that Henry had maliciously wished to embarrass him.

The King smiled at the double-meaning answer, and then, turning to the young Count, replied, "Well, sir, you have fulfilled your mission, and may tell the Duke of Guise, our true and well-beloved cousin, that we will cause immediate inquiry and investigation to be made into the whole affair; and let him know the particulars as soon as we are sufficiently well-informed to speak upon it with that accuracy which becomes our character. You may retire."

This was of course not the conclusion of the affair to which Charles of Montsoreau was inclined to submit; and it was evident to him that the King and his minions presumed upon his apparent youth and inexperience. But there was a firm decision in his character which they were not prepared for; and after pausing for a moment in thought, during which time the King's brows began to bend angrily upon him, he raised his eyes, looking Henry calmly and stedfastly in the face, and replying, "Your Majesty must pardon me if I do not take instant advantage of your permission to retire, as you have conceived a false impression when you imagine that my mission is fulfilled."

The King looked with an air of astonishment, first to Epernon and then to Villequier: but the former turned away his head with a look of dissatisfaction; while the latter bit his lip, let his hand fall upon a jewelled dagger in his belt, and said nothing.

Charles of Montsoreau, however, went on in the same calm but determined tone. "His Highness the Duke of Guise," he said, "directed me to inform your Majesty of the facts I have mentioned, and to beg in general terms information regarding them; but in case the general information that I obtained was not sufficiently accurate to enable me to write to him distinctly that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut is in this place, or in that place, he further directed me humbly to request that your Majesty would answer in plain terms the following plain questions:--Is Mademoiselle de Clairvaut in the château of Vincennes? Is she under the charge and protection of your Majesty? Does your Majesty know where she is?"

"By the Lord that lives," exclaimed Henry, "this Duke of Guise chooses himself bold ambassadors to his King!"

"Do you dare, malapert boy," exclaimed Villequier, "with that bold brow, to cross-question your sovereign?"

"I do dare, sir," answered Charles of Montsoreau, "to ask my sovereign, in the name of the Duke of Guise, these plain questions, which, as he is a just and noble monarch, he can neither find any difficulty in answering, nor feel any anger in hearing."

"And what if I refuse to answer, sir?" demanded the King. "What is to be the consequence then? Is the doughty messenger charged to make a declaration of war on the part of our obedient subject, the Duke of Guise?"

The young Count was not prepared for this question, and hesitated how to answer it, though a full knowledge of how terrible the Duke of Guise was to the weak and effeminate monarch he addressed, brought a smile over his countenance, which had in reality more effect than any words he could have spoken. After a pause, however, he replied,--"Oh no, Sire. The Duke of Guise is, as you say, your Majesty's most devoted and obedient subject; and never conceiving it possible that you would refuse to answer his humble questions, he gave me no instructions what to say in a case that he did not foresee. I can only suppose," he added, with a low and reverent bow to the King, "that the Duke will be obliged to come to Paris himself to make those inquiries and investigations, concerning his young relation, in which I have not been successful."

Charles of Montsoreau could see, notwithstanding the paint, which delicately furnished the King with a more stable complexion than his own, that at the very thought of the Duke of Guise coming to Paris the weak monarch turned deadly pale. The same signs also were visible to Villequier, who whispered, "No fear, Sire; no fear; he will not come!"

The King answered sharply, however, and sufficiently loud for the young nobleman to hear, "We must give him no excuse, René! we must give him no excuse! Monsieur de Logères," he continued, putting on a more placable air than before, "we are glad to find that neither the Duke of Guise nor his envoy presumes to threaten us; and in consideration of the questions being put in a proper manner, we are willing to answer them to the best of our abilities."

Villequier, at these words, laid his hand gently upon the King's cloak; but Henry twitched it away from his grasp with an air of impatience, and continued, "I shall therefore answer you frankly and freely, young gentleman; telling you that the Lady whom you are sent to seek is in fact not at Vincennes; nor, to the best of our knowledge and belief, in our good city of Paris; neither do we know or have any correct information of where she may be found, though it is not by any means to be denied that she has visited this our castle of Vincennes."

The first part of the King's speech had considerably relieved the mind of Villequier; but when he proceeded to make the somewhat unnecessary admission, that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut had visited Vincennes, the minister again attempted to interrupt the King, saying, "You know, Sire, her pause at Vincennes was merely momentary, and absolutely necessary for those passports and safeguards without which it might be dangerous to travel, in the distracted state of the country."

"Perfectly true," replied Henry: but the King's apprehension of the Duke of Guise appearing in Paris was much stronger than his respect for his minister's opinion; and he proceeded with what he had to say, in spite of every sign or hint that could be given him.

"You must know, Monsieur de Logères," he said, "that, as I before observed, she did visit Vincennes for a brief space; but, there being something embarrassing in the whole business, we were, to say the truth--albeit not insensible to beauty--we were not at all sorry to see her depart."

Although Charles of Montsoreau judged rightly that the abode of Vincennes, to the high and pure-minded girl whom he sought, could only have been one of horror, he could not conceive any thing in her situation which should have proved embarrassing to the King, and he answered bluntly, "Then your Majesty of course has caused her to be escorted in safety to the Duke of Guise, as the means of relieving yourself from all embarrassment concerning her."

"Not so, not so, Monsieur de Logères," replied the King. "Young diplomatists and young greyhounds run fast and overleap the game. It so happens that there are various claims regarding the wardship of this young Lady. She has many relations, as near or nearer than the Duke of Guise. The care and guidance of her, too, under the authorisation of the Duke himself, has been claimed by a young nobleman whom you may have heard of, called the Marquis of Montsoreau;" and he fixed his eyes meaningly upon the young Count's face. "All these circumstances rendered the matter embarrassing; and as I was not called upon to decide the matter judicially; and the Lady, if not quite of an age by law to judge for herself, being very nearly so, I thought it far better to leave the whole business to her own discretion, and let her take what course she thought fit, offering her every assistance and protection in my power, which, however, she declined. You may therefore assure the Duke of Guise, on my part, that she is not at Vincennes, and that I am unacquainted with where she is at this moment. I now think, therefore, that all your questions are answered, and the business is at an end."

"I fear I must intrude upon your Majesty still farther," replied the young Count; "for besides the letter from the Duke of Guise, which I have had the honour of delivering to your Majesty, he has also furnished me with this document, giving me full power and authority to inquire, seek for, and require, at the hands of any person in whose power she may be, the young Lady whom he claims as his ward. He has directed me to request your Majesty's approbation of the same, expressed by your signature to that effect, giving me authority to search for her in your name also, and to require the aid and assistance of all your officers, civil and military, in executing the said task."

Henry looked both agitated and angry; and Villequier spoke for a moment to Epernon behind the King's back.

"Monsieur de Logères," exclaimed the latter, taking a step forward, "this is too much. I can hardly suppose that his Highness the Duke of Guise has authorised you to make such a demand."

"My Lord Duke of Epernon," replied the Count, "were it not that I hold in my hand the Duke's authority for that which I state, I would call upon you to put your insinuation in plainer terms, that I might give it the lie as plainly as I would do any other unjust accusation."

The Duke turned very red; but he replied, "And you would be treated, sir Count, as a petty boy of the low nobility of this realm deserves, for using such language to one so much above yourself."

"There is no one in France so much above myself, sir," replied the Count, gazing on him sternly, and with a look of some contempt, "as to dare to insult me with impunity; and though you be now High-admiral of France, Colonel-general of Infantry, Governor of half the provinces of this country, Duke, Peer, and hold many another rich and honourable office besides, I tell you, John of Nogaret, that when the Baron de Caumont dined at my father's table, he sat nearer the salt than perhaps now may suit the proud Duke of Epernon to remember."

"Silence!" exclaimed the King, rousing himself for a moment from his effeminate apathy, while, for a brief space, an expression of power and dignity came over his countenance, such as that which had distinguished him while Duke of Anjou. "Silence, insolent boy! Silence, Epernon! I forbid you, on pain of my utmost displeasure, to take notice, even by a word, of what this young man has said. You were yourself wrong to answer for the King in the King's presence. The Duke

of Guise shall have no just occasion to complain of us," he added, the brightness which had come upon him gradually dying away like the false promising gleam of sunshine which sometimes breaks for a moment through a rainy autumnal day, and fades away again as soon, amidst the dull grey clouds; "the Duke of Guise shall have no occasion to complain of us. We will give this young man the authority which he has so insolently demanded, to seek for Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and having found her--if she have not joined the Duke of Guise long before--to escort her in safety to our cousin's care. But, Monsieur de Logères, you show your ignorance of every custom of the court and state, by supposing that the King of France can write down at the bottom of the powers given you by the Duke of Guise his name in confirmation of the same, like a steward at the bottom of a butcher's bill. The authority which we give you must pass through the office of our secretary of state, and it shall be drawn out and sent to you as speedily as possible. I think that Monsieur de Villequier already knows where to send this authority. You may now retire; and rest assured that it shall reach you as soon as possible. At the same time we pardon you for your conduct in this presence, which much needs pardon, though it does not merit it."

Charles of Montsoreau bowed low, and retired from the King's presence, fully convinced that Henry was deceiving him; that he knew, or, at all events, had every means of judging, where Marie de Clairvaut was; and that he had not the slightest intention of sending him the authorisation he had promised, unless absolutely driven to do so.

The moment that the young Count had quitted the presence, the King turned angrily to Villequier, exclaiming, "Are you mad, Villequier, to risk bringing that fiery and ambitious pest upon us? 'Tis but four days ago he was within ten miles of Paris!"

"Pshaw, Sire!" replied Villequier; "there is not the slightest chance of his coming. Did I not tell you when he was at Gonesse that I would find means to make him run like a frightened hare back again to Soissons? I fear your Majesty has ruined all our plans by promising this authority to that malapert youth, who doubtless already knows, or easily divines, that he is deceived."

"I have not deceived him," said the King: "I told him the girl was not at Vincennes; nor is she. I told him that I did not know where she is at this moment; nor do I; for she may be three miles on this side of Meulan, or three miles on that, for aught I know. It depends upon the quickness of the horses, and the state of the roads. I promised him the authority to seek her; and he shall have it in good due form, if he live long enough, and wait in Paris a sufficient time."

"If he have it not within three days," replied Villequier, "be you sure, Sire, that he will write to the Duke of Guise."

"But, Villequier," said the King in a soft tone, "could you not find means to prevent his making use of pen and ink to such bad purposes? In short, friend René, it is altogether your affair. You seem to think that the fact of this girl falling into our hands is quite the discovery of a treasure which may fix on our side this young Marquis of Montsoreau and the crafty Abbé that you talk of, and I don't know how many more people besides. Now I told you from the beginning that you should manage it all yourself: so look to it, good Villequier; look to it."

"He has let me manage it all myself, truly!" said Villequier, in a low tone, "But I wish to know more precisely, your Majesty," he added aloud, "what am I to do with this youth and the girl? Is he to have the authorisation, or not? Am I, or am I not, to give her up when he demands her?"

"Now, good faith," replied the King, "would not one think, Epernon, that our well-beloved friend and minister here was a mere novice out of a convent of young girls, a tender and scrupulous little thing, thinking evil, in every stray look or soft word addressed to her. He who has dealt with so many in his day, diplomatists and warriors and statesmen, has not wit enough to deal with a raw boy, whom, doubtless, our fair and crafty cousin of Guise has sent upon a fool's errand to get him out of the way."

"Certainly," replied the Duke of Epernon, "our wise friend Villequier seems to be somewhat prudent and cautious this morning. The young lady is in your hands, I think, Villequier; is she not? and you have sent her off into Normandy, I think you told me, with an escort of fifty of your archers. She goes there, doubtless, as his Majesty has said, with her own will and consent, and by her own choice, for there is a soft persuasiveness in fifty archers which it is very difficult for a woman's heart to resist; and, doubtless, by the same cogent arguments, you will induce her to marry whom you please. Come, tell us who it is to be; the hand of a rich heiress to dispose of, may be made a profitable thing, under such management as yours, Villequier."

"I have not discovered the philosopher's stone, like you, Monsieur d'Epernon," replied the other.

The King laughed gaily, for Epernon's extraordinary cupidity was no secret even to the monarch that fed it. But the Duke was proof to all jest upon that score; and looking at Villequier with the same sort of musing expression which he had before borne, he repeated his question, saying, "Come, come, disinterested chevalier, tell us to whom do you intend to give her?"

"Perhaps to my own nephew," replied the other. "What think you of that, Monsieur le Duc?"

The brow of Epernon grew clouded in a moment. "I think," he said, "that you will not do it, for two reasons: in the first place, you destine your nephew for your daughter Charlotte."

"Not I," replied the Marquis; "I never dreamt of such a thing. She shall wed higher than that, or not at all. But what is your second reason, Monsieur d'Epernon?"

"Because you dare not," replied the Duc d'Epernon: and he added, speaking in a low tone, "You dare not, Villequier, mingle your race with that of Guise. The moment you do, your object will be clear, and your ruin certain."

"It is a curious thing, Sire," said Villequier, turning to the King with a smile, "it is a curious thing to see how my good Lord of Epernon grudges any little advantage to us mean men. However, to set his Grace's mind at ease, I neither destine Mademoiselle de Clairvaut for one nor for the other; but I think she may prove a wonderful good bait for the wild young Marquis of Montsoreau. By the promise of her hand, as far as my interest and influence is concerned, he will not only be bound to your Majesty's cause on every occasion, but will exert himself more zealously and potently for that, than any other inducement could lead him to do. Even if he should fail in the trial--for we must acknowledge that he shows himself somewhat unstable in his purposes--he will, at all events, have so far committed himself as to give your Majesty good cause for confiscating all his land, cutting down all his timber, and seizing upon all his wealth. However, I must think, in the first place, of how to deal with this brother of his."

"No very difficult task, I should judge," said the Duke of Epernon, "for one so practised in the art of catching gudgeons as you, Villequier."

"I don't know that," answered Villequier; "I would fain detach that youth, also, from the Guises. You see, most noble Duke, I am thinking of the King's interest all the time, while you are thinking of your own. However, I must find a way to manage him, for, as their wonderful friend and tutor, this wise Abbé de Boisguerin, admitted to me last night, there are three means all powerful in dealing with our neighbours--love, interest, and ambition; and we might thus exemplify it,--the King would do any thing for the first, the Duke of Epernon any thing for the second, and his Highness of Guise any thing for the third."

"There are two other implements frequently used, which I wonder Monsieur de Villequier did not add," said the Duke, "as I rather expect he may have to use one or other of them on the present occasion; and men say he is fully as skilful in using them as in employing love, interest, or ambition, for his ends."

"Pray what are those?" demanded Villequier, somewhat sharply.

"Vicenza daggers," replied the Duke of Epernon, "and wine that splits a Venice glass!"

"Come, come, Epernon," cried the King, "you and Villequier shall not quarrel. Come away from him, come away from him, or you will be using your daggers on each other presently:" and, throwing his arm familiarly round his neck, he drew the Duke away.

CHAP. V.

Charles of Montsoreau rode homeward in painful and anxious thought: he had flattered himself vainly, before he had proceeded to Vincennes, that the redoubted name of Henry of Guise would be found fully sufficient immediately to cause the restoration of Marie de Clairvaut to him, who had naturally a right to protect her. It less frequently happens that youth fails to reckon upon the fiery contention it is destined to meet with from adversaries, than that it miscalculates the force of the dull and inert opposition which circumstances continually offer to its eager course, throwing upon it a heavy, slow, continual weight, which, like a clog upon a powerful horse, seems but a nothing for the moment, but in the end checks its speed entirely. None knew better than Henry III. that it is by casting small obstacles in the way of impetuous youth, that we conquer and tame it sooner than by opposing it; and such had been his purpose with Charles of Montsoreau.

In his idle carelessness he cared but little what became of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, or into whose hands she fell. He was willing to countenance and assist the politic schemes of his favourite Villequier; and cared not, even in the slightest degree, whether that personage employed poison or the knife to rid himself of the young Count of Logères, provided always that he himself had nothing to do with it. The only part that he was inclined to act was to thwart the Duke's young envoy by obstacles and long delays; and this he had suffered to become so far evident to Charles of Montsoreau, that he became angry and impatient at the very prospect before him. He doubted, however, whether it would be right to send off a courier with this intelligence immediately to the Duke of Guise, or to wait for two or three days, in order to see

whether the powers promised him were effectually granted; and he was still pondering the matter, while riding through the streets of Paris, when, in passing by a large and splendid mansion in one of the principal streets, he caught a glimpse of two figures disappearing through the arched portal of the building. The faces of neither were visible to him; their figures only for a moment, and that at a distance. But he felt that he could not be mistaken--that all the thoughts and feelings and memories of youth could not so suddenly, so magically, be called up by the sight of any one but his brother,--and if so, that the other was the Abbé de Boisguerin.

"Whose is that house?" he exclaimed aloud, turning to his attendants.

"That of Monsieur René de Villequier," replied the page instantly; and, springing from his horse at the gate, the young Count knocked eagerly for admission. The portals were instantly thrown open, and a porter in crimson, with a broad belt fringed with gold, appeared in answer to the summons.

"I think," said the young Count, "that I saw this moment the Marquis de Montsoreau and the Abbé de Boisguerin pass into this house."

The porter looked dull, and shook his head, replying, "No, sir; nobody has passed in here but two of my noble Lord's attendants--the old Abbé Scargilas, and Master Nicolas Prevôt, who used formerly to keep the Salle d'Armes, opposite the kennel at St. Germain."

Although Charles of Montsoreau knew the existence and possibility of such a thing as the lie circumstantial, yet the coolness and readiness of the porter surprised him. "Pray," he said, after a moment's pause, "is there any such person as either Monsieur de Montsoreau or the Abbé de Boisguerin dwelling here at present?"

"None, sir," replied the man. "There is no one here but the attendants of my Lord, who is at present absent with the King."

Charles of Montsoreau would have given a good deal to have searched the house from top to bottom; but as it would not exactly do to storm the dwelling of René de Villequier, he rode on, no less convinced than ever that his brother was at that moment in the dwelling of the minister.

This conviction determined his conduct at once. That his brother was in Paris, and in the hands of the most dangerous and intriguing man of that day, he had no doubt; and it seemed to him also clear, that schemes were going on and contriving, of which the obstacles and delays thrown in his way might be, perhaps, a part. To what they tended he could not, of course, tell directly; but he saw that the only hope of frustrating them lay in exertion without the loss of a moment, and he accordingly dispatched his faithful attendant Gondrin to Soissons as soon as he reached the inn.

We must follow, however, for a moment, the two persons whom the young Count had seen enter the hotel of Villequier, and accompany them at once into the chamber to which they proceeded after passing the portal. It was a splendid cabinet, filled with every sort of rare and costly furniture, which was displayed to the greater perfection by the dark but rich tapestry that covered the walls. Another larger room opened beyond, and through the door of that again, which was partly open, a long suite of bed-rooms and other apartments were seen, with different rich and glittering objects placed here and there along the perspective, as if for the express purpose of catching the eye.

Into one of the large arm-chairs which the cabinet contained, the Marquis of Montsoreau threw himself as if familiar with the scene. "Villequier is long," he said, speaking to the Abbé. "He promised to have returned before this hour."

"Impatience, Gaspar, impatience," replied the Abbé, "is the vice of your disposition. How much have you lost already by impatience? Was it not your impatience which hurried me forward to represent his own situation and that of yourself, to your brother Charles, which drove him directly to the Duke of Guise? Was it not your impatience which made you speak words of love to Marie de Clairvaut before she was prepared to hear them, drawing from her a cold and icy reply? Was it not your impatience that made us leave behind at Provins all the tired horses and one half of the men, rather than wait a single day to enable them to come on with us; and did not that very fact put us almost at the mercy of the reiters, and give your brother an opportunity of showing his gallantry and skill at our expense?"

"It is all true, my friend; it is all true," replied the Marquis. "But in regard to my speaking those fiery words to Marie de Clairvaut, how could I help that? Is it possible so to keep down the overflowing thoughts of our bosom as to prevent their bursting forth when the stone is taken off from the fountain, and when the feelings of the heart gush out, not as from the spring of some ordinary river, but, like the waters of Vaucluse, full, powerful, and abundant even at their source."

"It was that I wished you to guard against," replied the Abbé. "Had you appeared less to seek, you would have been sought rather than avoided. It may be true, Gaspar, what authors have said, that a woman, like some animals of the chase, takes a pleasure in being pursued; but depend upon it, if she do so, she puts forth all her speed to insure herself against being caught. Unless you are very sure of your own speed and strength, you had better steal quietly onward, lest you

frighten the deer. Had she heard much from my lips, and from those of her good but weak friend Madame de Saulny, of your high qualities, and of all those traits in your nature calculated to captivate and attract such a being as herself, while you seemed indifferent and somewhat cool withal, every thing--good that is in her nature would have joined with every thing that is less good--the love of high qualities and of manly daring would have combined with vanity and caprice to make her seek you, excite your attention, and court your love."

"I have never yet seen in her," said the young Marquis, "either vanity or caprice; and besides, good friend, such things to me at least are not matters of mere calculation. I act upon impulses that I cannot resist. Mine are feelings, not reasonings: I follow where they lead me, and even in the pursuit acquire intense pleasure that no reasoning could give."

"True," replied the Abbé, bending down his head and answering thoughtfully. "There is a great difference between your age and mine, Gaspar. You are at the age of passions, and at that period of their sway when they defeat themselves by their own intensity. I had thought, however, that my lessons might have taught you, my counsel might have shown you, that with any great object in view it is necessary to moderate even passion in the course, in order to succeed in the end."

"But there is joy in the course also," exclaimed Gaspar de Montsoreau. "Think you, Abbé, that even if it were possible to win the woman we love by another's voice, we could lose the joy of winning her for ourselves--the great, the transcendant joy of struggling for her affection, even though it were against her coldness, her indifference, or her anger?"

"I think, Gaspar," replied the Abbé, "that if to a heart constituted as yours is, there be added a mind of equal power, nothing--not even the strongest self-denial--will be impossible for the object of winning her you love. But I am not a good judge of such matters," he continued with a slight smile curling his lip--a smile not altogether without pride. "I am no judge of such matters. The profession which I have chosen, and followed to a certain point, excludes them from my consideration. All I wish to do in the present instance is to warn you, Gaspar, against your own impetuosity in dealing with this Villequier. Be warned against that man! be careful! Promise him nothing; commit yourself absolutely to nothing, unless upon good and sufficient proof that he too deals sincerely with you. He is not one to be trusted, Gaspar, even in the slightest of things; and promise me not to commit yourself with him in any respect whatsoever."

"Oh, fear not, fear not," replied the Marquis. "In this respect at least, good friend, no passions hurry me on. Here I can deal calmly and tranquilly, because, though the end is the same, I have nothing but art to encounter, which may always be encountered by reason. When I am with her, Abbé, it is the continual strife of passion that I have to fear; at every word, at every action, I have to be upon my guard; and reason, like a solitary sentinel upon the walls of a city attacked on every side, opposes the foes in vain at one point, while they pour in upon a thousand others."

While he was yet speaking, a servant with a noiseless foot entered the room, and in a low sweet tone informed the Marquis, that Monsieur de Villequier had just returned from Vincennes, and desired earnestly to speak with him, for a moment, *alone* in his own cabinet. The word "alone" was pronounced more loud than any other, though the whole was low and tuneful; for Villequier used to declare that he loved to have servants with feet like cats and voices like nightingales.

The Abbé marked that word distinctly, and was too wise to make the slightest attempt to accompany his former pupil. The Marquis, however, did not remark it; and, perhaps a little fearful of his own firmness and skill, asked his friend to accompany him. But the Abbé instantly declined. "No, Gaspar," he said, "no; it were better that you should see Monsieur Villequier alone. I will wait for you here;" and, turning to the table, he took up an illuminated psalter, and examined the miniatures with as close and careful an eye as if he had been deeply interested in the labours of the artist.

He saw not a line which had there been drawn; but after the Marquis had followed the servant from the room he muttered to himself, "So, Monsieur de Villequier, you think that I am a mean man, who may be over-reached with impunity and ease? You know me not yet, but you shall know me, and that soon." And laying down the psalter, he took up another book of a character more suited to his mind at the moment, and read calmly till his young friend returned, which was not for near an hour.

In the mean time the Marquis had proceeded to the cabinet of Villequier, who, the moment he saw him, rose from the chair in which he had been seated busily writing, and pressed him warmly by the hand.

"My dear young friend," he said, "one learns to love the more those in whose cause one suffers something; and, since I saw you, I have had to fight your battle manfully."

"Indeed! and may I ask, my Lord, with whom?" demanded the young Marquis.

"With many," answered Villequier. "With the King,--with Epernon,-with your own brother."

"With my brother?" exclaimed Gaspar of Montsoreau, while the blood rushed up in his face. "Does he dare to oppose me after all his loud professions of disinterestedness and generosity? But where is he, my Lord? Leave me to deal with him. Where does he dwell? Is he in Paris?"

Villequier smiled, but so slightly, that it did not attract the eyes of his companion. That smile, however, was but the announcement of a sudden thought that had passed through his own mind.

Shrewd politicians like himself, fertile in all resources, and unscrupulous about any, feel a pride and pleasure in their own abundance of expedients, which makes the conception of a new means to their end as pleasant as the finding of a diamond. On the present occasion the subtle courtier thought to himself with a smile, as he saw the angry blood mount into the cheek of the young Marquis of Montsoreau at the very mention of his brother's name,--"Here were a ready means of ridding ourselves, were it needful, of one if not both of these young rash-headed nobles, by setting them to cut each other's throats."

It suited not his plan however at the moment to follow out the idea, and he consequently replied, "No, no, Monsieur de Montsoreau. I should take no small care, seeing how justly offended you are with your brother, to prevent your finding out his abode, as I know what consequences would ensue. But in all probability, by this time, he has gone back to the Duke of Guise, having with difficulty been frustrated, for the King was much inclined to yield to his demands."

"What did he demand?" exclaimed the Marquis vehemently. "What did he dare to demand, after the professions he made to me at La Ferté?"

"That matters not," answered Villequier. "Suffice it that his demands were such as would have ruined all your hopes for ever."

"But why should the King support his demands," said the Marquis, "when well assured of how attached he is to the great head of the League that tyrannises over him?"

"Hush, hush!" said Villequier. "The League only tyrannises so long as the King chooses. Henry wields not the sword at present, but the sword is still in his hands to strike when he thinks fit. But to answer your question, my young friend. The King knows well, as you say, that your brother is attached to the Duke of Guise: but you must remember at the same time, Monsieur de Montsoreau, that as yet he is not fully assured that you are attached to himself. Nay, hear me out, hear me out! The King's arguments, I am bound to say, were not only specious but reasonable. He had to consider, on the one hand, that the Duke of Guise, with whom it is his strongest interest to keep fair, demands this young lady as his ward, which, according to the laws of the land, Henry has no right to refuse. Your brother, on the Duke's part, threatens loudly; and what have I to oppose to a demand to which it seems absolutely necessary in good policy that the King should yield? Nothing; for, on the other hand, Henry affirms that he can be in no degree sure of yourself; that your family for long have shown attachment for the House of Guise; that you yourself were upon your march to join the Duke, when this lady, falling into the hands of the King's troops, induced you to abandon your purpose for the time; but that the moment he favours your suit, or gives his consent to your union with her, you may return to your former attachments, and purchase the pardon and good will of the Duke of Guise by returning to his faction."

"I am incapable of such a thing!" exclaimed the Marquis vehemently: but the recollection of his abandonment of the Duke's party came over him with a glow of shame, and he remained for a moment or two without making any farther reply, while Villequier was purposely silent also, as if to let what he had said have its full effect. At length he added:

"I believe you are incapable of it, Monsieur de Montsoreau, and so I assured the King. He, however, still urged upon me that I had no proof, and that you had taken no positive engagement to serve his Majesty. All the monarch's arguments were supported by Epernon, who, I believe, wishes for the hand of the young lady for some of his own relations, in order to arrange for himself such an alliance with the House of Guise as may prove a safeguard to him in the hour of need." And again Villequier smiled at his own art in turning back upon the Duke of Epernon the suspicion which the Duke had expressed in regard to himself.

The warning of the Abbé de Boisguerin, however, at that moment rang in the ears of Gaspar of Montsoreau, and he roused himself to deal with Villequier not exactly as an adversary, but certainly less as a friend.

"In fact, Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "his Majesty wishes that I should devote my sword and fortune to his service; and I am to understand, through you, that he holds out to me the hope of obtaining the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut in return. Now, it was not at all my purpose to take any part in the strifes that are agitating the country at this moment. I am neither Leaguer nor Huguenot, nor Zealot nor Moderate; and, though most loyal, not what is called Royalist. I was merely conducting Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, with a very small force, not the tenth part of what I can bring into the field at a week's notice, when the events took place which brought me to Paris. Now, Monsieur, if the King does not rest satisfied with my expressions of loyalty, and desires some express and public engagement to his service, I see no earthly reason why I should rest satisfied with mere vague hopes of obtaining the hand of the lady I love; and though, of course, I cannot deal with his Majesty upon equal terms, yet I must demand some full, perfect, and permanent assurance that I am not to be disappointed in my hopes, before I draw my sword for one party or another."

Villequier gazed thoughtfully in his face for a moment or two, biting his under lip, and saying internally, "The Abbé de Boisguerin--this comes from him." His next thought was, "Shall I endeavour to pique this stripling upon his honour, and generosity, and loyalty, and all those fine words?" But he rejected the idea the moment after thinking. "No; that would do better with his brother. When a man boldly leaps over such things, it is insulting him to talk about them any more."

And after a moment's farther thought, he replied, "It is all very fair, Monsieur de Montsoreau, that you should have such assurances; though, if we were not inclined to deal straightforwardly with you in the matter, we might very very easily refuse every thing of the kind, and leave you not in the most pleasant situation."

"How so?" demanded the Marquis with some alarm. "How so?"

"Easily, my dear young friend," replied Villequier. "Thus: by informing you that the King could give you no such assurance--which, indeed, is nominally true, though not really--and by showing you, at the same time, that as the young lady is in his Majesty's hands, and he is determined not to give her up to the Duke of Guise or to any body else, but some tried and faithful friend, the only means by which you can possibly obtain her is by serving the King voluntarily, in the most devoted manner. Suppose this did not suit you, what would be your resource? If you go to the Duke of Guise, you find the ground occupied before you by your brother, and the Duke accuses you of having betrayed his young relation into the hands of the King--perhaps sends you under a guard into Lorraine, and has you tried, and your head struck off. Such things have happened before now, Monsieur de Montsoreau. At all events, not the slightest chance exists of your winning the fair heiress of Clairvaut from him. But, even if you did gain his consent, she is still in the hands of the King, who would certainly not give her up to one who had proved himself a determined enemy."

Gaspar of Montsoreau looked down, with somewhat of a frowning brow, upon the ground. He saw, indeed, that the alternative was one that he could not well adopt; and, from the showing of Villequier, he fancied himself of less power and consequence in the matter than he really was. He resolved, however, not to admit the fact if he could help it.

"Suppose, Monsieur de Villequier," he said, "that the League were to prevail, and to force his Majesty to concede all the articles of Nancy, think you not that one thing exacted from him might well be, to yield Mademoiselle de Clairvaut to her lawful guardian?"

"It might," answered Villequier immediately. "But then I come in. The question of guardianship has never been tried between the Duke and myself. I stand as nearly related to her as he does; and I should instantly bring the cause before the Parliament, demanding that the young lady should remain in the hands of the King as suzerain till the cause is decided, which might be this time ten years."

"I did not know," said the young nobleman, "that the relationship was so near, though I was aware that Clairvaut is the family name of Villequier. However, sir, there is yet another alternative. Suppose I were to keep the sword in the sheath, and retire once more to Montsoreau."

"Why there, then," replied Villequier with a slight sneer, "you might happily abide, watching the progress of events, till either the royalist party or the League prevailed; and then, as chance or accident might will it, see the hand of the fair Lady rewarding one of the King's gallant defenders, or bestowed by the Duke of Guise upon his brave and prudent partisan, the Count of Logères."

He paused for a moment or two, to let all he said have its full effect, and then added, in a familiar tone, "Come, come, Monsieur de Montsoreau, see the matter in its true light. There is no possible chance of your obtaining the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, except by attaching yourself to the King's service, and defending the royal cause with the utmost zeal. If you persist in doing so simply as a voluntary act to be performed or remitted at pleasure, be you sure that as you make the King depend upon your good will for your services towards him, so will you be made to depend upon his good will, his caprices if you like, for the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. If, however, on the contrary, you frankly and generously determine to take service with the King, and bind yourself irrevocably to his cause, I do not scruple to promise you, under his hand, his full consent to your union with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. I will give you the same consent under mine, assuming the title of her guardian. Your marriage cannot, of course, take place till the great struggle that is now impending is over. In a few months, nay, in a few weeks, the one party or the other--who are now directing their efforts against each other, instead of turning, as they ought, their united forces against the common enemies of our religion--must have triumphed over its adversary. I need not tell you which I feel, which I know, must be successful; but your part will now be, to exert yourself to the utmost, to traverse the country with all speed to Montsoreau, to raise every soldier that you can, and to gather every crown that you can collect, to join the King with all your forces, wherever he may be, and, by your exertions, to render that result certain, which is, indeed, scarcely doubtful even as it is; remembering that upon the destruction of the Duke of Guise's party, and upon the overthrow of his usurped and unreasonable power, depends not only the welfare of your King and master, but the realisation of your best and sweetest hopes."

"You grant all that I demand, Monsieur de Villequier," replied Gaspar of Montsoreau. "All I wish is the King's formal consent in writing, and yours, to my marriage with Marie de Clairvaut, as the condition of my absolute and public adhesion to the royal cause."

"I know," replied Villequier, "that I grant all you demand, and I was prepared to do so from the first, only we were led into collateral discussions as we went on. You will, of course, take an oath to the King's service, and confirm it under your hand."

"We will exchange the papers, Monsieur de Villequier," replied the Marquis, thinking himself extremely cautious. "But now, pray tell me, how ended the discussion with my brother?"

"The only way that it could end," replied Villequier, "when all parties were determined to evade his demand. The King, you may easily suppose, was not inclined to give the young heiress of Clairvaut to any of the partisans of an enemy. Epernon knew well that if the hand of a Guise were upon her shoulder, the ring of a La Valette would never pass upon her finger; and I, when last we met, had half given my promise to you, and was, at all events, determined that the question of wardship should be settled before I parted with her. The King, therefore, evaded the demands of the young Count, though he was not a little inclined to yield to them at one time, in order to pacify the Duke of Guise. However, I took the brunt of the business upon myself, and underwent the hot indignation of your brother, who thought to find in me an Epernon, or a Montsoreau, who would measure swords with him for an angry word."

"They had better be skilful as well as brave," said the young Marquis thoughtfully, "who measure swords with my brother Charles."

"Indeed!" said Villequier, "is he then so much a master of his weapon?"

"The most perfect I ever beheld--ay, more skilful now, than even our friend the Abbé de Boisguerin; though I have heard that, some years ago, when the Abbé was studying at Padua, he challenged the famous Spanish sword-player, Bobéz, to display his skill with him in the schools, in single combat, and hit him three times upon the heart without Bobéz touching him once."

"I remember, I remember!" cried Villequier. "The master broke the buttons from the swords in anger, and the student ran him through the body at the first pass, whereof he died within five minutes after in the Deacon's chamber."

"I never heard that he died," replied the Marquis with some surprise.

"He did indeed, though," replied Villequier with a meditative air. "And so this was the Abbé de Boisguerin. One would have thought the army, rather than the church, would have called such a spirit to itself."

"I know not," replied the young Marquis, "but in all things he is equally skilful; and, doubtless, you know he has taken but the first step towards entering the church, pausing as it were even on the threshold."

"Do you think," said Villequier, "that he is as skilful in conveying intelligence as in other things?"

"What do you mean, my Lord?" exclaimed his young companion.

"Nay, I mean nothing," replied the politician, satisfied with having sown the first seed of suspicion in the young nobleman's mind, without, perhaps, any definite design, but simply for the universal purpose of making men doubt and distrust each other, with a view of ruling them more easily. "Nothing, except a mere question concerning his skill. I have no latent meaning, I assure you."

The brow of the Marquis grew clear again, and Villequier saw that he believed the latter assertion more fully than he had intended. He let the subject pass, however, and spoke of many other things, giving his own account of various matters which had occurred during the Count de Logères's audience of the King, and urging Gaspar de Montsoreau to set off with all speed to raise his forces in his native province. Then abruptly turning the conversation, he demanded, "You or the Abbé told me, I think, that you suspected your brother of having communicated your march to the reiters. Is it like his general character so to act? I'm sure, if it be his custom to do such things, I would much rather that he was upon the opposite party than our own."

The Marquis bent down his head, and gazed sternly upon the ground for two or three moments. He then answered, with a deep sigh, "No, Monsieur de Villequier; no, it is not like Charles's character. He has all his life been frank and free as the summer air, open, and generous. I fear I did him wrong to suspect him. We are rivals where no man admits of rivalry: but I must do him justice. If he have done such a thing, his nature must be changed, changed indeed--changed, perhaps, as much as my own."

"I thought," replied Villequier, "that he seemed frank and straightforward enough, bold and haughty as a lion; gave the King look for look; bearded Epernon, and threatened to bring him to the field; and spared not me myself, whom men don't for some reason love to offend. But he did not seem a man likely to betray his friend, or practise treachery upon his brother. It is a very

strange thing, too," he continued in an easier tone, "that Colombel and the other officers of the King's troops at Château Thierry should have received news of your coming a day before you did cross the Marne, together with the information that the reiters might attack you near Gandelu. Was not this strange?"

"Most strange," replied the Marquis, knitting his brows, and setting his teeth hard. But Villequier, now seeing that he had said quite enough, again turned the conversation; and after letting it subside naturally to ordinary subjects, he told the young Marquis that he would immediately write to the King, and obtain his signature to the paper required, before bed-time. "It is late already," he said; "I think even now I see a shade in the sky, so I must about my work rapidly. But remember, Monsieur de Montsoreau, nine is my supper hour exactly; and then, care and labour being past, we will sit down and enjoy ourselves, though I fear the accommodation which I can offer you in my poor dwelling must seem but rude in your eyes."

The Marquis said all that such a speech required, and then withdrew.

When he was gone, Villequier applied himself for some time to other things; but when they were concluded, he rose from his chair, and walked once or twice thoughtfully across the cabinet.

"I had better," he said to himself at length, "I had better deal with him at once, and then I can ascertain what are his demands, and how to treat them."

Thus saying, he took up his bell and rang it, directing the servant who appeared to see if he could find the Abbé de Boisguerin alone, in which case he was to invite him to a conference. "He will be alone," thought the wily courtier, "for I have sown seeds of those things which will not suffer them to be long together."

The Abbé, however, was absent from the house, much to the surprise of Villequier; and another hour had well nigh passed before he made his appearance. The moment that he did so, he advanced towards Villequier with his mild and graceful calmness, saying that he understood his Lordship had sent for him. Villequier pressed his hand tenderly, and with soft and courtly words assured him that, in sending for him, he had only sought to enjoy the pleasure of his unrivalled conversation for a few minutes before supper.

The Abbé replied exactly in the same tone; that he was profoundly grieved to have lost even a moment of the society of one who fascinated from the first, and sent away every one charmed and delighted.

A slight and bitter smile curled the lip of each as he ended his speech, like a seal upon a treaty, the confirmation and mockery of a falsehood.

The Abbé, however, added to his speech a few words more, saying that he should have been back earlier, but that his conversation at the White Penitent's had been so interesting that he could not withdraw himself earlier from her Majesty the Queen-mother.

Villequier started. "Are you acquainted with the Queen?" he said. "What a surprising-being Catherine is!"

"She is indeed," answered the Abbé. "My long sojourn at Florence some years ago made me fully acquainted with every member of the House of Medici, and I now bring you this letter on her part, Monsieur de Villequier."

Villequier took the paper that the Abbé handed to him, and read apparently with some surprise. "Her Majesty," he said, "knows that I am her devoted slave, but at the same time she cannot doubt, knowing as she does so well your high qualities, that I will do every thing to serve and assist you, and prevent all evil machinations against you."

"Oh, she doubts it not; she doubts it not," replied the Abbé. "She doubts it not, Monsieur de Villequier, any more than I do; and has written this note only in confirmation of your good intentions towards me. However, there is one thing I wish you to do for me, Monsieur de Villequier."

"Name it, my dear friend," exclaimed the Marquis; "but give me an opportunity of making myself happy in gratifying your wishes."

"The fact is, Monsieur de Villequier," replied the Abbé, "that some malicious person has been endeavouring to persuade the young Marquis de Montsoreau, my friend, and formerly my pupil, that it was I who intimated to the reiters the course we were pursuing to meet the Duke of Guise, and who also intimated the facts to the King's troops at Château Thierry, that they might have an opportunity of coming up to rescue us and bring us hither--though they showed no great activity in doing the first. Now, doubtless, the person who did this, if there were any one, had the King's service solely in view, and deserved to be highly rewarded, as he probably will be; but----"

"Doubtless," replied Villequier with a sneering smile. "But surely he could not object to such honourable service being known."

"Of course not," replied the Abbé; "nor that he had given intimation of the facts to, and taken

his measures with, her Majesty the Queen-mother; by an order, under whose hand the troops at Château Thierry acted, and at whose suggestion Monsieur de Montsoreau and his friends threw themselves into the hands of Monsieur de Villequier.--All this her Majesty declares he did; and he could not, of course, object to any of these things being known, except as it is contrary to good policy and to the wishes of the Queen-mother: and more especially contrary to every wise purpose, if he be a person possessed of much habitual influence with the young Marquis."

"Monsieur de Boisguerin," said Villequier, seeming suddenly to break away from the subject, but in truth following the scent as truly as any well-trained hound, "the bishopric of Seez is at present vacant. I know none who would fill it better than the Abbé de Boisguerin."

The Abbé drew himself up and waved his hand. "You mistake me entirely, Monsieur de Villequier," he said. "I take no more vows. I have taken too many already; and those, by God's grace and the good will of our holy father the Pope, I intend to get rid of very speedily. I have nothing to request of your Lordship at present. I know, see, and understand your whole policy, and think you quite right in every respect. The promises which you and the King are to give to Monsieur de Montsoreau concerning the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut can of course be broken, changed, or modified in a moment at any future time."

"We have no intention of breaking them," replied Villequier. "We are acting in good faith, I can assure you."

"Doubtless," replied the Abbé, "doubtless: but they can be broken?"

"Of course," replied Villequier; "of course any thing on earth can be broken."

"That is sufficient," replied the Abbé. "It is quite enough, Monsieur de Villequier: I only desire to know, whether you and the King consider it as a final arrangement, that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut is to marry the young Lord of Montsoreau, or whether the matter is not now as much unsettled and within your own power and grasp as ever."

"Why," replied Villequier thoughtfully, "it is, as I dare say you well know, Monsieur l'Abbé, a very difficult thing indeed to devise any sort of black lines, which, written down upon sheep skin, will prove sufficiently strong to bind the actions of kings, princes, or common men, at a future period. But it seems to me, Monsieur l'Abbé, that the time is come when we had better be frank with each other! What is it that you aim at? You seem not displeased to think the arrangement doubtful or contingent; and yet I, who am not accustomed to guess very wrongly in such matters, have entertained no doubtful suspicion that you prompted the demand for a definite and conclusive bargain."

"I did," replied the Abbé. "When you asked to see him alone, I was very well assured that, though a game of policy skilfully played may occasionally afford sport to Monsieur de Villequier, you were quite as well pleased in the present business to deal with a young and inexperienced head as with an old and a worldly one. He sought my opinion and advice, and, as I uniformly do when it is sought, I gave it him sincerely, though it was against my own views and purposes. Now, Monsieur de Villequier, I see hovering round your lips a question, which, in whatever form of words you place it, whatever Proteus form it may assume, will have this for its substance and object; namely, What are the plans and purposes of the Abbé de Boisguerin? Now, my plans and purposes are these,--remember, I do not say my objects; the object of every man in life is one, though we all set out upon different roads to reach it. My purpose is to serve his Majesty and the Queen-mother far more than I have hitherto been able to do. What I have done is a trifle; but if I detach from the party of the League, separate for ever from the Duke of Guise, and bring over to the royal cause Charles of Montsoreau as well as his brother, I shall confer no trifling service, for I can now inform you, Monsieur de Villequier, that, besides the great estates of Logères, he is lord of all the possessions lately held by the old Count de Morly, who amassed much treasure during the avaricious part of age, and died little more than a week ago, leaving this young Lord the heir of all his wealth. I have received the intelligence this very morning; so that, what between his riches, his skill, and his courage, he is worth any two, excepting Epernon perhaps, of the King's court."

"If you do what you say, Monsieur de Boisguerin," replied the Marquis in a low, deep, sweet-toned voice, "you may command any thing you please in France, bishoprics, abbeys----"

"If it rained bishoprics," replied the Abbé, "I would not wear a mitre. I do not pretend to say, Monsieur de Villequier, that I am more disinterested than my neighbours; that I have not great rewards in view, and objects of importance--to me, if not to others. But these objects are not quite fixed or determined yet, and I am not one of those men, Monsieur de Villequier, who hesitate to render the services first from a fear of losing the reward afterwards. I know how to make my claims heard when the time comes for demanding; and in the present instance, although I cannot distinctly promise to bring Charles of Montsoreau absolutely and positively over to the King's cause, yet I am sure of being able both to detach him from the Duke of Guise and separate him from the faction of the League. I think, indeed, that all three can be done: but nothing can be done unless the promise given to his brother be made contingent. The one loves her as vehemently as the other; and I, who know how to deal with him, can change his whole views in an hour, or at least in a few days."

"Indeed!" said Villequier. "He is now in Paris; the trial could be speedily made."

"I know it--" replied the Abbé, seeing the Marquis fix his eyes upon him eagerly, thinking, perhaps, 'he has promised more than he could perform.'

"I know it, and that is the precise reason why I have hurried on this matter, and urged it to the present point. No time is to be lost, or I see storms approaching, Monsieur de Villequier, that I think escape your eyes."

"What do you intend to do?" demanded Villequier; "and what means do you require to do it?"

"My purposes I have already told you," replied the Abbé. "The means I require--to come to the point at once--consist of a document under your own hand, making over to me, as far as your relationship to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut goes, the right of disposing of her hand in marriage to whomsoever I may think fit: that is to say, the voice for, or the voice against, any particular candidate for her hand, when given by me, is to be held as if given by yourself."

"This is a great thing that you demand, Monsieur de Boisguerin," replied Villequier, gazing in his face with no inconsiderable surprise; "and I see not how I can give such a paper at the very same time that I give the one which I have promised to the Marquis of Montsoreau."

"Nothing, I fear, can be done without it," replied the Abbé; "but I think it may be done without risk or exposure of any kind, for I in return can bind myself not to employ that paper for nine months, by which time all will be complete; and in both the documents you can speak vaguely of other promises and engagements, and can declare your great object in giving me that paper to be, the final settlement of difficult claims, by a person in whom you have full confidence."

Villequier looked in his face with a meaning and somewhat sarcastic smile: then turned to the note which the Queen-mother, Catharine de Medici, had sent him; read it over again as if carelessly, but marking every word as he did so; and then said, with somewhat of a sigh, "Well, Monsieur de Boisguerin, pray draw up on that paper what you think would be required."

The Abbé took up the pen and ink, and wrote rapidly for a moment or two; while Villequier looked over his shoulder, fingering the hilt of his dagger as he did so, in a manner which might have made the periods of any man but the Abbé de Boisguerin, who knew as he did his companion's habits and views, less rounded and eloquent than they usually were. The Abbé, however, wrote on without the slightest sign of apprehension, and at length Villequier exclaimed, "That would tie my hands sufficiently tight, Monsieur de Boisguerin."

"Not quite, my Lord," replied the other. "I never make a covenant without a penalty; and what I am now going to add provides that, in case of your failing to confirm my decision, or attempting in any way to rescind this paper and the power hereby given to me, you forfeit to my use and benefit one hundred thousand golden crowns, to be sued for from you in any lawful court of this kingdom."

"Nay, nay, nay!" cried Villequier, now absolutely laughing. "This is going too far, Monsieur de Boisguerin."

"Faith, not a whit, my Lord," replied the Abbé. "I take care when men make me promises, that they are not such as can be trifled with, at least if I am to act upon them."

"Why, you do not suppose----" exclaimed Villequier.

"I suppose nothing, my Lord," interrupted the Abbé, "but that you are a statesman and a courtier, and must in your day have seen more than one promise broken."

"By some millions," replied Villequier. "I told you to speak frankly, Monsieur de Boisguerin, and you have done so with a vengeance. I must have my turn, too, and tell you that neither to you nor any other man on earth will I give such a promise, without in the first place seeing a probability of the object for which it is given being accomplished, and, in fact, some steps taken towards the accomplishment of that object; and, in the next place, without having a distinct notion of the means by which it is to effect its end. That is a beautiful ring of yours," continued the statesman, suddenly breaking away from the subject as if to announce that what he had just said was final, but perhaps in reality to consider what was to be the next step. "That is a beautiful ring of yours, Monsieur de Boisguerin, and of some very peculiar stone it seems; a large turquoise semi-transparent."

"It is an antidote against all poisons," answered the Abbé coolly, "whether they be eaten in the savoury ragout, drunk in the racy cup, smelt in the odour of a sweet flower, or inhaled in the balmy air of some well-prepared apartment. My dear friends will not find me so tender a lamb as Jeanne d'Albret."

"No, I should think not," replied Villequier with a laugh, and still holding off from the original subject of conversation. "I should think not, if I may judge by some of your attendants, Monsieur de Boisguerin, for there is one of them at least, an Italian, whom I passed in the court but now, who looks much more like the follower of a wolf than of a lamb. He was dressed somewhat in the guise of a wandering minstrel, with a good strong dagger, which I dare say is serviceable in time

of need."

"I have not the slightest doubt of it," replied the Abbé de Boisguerin with the most imperturbable coolness, "though I have not had occasion to make use of him much in that way yet. But the man's a treasure, Monsieur de Villequier; and as to his garb the fact is, that I have not had time yet to have it changed and made more becoming. You shall see in a few days, Monsieur de Villequier, what a change can be effected by razors, soap, cold water, and good clothing. He's a complete treasure, I can assure you, and well worth any pains."

"But," said Villequier, "if you have had him so short a time as not to be able to clothe him yet, how do you know all these magnificent qualities?"

"It is a singular business enough," answered the Abbé. "I knew him long ago in Italy, where he was exercising various professions: but he had skill enough almost to cheat me, which, of course, made me judge highly of his abilities. One day, not long ago, he presented himself at the Château de Montsoreau, where it seems he had been upon some vagabond excursion a week or a fortnight before. He had on the first occasion seen and recognised me, and he now came back, having spent all the money he had gained by selling a young Italian pipe-player to my good cousin Charles, and being consequently in not the best provided state. He was in hopes that I would take him into my service, which, from ancient recollection of his character, I was very willing to do; dismissing, however, without much ceremony, another man and a low Italian woman whom he had brought with him. They seemed very willing to go, it is true, and he to part with them; and my good friend Orbi has already shown himself on more than one occasion fully as serviceable as I had expected he would prove. My former knowledge of him gives me means of binding him to me by very strong ties; and I will acknowledge that never was there man to all appearance so well calculated to remove a troublesome friend or a pertinacious enemy."

"Doubtless, doubtless," replied Villequier; "though he seems not to be particularly strong in frame."

"But he is active," answered the Abbé, "and full of skill, and thought, and ingenuity. But to return to what we were saying concerning the paper, Monsieur de Villequier, which we have left somewhat too long," added the Abbé, thinking this sort of farce had been carried quite far enough. "Every objection that you have raised can be overthrown at once. I ask this promise, not for my own sake, but to satisfy this youth Charles of Montsoreau. He will trust you as soon as the fox will the tiger; but he will trust to me implicitly, if he believes that I have the power to aid him in obtaining her he loves. Thus you see at once the means by which this promise is to work to the ends that we propose. Then, as to seeing clearly what the effect will be, I will show it to you in the very course of this night. Read that letter, written by the young Count of Logères to his brother, no later than yesterday evening! You see," the Abbé continued, after Villequier had read, "he renounces all claim whatsoever to the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, and this in favour of his brother. The letter was brought hither not two hours ago. Now, ere two hours more be over, you shall yourself see the whole feelings of this young man changed, and the pursuit renewed as eagerly as ever. If it be so, what say you? Will you go forward in the way I propose?--Yea or nay, Monsieur de Villequier? I trifle not, nor am trifled with."

"I will then go forward, beyond all doubt," replied the Marquis.

The Abbé thereupon took up the pen, wrote five lines on a sheet of paper, sealed them with some of the yellow wax which lay ready, addressed the note to Charles of Montsoreau, and placing it in the hands of Villequier, bade him to send it by a page, with orders to require an answer. The page seemed winged with the wind, and in a marvellous short time he returned, bearing a note from the young Count of Logères, containing these few words:--

"My renunciation was entirely conditional. If it be as you say, nothing on earth shall induce me to yield the hand of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut to any man. The time that you allow me for writing does not permit me to say more, but come to me as early as possible to-morrow, and let all things be explained; for a state of doubt and suspicion was always to me worse than the knowledge of real evil or real wrong."

The Abbé gave it to Villequier, and the Minister only replied by signing and sealing the paper which the Abbé had drawn up.

"Now, quick! Monsieur l'Abbé," said the Minister. "Go for a few minutes to your own apartments, and then join us at supper, which I hear is already served, as if we had not met during the evening. You will not need your ring, I can assure you."

The Abbé bowed low and retired in silence; but in his heart he said, "And this, the fool Henry holds to be a great politician."

No knave can be a great politician; but every knave thinks himself so. The mistake they make is between wisdom and cunning. The knave prides himself on deceiving others, the wise man on not deceiving himself.

CHAP. VI.

When the Abbé de Boisguerin on the following morning entered the presence of Charles of Montsoreau, his mind was prepared for every thing he was to say and do, for every thing he was to assert or to imply. But there was one thing for which his mind was not prepared--all shrewd, keen, politic, and experienced as it was.

There are points in the deep study of human nature which those who would use that mighty science for selfish purposes almost always overlook. Amongst these are the changes, both sudden and progressive, which take place in themselves and in others, and the changes in relative situations which they produce. In this respect it was that the Abbé de Boisguerin, thoughtful and calculating as he was, had not prepared himself for the meeting with Charles of Montsoreau. The time was short since they had parted. Not above six weeks had elapsed, if so much; and the Abbé had come ready to deal with a youth of keen and penetrating mind, of quick perceptions and extensive powers; of all whose feelings and thoughts he fancied that he knew the scope and quality; whose mind he believed that he had gauged and tested as if it were some material substance. But he knew not at all, what an effect the space of six weeks may have when spent in communication with great minds, and in dealing with great events; and the moment he entered the room he saw a change which he had never dreamt of--a change which through the mind affected the body, the countenance, and the demeanour.

Charles of Montsoreau, in short, had left him a youth high-spirited, feeling, intelligent, graceful,--he stood before him a man, calm, thoughtful, grave, dignified. There were even lines of care already upon his brow, which gave it a degree of sternness not natural to it; and the whole look and aspect of his former pupil was so powerfully intellectual, that the Abbé felt he must be more cautious and careful than he had prepared to be; that his words, his thoughts, and his looks would not alone be tested by old affection, nor even by the simple powers of an undoubting mind, but would be tried by experience likewise, and tried moreover with that degree of suspicion which is more active within us when we first learn the painful lessons taught by human deceit, than it is when we learn fully our own powers of separating truth from falsehood.

He saw that it would be necessary to be more cautious than he had proposed to be, and that, consequently, he must change much that he had intended to say and do. The very caution affected his manner, and his alteration of purposes caused occasional hesitation. Charles of Montsoreau, who remembered his whole character and demeanour during many years, found, without seeking it, a touchstone in the past by which to try the present, and the conclusion in his own heart was, "This man is not true."

The explanation given by the Abbé of all that had occurred on their route did not satisfy his hearer. He told him that he had remained with Mademoiselle de Clairvaut and the carriage till the reiters had passed, and then had caused the horses to be turned into a bye-road, in the hope of escaping any returning parties: they had thus accidentally met with the King's troops, whose offered protection, of course, they could not refuse. But he touched vaguely and lightly upon the mission of Colombel to the young Marquis de Montsoreau; and the Count de Logères did not press him upon the subject, for he felt sufficiently upon his guard, and had a repugnance openly to convict one whom he had loved of falseness and treachery.

He turned then to the note which he had received on the preceding evening.

"You tell me now," he said, "Abbé, that you have some reason to believe that Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, as I at first supposed, has seen my affection, and did not intend to discourage it. What are those reasons?"

The Abbé stated vaguely that some words, dropped by Madame de Saulny, had produced that belief in his mind.

Charles of Montsoreau mused, and made no answer. The time had been when he would have replied at once, and have discussed the question fully with his former preceptor; but now he held counsel with his own heart in his own bosom, and said, "This man has some object in telling me this. Her own words were sufficiently conclusive, that she did not see, that she did not remark, the signs of affection which I had fancied undoubted."

He still maintained silence, however, towards the Abbé, in regard to his own views, his own purposes, and his own feelings. Nor could the other, though he used all his skill, draw from him the slightest indication of what he intended to do, except that he waited in Paris for the arrangement of some affairs, which were not yet concluded, with the King. He in turn, however, questioned the Abbé much concerning his brother, expressing not only a wish but a determination to see him.

"I am happy," he said, "that my letter reached him; for--by whom or for what reason instructed

to falsify the truth, I do not know--the porter of Monsieur de Villequier denied the fact of your being in the house. As nothing could shake my own belief that it was Gaspar and yourself I had seen, and as both Gondrin and the page confirmed my opinion, I sent the letter at all risks: and now, good Abbé, if you love Gaspar and myself as you used to do, contrive that we may meet again to-morrow, in order that all these clouds may be cleared away from between us, and that we may feel once more as brothers ought to feel towards each other."

The Abbé promised to do as the young Count desired, beseeching him, however, not to press his brother to an interview too suddenly, and assuring him that he would use every effort.

The still more important subject of what had become of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut remained to be discussed; and Charles of Montsoreau, though resolved to make the inquiry, approached it with distaste and with caution, from a feeling that the Abbé would not deal truly with him, and would only endeavour, in the course of any conversation upon that point, to discover what were his secret intentions, even while he concealed from him the true circumstances.

It was as he expected. The Abbé told him that, in some degree under the care, and in some degree under the guard, of the King's troops, the whole party had been brought to the neighbourhood of Paris, where a messenger from the monarch had conveyed to himself and the young Marquis an invitation to take up their abode at the house of Villequier, while Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was conveyed to Vincennes. They had done all that was possible, he said, to prevent such a separation; but the King's commands were peremptory; and he had since learnt, or at least had reason to believe, that the young lady had been sent in the direction of Beauvais, to the care of some distant relations.

The young Count smiled, and said nothing; and the Abbé then, with an air of grave sincerity, proceeded to ask him what had best be done under such circumstances. He replied that he could give no advice; and many a vain effort was again made to discover what were his purposes in regard to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut. Finding that no indirect means succeeded, the Abbé, trusting to their former familiarity, asked the question directly, "What do you intend to do in this business, Charles."

"Indeed, my dear Abbé," replied the young Count, "it is difficult to tell you. I have no definite plan of action at present, and must be guided by circumstances as they arise."

Thus ended their interview; and it formed a strange contrast to that between the Abbé and Villequier,--showing how simple honesty may often baffle cunning which has succeeded against astuteness like itself. The following day passed without any communication reaching the young Count, either from the Abbé or from his brother, from the King or the Duke of Guise; and expectation of receiving tidings from some one caused him to remain at home during the greater part of the day.

On the succeeding morning, however, he determined to proceed to the house of Villequier, and to demand peremptorily the fulfilment of the promise which the King had made. Ere he set out, however, he received a note in the hand of the Abbé de Boisguerin, informing him briefly that his brother, having determined to return to Montsoreau, was upon the very point of setting out. He, the Abbé, was to accompany him for two days' march upon the road, but would return to Paris in four or five days without fail.

Charles of Montsoreau read the note with a faint and melancholy smile, and again said, "This man is not true!"

He rode at once, however, to the hotel of Villequier, but found that the minister had once more gone to Vincennes. He inquired for the Marquis of Montsoreau of the same porter who had denied the fact of his being there. The porter, not at all discomposed, replied that the Marquis and the Abbé de Boisguerin, with their train, had set out fully two hours before for Montl'hery; which, being confirmed upon farther inquiry by an Italian confectioner on the opposite side of the street, was believed by the young Count, who returned home with a heart but ill at ease.

Another day was passed in gloomy and impatient expectation; but at night Gondrin reappeared from Soissons, bringing with him a brief note from the Duke of Guise:--

"Your interview," it said, "was such as might be expected; your conduct all that it should have been; your view of the result right. They are endeavouring to trifle both with you and me; but we must show them that this cannot be done. I send off a courier at once to Villequier, requiring that the King's authorisation shall be immediately given to you. If it reach you not before to-morrow night, I pray you set off at once with the passports you possess for Chateauneuf; for I have information scarcely to be doubted, that our poor Marie has been conveyed thither. Show her the letter which I gave you, requiring her to follow your directions in every thing. Endeavour to bring her at once, with what people you can collect upon her lands, across the country towards Rheims, avoiding Paris. If any one stops you, or attempts either to delay your progress or dispute your passage, show them my letter of authority, as well as the passports that you already possess; and if they farther molest or delay you, they shall not be forgotten, be they great or small, when they come to reckon with your friend, Henry of Guise."

In a postscript was written at the bottom--"In going, avoid Dreux and Montfort, for the plague

is raging there. If there be any force stationed at Chateauneuf to prevent the removal of Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, only ascertain distinctly the fact of her presence in the château, and come back to rejoin me with all speed."

The tidings brought by Gondrin showed Charles of Montsoreau that great events of some kind were in preparation. Various bodies of troops attached to the House of Lorraine were moving here and there in Champaign and the Ardennes; daily conferences were held between the Duke of Guise, the Cardinal of Bourbon, the Cardinal of Guise, and a number of other influential noblemen; the propriety of deposing the King was said to be openly discussed at Soissons, and ridicule and hatred were unsparingly busy with the names of Epernon, Villequier, and others. Couriers, totally independent of those which were sent upon the business that brought the young Count to Paris, were almost hourly passing between the capital and Soissons; and it was daily whispered in the latter city, that experienced officers and small bodies of troops were daily gliding into the capital from the army which the Duke had led to victory on so many previous occasions.

Early on the following morning, Charles of Montsoreau again proceeded to the Hotel de Villequier, in order that nothing might be wanting on his part. But the reply once more was, that the minister was absent; and the day passed over without any tidings from either the King or his favourite. As he passed through various parts of the city, however, the young Count remarked many things that somewhat surprised him. He had hitherto ridden amongst the people quite unnoticed, but now many persons whom he met bowed low to him, and those seemingly of the most respectable classes of citizens. On two or three occasions the burgher guard saluted him as he passed; and in one place, where several people were collected together, there was a cry of "Long live the Duke of Guise!"

All these indications of some approaching event of importance at any other moment might have given him an inclination to remain in Paris: but he had other interests more deeply at heart; and having waited till the last moment to make sure that the King's authorisation was still delayed, he prepared to set out that very night, taking with him only the number of persons specified in the passports which he had brought from Soissons.

In a brief and hurried note which he wrote to Chapelle Marteau, he informed him that he was about to absent himself from Paris for a short time on business of importance; and begged him, as it was his intention to pass out of the city by the Faubourg St. Germain that very night, to facilitate his so doing as quietly as possible. That his absence might remain for some time concealed from those who might obstruct his proceedings, he retained his apartments at the inn, and the servants he had hired, paying the whole for some time in advance, and directing that if any inquiries were made, the reply should be, that he was only absent for a few days.

When all was prepared he set out, and at the gates found his friend of the Seize, with another personage, who seemed to consider himself of great importance. No words, however, were spoken, no passports were demanded, the two Leaguers bowed lowly to the Count, the gates opened as if of themselves, and, issuing forth, the young Count rode on upon the way, anxious to place as great a distance between Paris and himself ere the next morning as possible.

It was a soft calm night in April, the sky was unclouded and filled with stars, the dew thick upon the grass, and the air balmy; and the young nobleman pursued his way with a mind filled with thoughts which, though certainly in part melancholy, were still tinged with the soft light of hope. His horses were strong and fresh, and just in the grey of the morning, on the following day, he reached the small town of Rambouillet.

The signs and indications of the disturbed and anxious state of society in France were visible in the little town as the young Count gazed from the door of the inn, after seeing that his horses were well taken care of. There were anxious faces and eyes regarding the stranger with the expression of doubt, and perhaps suspicion; there were little knots gathered together and talking gloomily at the corners of different streets; the whistle of the light-hearted peasant was unheard; and the cart or the flock was driven forth in silence.

The Count's horses required rest; none were to be procured with which he could pursue his journey, and he determined to take what repose he could get ere he proceeded on his way. Casting himself down then upon a bed, he closed his eyes and sought to sleep: but suddenly something like a wild cry sounded from the other side of the street, and springing up he looked out of the window. He could almost have touched the opposite house, so narrow was the way, and he saw completely into a room thereof through the window that faced his own.

There was a woman in it of about the middle age, kneeling by the bedside of a youth who seemed just dead; and on looking down a little below he saw a man, dressed in a black serge robe, standing on a ladder, and marking the front of the building with a large white cross. On the impulse of the moment, Charles of Montsoreau ran down stairs, and approached the door of the house, intending to enter. But he was stopped at the door by two of the guards of the city. "Do you not see the mark of the plague?" they said. "You must not go in; or, if you go in, you must not come out again."

With a sorrowful heart, Charles of Montsoreau turned back into the inn, but he found no sleep, and the image of the woman clasping her dead son still haunted him in waking visions.

CHAP. VII.

It was about nine o'clock at night, and the moon, rising later than the night before, had not yet gone down, as Charles of Montsoreau passed through the wide forest that then surrounded Chateauneuf en Thimerais. It was a beautiful moonlight scene, affording to the eye many various and pleasant objects. The greater part of the forest, indeed, consisted of old trees far apart from each other, and only surrounded by brushwood in patches here and there. Occasionally, indeed, deeper and thicker parts of the forest presented themselves, where the axe had not been plied so unsparingly; but the ground was hilly and broken, and the road ascended and descended continually, showing every change of the forest ground. There were manifold streams too in that part of the country, and small gushing fountains, while a chapel or two, here and there raised by the pious inhabitants of the neighbourhood, broke the desolate appearance of the wood by showing sweet traces of human hope or gratitude. The heart, however, of Charles of Montsoreau enjoyed not that scene as it might at any other time, for many dark and painful reports had reached him of the state of the country in that district, and he looked anxiously forward to his arrival at the little village of Morvillette seated in the midst of the forest, to hear further tidings of Chateauneuf and its neighbourhood. A party of soldiers he had already heard had passed along some days before, escorting a carriage, and it was understood their destination was Chateauneuf; but the people of Tremblay, where he received this intelligence, shook the head doubtingly, and added, that the traveller would hear more at Morvillette, and could there get a guide to the château, which was two miles from the town.

At length, lying in a hollow of the woodland, the moonlight showed him a group of dark cottages; but no friendly light appeared in the windows; and as he rode on amongst the houses, there was a sort of awful stillness about the place, which seemed to indicate that it was not slumber that kept the tongues of the peasantry silent. There were no dogs in the streets; there was no smoke curling up from any of the chimneys; all was still, and many of the doors stood wide open in the night air, exhibiting nothing but solitude within.

"There must be somebody in the place," cried Gondrin, springing from his horse and approaching one of the cottages, the door of which was shut.

Without knocking, the man threw open the door at once, and went in as far as the bridle of his horse would let him; but he came out again immediately, and his master could see that his face was pale and its expression horrified.

"A man and a woman," he said in a low voice, "both dead! the one in the bed and the other on the floor, and both of them looking as blue as a cloud."

The boy Ignati pressed up his horse to hear; and the Count said, "In all probability there may be things still more horrible before us. I shall go on, Gondrin; I must go on: but there is no need for either yourself or the page to do so. You had better both go back. Make the best of your way to Soissons, there tell the Duke what you have seen, and assure him that I will do my best to fulfil his wishes if I live."

"My Lord," said the boy, "I might quit you for a kind and noble master when danger was not about you, but I will only quit you now with life."

"And so say I," replied Gondrin in a somewhat reassured but still anxious tone. "But let us ride on, my Lord, and get out of this horrible place. We shall find no one here to show us the way."

"I believe I can find it myself," replied the Count. "We turn to the left as soon as we have passed the village. Come on!"

Thus saying, he somewhat quickened his pace and rode away, the moon now declining towards her setting, throwing longer shadows, and giving more uncertain light. Anxiously did the young Count gaze from the brow of every rise, hoping to see the form of the château rising upon the eminence before him. Several times he disappointed himself by fancying that he saw it when it was not there, so that, when at length he beheld a single faint point of light, like the spark of a firefly amongst the distant branches, he could scarcely believe that it afforded any true indication of that which he sought.

Riding on, however, he again and again caught sight of it, till at length the forms of the building grew more clear and defined, and after about half a mile more he rode up the gentle slope that conducted towards the château.

It was situated in the midst of a wild game park, not unlike that of Vincennes, only that the ground was more irregular. The building, however, was very different: it had been erected by that Count de Clairvaut who had been sent ambassador in the reign of Henry II. to the Republic of Venice. He had formed his ideas of beauty in architecture under another sky, and, but that it was somewhat larger and heavier, it might have been supposed that the building had been transported by some Geni from the banks of the Brenta. There was a strong old castellated gate, however, in the walls of the park, which had belonged to some former building. But the heavy iron gates were wide open, and the voice of no porter responded to the call of the young Count and his companions.

Still, however, he saw a light in the windows of the château, and he eagerly rode on along the path which conducted to the principal gates of the building. Here there was a wide flight of marble stairs, which had been brought ready polished at an immense expense from Italy, yellow and green with the damp, but still altogether of a different hue and consistence from the ordinary stone of the place. From those steps the wide forest scene beyond was fully displayed to the eye, the château being built very near the highest point of the acclivity, and the whole ground towards Dreux, Maintenon, and Chartres lying below, with the forest itself sweeping down the edge of that chain of high hills which separates the southern parts of Normandy from the northern parts and Maine.

The moon at that moment was just sinking beyond the trees on the left, and poured over the woods and plains below a flood of silver light, caught and reflected here and there by some open stream or wide piece of water, and, shining full upon the front of the marble building, which, with its pillars, its capitals, and its cornices, its wide doors and spreading porticoes, looked like the spectre of some bright enchanted palace from another land.

The large doors that opened upon the terrace were ajar; and Charles of Montsoreau, leaving his horse with the page, mounted the steps and knocked hard with the haft of his dagger. A long melancholy echo was all the sound that was returned. He knocked again, there was no answer; and then pushing open the door, he entered the wide marble hall. The moonlight was pouring through the tall windows, but all was solitary; and putting his foot upon the first step of the staircase, he was beginning to ascend. At that moment, he thought he heard a distant sound as of an opening door; and a ray of light, streaming down some long corridor at the top of the broad staircase, crossed the balustrade and chequered the iron work with a different hue from the moonlight. He now called loudly, asking if there was any one in the building.

In a moment after, there were steps heard coming along towards the staircase, and a voice replied, "There is death and pestilence in the house. If you come for plunder, take it quickly; if you come by accident, fly as fast as you may, for every breath is tainted."

The tones of that voice were not to be mistaken, even before Charles of Montsoreau beheld the speaker; but, ere the last words were spoken, Marie de Clairvaut herself was at the top of the staircase, bearing a small lamp in her hand, and Charles of Montsoreau eagerly sprang up the steps.

The lamp flashed upon the form and features which she had not at first seen, and with a loud cry she darted forward to meet him.

The next moment, however, nearly dropping the lamp, she rushed back, exclaiming, "Come not near, Charles! Dear, dear Charles, come not near! These hands, not twelve hours ago, have closed the eyes of the dead. The plague most likely is upon me now!"

But before she could add more, the arms of Charles of Montsoreau were round her.

"You have called me dear," he said, "and what privilege can be dearer than sharing your fate, whatever it may be? Dear, dear, dear Marie! oh, say those words again, and make me happy!"

"But I fear for you, Charles," she said; "I fear for you. All are either dead or have fled and left me, and I shall see you die too,--you, you die also by the very touch, by the very breath, of one to whom you have restored life."

"I fear not, Marie," answered Charles; "I fear not; and that is the safest guard. Certainly you shall not see me fly and leave you; and I fear not, either, that you will see death overtake me. But oh, if even it did, how sweet would death itself be, watched by that dear face, wept by those beloved eyes!"

Marie bent down her head, and said nothing; but she strove no more against the arm that was cast round her; her hand remained in his, and the colour rose warmly into her cheek, which had before been deadly pale.

"If," she said at length, after a long pause, during which he had continued to gaze earnestly, fondly, sadly upon her,--"If it were not that I feared for you, your presence would indeed be a comfort and a consolation to me: not that I fear for myself," she added; "I know not why, but I have never feared. It has seemed to me as if there were no danger to myself--as if I should certainly escape. But oh, how terrible it would be to see you struck by the pestilence also!"

"Say no more, dear Marie; say no more," replied Charles of Montsoreau, feeling and knowing

by every word that she was his own. "I fear not; I have no fear; and even if I had, love would trample it under foot in a moment. I would not leave you in such an hour, not if by descending that short flight of steps I could save myself from death: unless indeed you told me to go, and that you loved me not."

The tears sprang into Marie de Clairvaut's eyes. "I must not tell such a falsehood," she cried, clasping her hands together, "in an hour like this. I never told you so; indeed I never did, though Madame de Saulny, poor Madame de Saulny, with her dying lips assured me that you thought so."

"There have been many errors, dear Marie," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "which have pained both your heart and mine, I fear. But now, my beloved, I must call in those that are with me, for we have travelled far and ridden hard."

"Oh, call them not in!" said Marie de Clairvaut, "for they will be frightened when they see the state of the house, and catch the pestilence and die! Bid them lead their horses to the stables, and sleep there. Perhaps they may find some one still living there, for this evening at sunset I saw my father's old groom still wandering about as usual; but you must go yourself to tell them, Charles, for I do not believe that there is any one in the house but you and I. The stables lie away to the left. I will wait here for you till you come back. Go through the great doors," she said, as he descended, "and go not into the rooms either to the right or left, for there is death in all of them."

Charles of Montsoreau descended with a rapid step, and in a few words gave his directions to the servants. He then returned, and taking Marie de Clairvaut's hand in his, he pressed his lips warmly upon it, and gazed tenderly upon her as she led him along through a wide corridor to the room in which she had been sitting.

It formed a strange contrast,--the aspect of that room, with the desolate knowledge that all was death and solitude through the rest of the house. Beautiful pictures, rich ornaments, fine tapestry, gave it an air of life and cheerfulness, which seemed strange to the feelings of Charles of Montsoreau. But an illuminated book of prayer that lay upon the table told how Marie de Clairvaut's thoughts had been employed; and Charles of Montsoreau paused, and, lifting his thoughts to Heaven, prayed earnestly, fervently, that that bright and beautiful and beloved being might still be protected by the hand of the Almighty in every scene of peril and danger which might yet await her.

She sat down on the chair in which she had been reading with a look of melancholy thoughtfulness, and Charles of Montsoreau sat down beside her, and there was a long silent pause, for the hearts of both were too full of agitating feelings for words to be plentiful at first. The moment and the circumstances, indeed, took from love all shame and hesitation. Death and deprivation and desolation gave affection a brighter, a holier light,--it was like some eternal flame burning upon the altar of a ruined temple.

Marie de Clairvaut felt that at that moment she could speak things that at any other time she would have sunk into the earth to say; she felt that--with the exception of their trust in God--his love for her and hers for him formed the grand consolation of the moment, the healing balm, the great support of that hour of peril and of terror. She looked at him and he at her, and they mutually thought that a few hours perhaps might see them there, dying or dead by each other's side, with love for the only comfort of their passing hour--with the voice of death pronouncing their eternal union, and the grave their bridal bed.

They thus thought, and it may seem strange to say, but--prepared as their minds were for leaving the life of this earth behind them--such a death to them appeared sweet; and neither feared it, but looked forward upon the grim enemy of human life, not with the stern defying frown of the martyr, not with the fierce and angry daring of the warrior, but with the calm sweet smile of resignation to the will of Heaven, and hopes beyond the tomb.

Thus they remained silent, or with but few words, for some time; and Charles of Montsoreau felt that he was beloved. Indeed, there was not a word, there was not a look, that did not tell him so: and yet he longed to hear more; he longed that those words should be spoken which would confirm, by the living voice of her he loved, the assurance of his happiness. Gradually he won her from conversing of the present to speak of the past; and she gently reproached him for leaving her at Montsoreau so suddenly as he had done.

"Marie," he said, with that frankness which had always characterised him, "let me tell you all; and then see if I did right or wrong. If I did wrong, you shall blame me still, and I will grieve and make any atonement in my power; but if I only mistook, and did not act wrong intentionally, you shall forgive me, and tell me that you love me."

Marie de Clairvaut gazed in his face, and asked, "And do you doubt it now, Charles?"

"Oh, no!" he cried, "oh, no! I ought not to doubt it, for Marie de Clairvaut could not speak such words as she has spoken without loving." And gently bending down his head over her, he pressed a kiss upon that dear fair brow. "Marie," he said, "it is our fate to meet in strange scenes. The last time that I kissed that brow, the last time that I held you to my heart, was when I thought you dead, and lost to me for ever."

"And when I woke up," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "and was not only grateful to God and to you for having saved me, but happy in its being you that did save me, and happy," she added, slightly dropping her eyes, "in the signs of deep affection which I saw."

"And yet," he exclaimed, "and yet, when my stay or my departure hung upon a single word from your lips, you gave me to understand that you had not received those signs of affection as signs of affection; that you looked upon them but as the natural effect of my witnessing your restoration to life, when I thought you dead."

"Oh, Charles!" exclaimed Marie de Clairvaut, with a slight smile, "could you not pardon and understand such small hypocrisy as that? Did you not know that woman's heart is shy, and seeks many a hiding-place, even from the pursuit of one it loves?"

"I never loved but you, Marie," replied the Count, "and I am sadly ignorant, I fear, of woman's heart. Nevertheless, upon those few words and that moment depended my fate."

"I knew not that," cried Marie de Clairvaut, eagerly; "I knew not that, or, upon my honour, I would have been more sincere: but what was it, Charles, made you take so sudden a resolution? what was it made you leave me, without a reply, in the hands of those who have striven constantly ever since to make me believe that you cared not for me?"

"I will tell you all," replied her lover; and, pouring forth in eloquent words all the passion of his heart towards her, he told her how his love had grown upon him, how it had increased each hour; and making that the main subject of his tale, he told but as adjuncts to it the pain which his brother's conduct had inflicted upon him, and all the signs of rivalry which he had remarked. He then spoke of his conversation with the Abbé de Boisguerin on their way to visit the Count de Morly; and he told how agonised were all his feelings--how terrible was the struggle in his heart,--and what was the resolution that he took, to ascertain whether her affections were really gained, and by the result to shape his conduct. He next spoke of his conversation with her immediately preceding his departure, and of the words which had led him to believe that she was unconscious of his love, and did not return it.

As she listened, the tears rose in her eyes, and, laying her soft fair hand on his, she said, "Forgive me, Charles! oh, forgive me! but do believe that there is not another woman on all the earth who would not have done the same."

"Alas! dear Marie," he replied, "in such knowledge you have but a child to deal with."

"Oh, be so ever, Charles!" she cried, clasping her hands and looking up in his face. "There may be women who would love you less for being so; but I trust and hope that you will never love any one but Marie de Clairvaut, and she will value your love all the more for its being, and having ever been, entirely her own. But you were speaking of the Abbé de Boisguerin, Charles--you have told me of his conversation with you--I saw, when I was at Montsoreau, that you loved and esteemed him."--She paused, and hesitated. "I fear," she added, "that what I must speak, that what I ought to tell you, may pain and grieve you:--I doubt that man, Charles--I more than doubt him."

"And so do I, Marie," replied her lover with a melancholy shake of the head; "and so do I doubt him much. Indeed, as you say, I more than doubt him, for I know and feel that he is not true."

"Alas! Charles," she replied, "I fear that in that very first conversation with you he meditated treachery towards you. I fear much, very much, that his design and purpose even then was to separate us."

"Perhaps it might be so, Marie," replied her lover: "though he has never shown any strong preference, I have often thought he loves Gaspar better than he does me."

"But it was no love of your brother, Charles," she said; "it was no love of your brother moved him then; for if your brother trusted him, he betrayed him too. Now hear me, Charles, and let me, as quickly as possible, tell a tale that makes my cheek burn, for it must be told. After you were gone, I avoided your brother's presence as far as might be. I was never with him for a moment alone if I could help it, for I could not but see feelings that were never to be returned. Although there was something from the first in the Abbé de Boisguerin that I loved not, though I could not tell why--something in his eye that made me shrink into myself with a kind of fear,--I now courted him to be with me, in order to avoid the persecution of love for which I could not feel even grateful. At first he seemed inclined to give your brother opportunities; and I believe, I firmly believe, that he did so because he knew that those opportunities would but serve to confirm the coldness of my feelings towards him. When he saw that I sought him to be with us, he seemed to yield, and was now with me often almost alone, when there was none but one or two of my women in the further end of the room. He timed his visits well; and, for a space, well did he choose his conversation too. It was such as he knew must please my ear. He told me of other lands, and of princely scenes beyond the Alps, the beauties of nature, the miracles of art, the graceful but dangerous race of the Medici, the treasures, the unrivalled treasures of Florence and of Rome. I learned to forget the prejudices--I had first taken towards him, and he saw that I listened well pleased, and then he ventured to speak of you and of your brother. But oh, Charles, he spoke not as a friend to either. He blamed not, indeed; he even somewhat praised; but he

undervalued all and every thing. There was not a word of censure, but there was every now and then a light sneer in the tone, a scornful turn of the lip, and curl of the nostril. It pleased me not, and seeing it, he wisely dropped such themes. He spoke of you no more; but he spoke of himself and of his own history. He told me that his was the more ancient branch of your own family, but that reverses and misfortunes had overtaken it; and that, careless of wealth or station, and any of the bubbles which the world's grown children follow, he had made no effort to raise his own branch from the ground to which it had fallen. But he said, however, that if he had had an object, a great and powerful object, he felt within himself those capabilities of mind which might raise him over some of the highest heads in the land: and none could hear his voice, and see the keen astuteness of his eye, without believing that what he said was true. And then again he spoke of the objects, the few, the only objects, which could induce a man of great and expansive intellect to mingle in the strife and turmoil of the world; and the chief of those objects, Charles, was woman's love. He was a churchman, Charles, and had taken vows which should have frozen such words upon his lips. I was silent, and I think turned pale, and he instantly changed the conversation to other things, speaking eloquently and nobly upon great and fine feelings, as I have seen one of the modellers in wax cast on the rough harsh form that he intended to give, and then soften it down with fine and delicate touches, so as to leave it smooth and pleasant to the eye. At length we set out to join my uncle; and your brother now had opportunities of paining me greatly by the open and the rash display of feelings that grieved and hurt me. He took means too to find moments to speak with me alone, which I must not dwell upon--means which were unworthy of one of your race, Charles. He tried to deceive me into such interviews by every sort of petty art; and if the Abbé de Boisguerin came to my relief, alas! it was but now to inflict upon me worse persecution. He dared to speak to me, Charles, words that none had ever dared to speak before--words that I must not repeat, that I must not even think of here, so near the holy calmness of the dead. These words were not, indeed, addressed to me directly; but they were used to figure forth what were the passions which an ardent and fiery heart might feel. They were intended evidently to let me know of what he himself was capable: though they breathed of love, there was somewhat of menace in them likewise. The very sound of his voice, the very glare of his eyes, now became terrible to me: but he seemed to consider that I was more in his power now than I had been at Montsoreau; and I need not tell you that to me the journey was a terrible one. To end it all, Charles--as I take it for granted that you know some part of what has taken place, even by seeing you here this night--I feel sure that it was by his machinations that I was betrayed into the hands of the King, whom I have all my life been taught to abhor, and by him given up to the power of a relation, from whom I have been sheltered by all my better friends as from the most venomous of serpents."

Charles of Montsoreau had heard all in deep silence, without interrupting her once. He gazed indeed, from time to time, upon her fair face, watching with love and admiration the bright but transient expressions that came across it: but he listened with full attention and deep thought; and when she had done, he replied, "What you have told me, dear Marie, indignant as it well may make me, was most necessary for me to hear, and is most satisfactory, for it explains all that I did not before comprehend or understand. His machinations, however, dear Marie, I now trust are at an end. What may be between Villequier and him I do not know; but I trust, dear Marie, I trust in that God who never does fail them that trust in him, that I come to bring you deliverance and to lead you to happiness. It would be long and tedious to tell you, beloved, all that has happened to me since I left you at Montsoreau. Suffice it that I have seen the Duke of Guise; that I have spent the greater part of the time with him; that I have been able, Marie, to serve him--he says, to save his life; and that to me he has entrusted the charge of seeking you and bringing you to join him at Soissons, in despite of any one that may oppose us."

"Oh, joy, joy!" cried Marie de Clairvaut. "When can we set out?" And she rose from her seat as if she hoped their departure might take place that minute. Charles of Montsoreau drew her gently to his heart, and, gazing into her deep tender eyes, he asked, "Will your joy be less, dear Marie, if you know that you go to be at once the bride of Charles of Montsoreau, with the full consent of your princely guardian, given by one who is well worthy to give, to one who is scarcely worthy to receive, such a jewel as yourself?"

Marie de Clairvaut hid her face upon his bosom, murmuring, in a scarcely audible tone, "Can you ask me, Charles?--But oh, let us speed away quickly; for though I, who have been here now several days, and have seen nothing but death and desolation round me ever since I came, have become accustomed to the scene, and doubtless to the air also, yet I fear for every moment that you remain here."

"I still fear not, dear Marie," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "Nevertheless, most glad am I to bear you away to happier scenes; and as soon as the horses have taken some rest, we will set out. And now, dear girl," he added, "I will send you from me. You need some repose, Marie; you need some tranquillity. Leave me then, dear girl, and try to sleep till the hour of our departure, while I will watch here for you, and call you before break of day."

"If you watch, Charles," replied Marie, "I will watch with you, for I need not repose. This morning, after closing the eyes of poor Madame de Saulny, and weeping long and bitterly over her and the poor girl who was the only one that chose to remain with me, exhausted with watching, anxiety, and grief, I fell asleep, and slept long. Before that, I had felt so weary and so heated, that I almost fancied--though without fearing it--that the plague might be coming upon me; but I woke refreshed and comforted just as the sun was going down, and I felt, as it were, a

hope and expectation that some change would soon come over my fate. But you need at least refreshment, Charles. In the next room remains my last untasted meal--the last that the poor frightened beings who abandoned me, set before their mistress yesterday. I fear not to take you there, Charles, for no one has died in this part of the house."

Charles of Montsoreau followed her, and persuaded her also to take some light refreshment; and there they sat through the live-long night, speaking kind words from time to time, and watching each other's countenances with hope strong at the hearts of both, though somewhat chequered by fears, each for the other.

CHAP. VIII.

By the time that the first grey streak chequered the dark expanse of the eastern sky, the horses of Charles of Montsoreau, with three others, were standing on the terrace at the foot of the marble steps. The page and Gondrin were there, and also the old groom, a white-headed man of some sixty years of age, who had booted and spurred himself, and buckled on a sword, declaring that he would accompany his young mistress, if it were but to lead the sumpter horse which carried her baggage. A moment after, Marie herself appeared, and Charles of Montsoreau placed her on the beast that had been prepared for her, while the old groom kissed her hand, saying, "I am glad to see you well, dear lady. But fear not; none of your race and none of mine ever died of the plague either, though I have seen it pass by this place twice before now, and I remember eleven corpses lying on those steps at once."

"There are six within those chambers now," replied Marie, shaking her head mournfully. "But I fear not, good Robin,--for myself at least. But you had better lead the way towards Chalet, for the Count tells me that Morvillette is deserted."

"Oh, I will lead you safely, Lady," replied the old man; "and though very likely they may keep us out of many a house on account of where we come from, there is my daughter's cottage where they will take us in, for they do not fear the plague there."

Thus saying, he mounted his horse, and rode on before, through the forest roads, while the lady and her lover followed side by side. As they went on circling round the highest parts of the hills, the grey streaks gradually turned into crimson; the dim objects became more defined in the twilight of morning; a few far distant clouds at the edge of the sky, tossed into fantastic shapes, began to glow like the burning masses of a furnace; the crimson floated like the waves of a sea up towards the zenith; the fiery red next became mingled with bright streaks of gold; the forest world, just budding into light green, was seen below with its multitude of hills and dales, and rocks and streams; the air blew warm and sweet, and full of all the balm of spring; and a thousand birds burst forth on every tree, and carolled joyous hymns to the dawning day.

Never broke there a brighter morning upon earth; never rose the sun in greater splendour; never was the air more balmy, or the voices of the birds more sweet. It seemed as if all were destined to afford to those two lovers the strongest, the strangest, the brightest contrast to the dark dull night of anxiety and emotion which they had passed within the palace they had just left behind them. It seemed to both as an image of the dawn of immortality after the tomb--anxiety, sorrow, danger, death, left behind, and brightness and splendour spread out before.

Each instinctively drew in the rein as the sun's golden edge was raised above the horizon; each gazed in the countenance of the other, as if to see that no trace of the pestilence was there; and each held out the hand to grasp that of the being most loved on earth, and then they raised their eyes to Heaven in thankfulness and joy.

The old man led them on with scarcely a pause towards Chalet; but about a mile from that place he turned to a little hamlet near, where, in a good farm-house inhabited by his daughter and her husband, they found their first resting-place. They were gladly received and heartily welcomed, without the slightest appearance of fear, though the circumstances of their flight were known. The farmer and the farmer's wife set before them the best of all they had, the children served them at the table, and the good woman of the house brought forth a large flask of plague water, and made them drink abundantly, assuring them that it was a sovereign antidote that was never known to fail. They then assigned a room to each, and though it was still daylight they gladly retired to rest. Charles of Montsoreau, though much fatigued, slept not for near an hour, but the house was all kept quiet and still, and, with his thoughts full of her he loved, he fancied and trusted that she was sleeping calmly near him, and in an earnest prayer to Heaven he called down blessings on her slumber. At length sleep visited his own eyes, and he rose refreshed and well. Some fears, some anxieties still remained in his bosom till he again saw the countenance of

Marie de Clairvaut. When he did see it, however, fears on her account vanished altogether, for the paleness which had overspread her face the night before had been banished by repose, and the soft warm glow of health was once more upon her cheek. He saw the same anxious look of inquiry upon her countenance; and oh! surely there is something not only sweet and endearing, but elevating also, in the knowledge of such mutual thoughts and cares for each other; something that draws forth even from scenes of pain and peril a joy tender and pure and high for those who love well and truly!

"Fear not, dear Marie," he said; "fear not; for I feel well, and you too look well, so that I trust the danger is over."

"Pray God it be!" said Marie de Clairvaut. "But now, when you will, Charles, I am ready to go on; we may soon reach Maintenon."

"We must avoid the road by Maintenon," replied Charles of Montsoreau, "for that would bring us on the lands of the grasping Duke of Epernon, and we could not run a greater risk. Chartres itself is doubtful; but we must take our way thither, and act according to circumstances. However, dear Marie, our next journey must be long and fatiguing: would it not be better for you to stay here to-night, and take as much repose as you can obtain before you go on?"

"Oh no," replied Marie de Clairvaut; "I am well and strong now, and eager to get forward out of all danger. The bright moon will soon be rising, the sun has not yet set, and we may have five or six hours of calm light to pursue our way."

Her wishes were followed; and they were soon once more upon their way towards the fair old town of Chartres. Their former journey had passed greatly in thought, for deep emotions lay fresh upon their hearts, and burthened them: but now they spoke long and frequently upon every part of their mutual situation. The history of every event that had happened to either, since they had parted at Montsoreau, was told and dwelt upon with all its details: and while the love of Charles of Montsoreau for his fair companion certainly did not diminish, every word that fell from his lips, every act that she heard him relate, and the manner of relating it also, increased in her bosom that love which she had at first perceived with shame, but in which she now began to take a pride as well as a joy.

Nor, indeed, did his conduct and demeanour to herself in the circumstances which surrounded them--circumstances of some difficulty and delicacy--change one bright feeling of her heart towards him. There was very much of that tenderness in his nature, that soft, that gentle kindness, which, when joined with courage and strength, is more powerful on the affections of woman than, perhaps, any other quality; and her feelings were changed and rendered more devoted by being dependent upon him for every thing--protection, and consolation, and support, and affection, and all those little cares and kindnesses which their mutual situation enabled him to show.

Thus they journeyed on for several hours, and at length reached the town of Chartres, having agreed to pass for brother and sister, as the safest means of escaping observation. It was about eleven o'clock at night when they reached the inn, but they were received with all kindness and hospitality, such as innkeepers ever show to those who seem capable of paying for good treatment. No questions were asked, supper was set before them, and the night passed over again in ease and comfort. Every hour, indeed, that went by without displaying any sign of illness was in itself a joy; and there was a stillness and a quietness about the old town of Chartres which seemed to quiet all fears of annoyance or interruption.

Charles of Montsoreau was early up, and was waiting for the appearance of Marie de Clairvaut, when the landlord of the inn appeared to inform him that a horse-litter, which he had ordered to be ready for his inspection, had been brought into the court-yard, and was waiting for him to see. At that moment, however, there was a flourish of trumpets in the street; and, looking forth from the window, the young Count saw a considerable band of mounted soldiers, drawn up, as if about to proceed on their march.

"My sister," he said, turning to the host, "has not yet risen, and she must see the litter, too, as it is for her convenience. But who are these gallant gentlemen before the house, and whither are they going?"

"Why, you might know them, sir, by their plumes and their scarfs," replied the host. "They are a body of the light horse of the guard of the Queen-mother. They are easily distinguished, I ween."

"Ay, but I am a rustic from the provinces," replied the young nobleman: "but they seem gallant-looking soldiers."

"The Captain was making manifold inquiries about you and the young lady who arrived last night," replied the landlord, "for he has come with orders to seek and bring back to Paris some young lady and gentleman that have made their escape lately with eight or nine attendants. But when I told him that you were going to Paris, not coming from it, and that you had only three servants with you, and the young lady was your sister, he said it was not the same, and is now going on. But I must go, lest he should ask for me."

"Well, well," answered the young Count with an air of indifference. "I will be down presently to see the litter; let it wait."

He watched, however, with some anxiety the departure of the body of light horse, for though he did not feel by any means sure that it was himself whom they sought, he did not feel at all secure till the last faint note of their trumpets was heard, as they issued forth from one of the further gates of Chartres. As soon as Marie de Clairvaut appeared, he purchased the litter without much hesitation, and determined to proceed with all speed towards Dourdan and Corbeil.

The host of the inn would have fain had them stay some time longer, for the young Count had paid so readily for the litter, that he judged some gold might be further extracted from his purse. He asked him, therefore, whether there was nothing in the good town of Chartres to excite his curiosity, and was beginning a long list of marvels; but Charles of Montsoreau cut him short, saying, as he looked up at the sign covered with fleurs-de-lis, "No, no, my good host. I have much business on my hands in which his Majesty is not a little concerned, and therefore I must lose no time."

The host nodded his head, looked wise, and suffered the Count and his party to depart without further opposition.

As it was not a part of their plan to follow the high road more than they were actually obliged to do, soon after leaving Chartres they took a path to the left, which they were informed would lead them by Gellardon to Bonnelle, through the fields and woods. Before they had gone a league, however, the noise of dogs and horses, and the shouts, as it seemed, of huntsmen, were heard at no great distance; and turning towards Gondrin the young Count asked, "What can they be hunting at this time of year?"

"The wolf, my Lord, the wolf," replied the man. "They hunt wolves at all times."

Scarcely had he spoken, when a loud yell of the dogs was heard; and nodding his head sagaciously, as if he had seen the whole proceeding with his mind's eye, Gondrin added, "They have killed him;" which was confirmed by a number of joyous morts on the horns of the huntsmen.

"Let us proceed as fast as possible," said Charles of Montsoreau; "we know not who those huntsmen may be:" and he was urging the driver of the litter to hurry on his horses rapidly, when the whole road before them was suddenly filled with a gay party of cavaliers, splendidly dressed and accoutred, and coming direct towards them. There was nothing now to be done but to pass on quietly if possible; and, taking no apparent notice, but bending his head and speaking into the litter, without even seeing of whom the other party was composed, Charles of Montsoreau was riding on, when a loud voice was heard exclaiming "Halt there! halt! A word with you if you please, young sir;" and, looking up, he saw the Duke of Epernon.

Without suffering the slightest surprise to appear upon his countenance, or the slightest apprehension, Charles of Montsoreau turned his head, demanding calmly, "Well, my Lord, what is your pleasure with me?"

"My pleasure is," replied the Duke, "that you instantly turn your horse's head and go back to Epernon with me."

"I am extremely sorry, my Lord," replied the Count, "that it is quite impossible for me to do what you propose, as I am upon urgent business for the Duke of Guise, and bear the King's passport and safe-conduct, which I presume your Lordship will not despise."

"You may bear the King's passport, sir," said the Duke, "but you certainly do not bear his authorisation to carry away from his power the young lady who I suppose is in that litter. As to the Duke of Guise, your authority from him is very much doubted also."

"That doubt is easily removed, my Lord," replied the Count, seeing clearly that he would be forced to yield, but fully resolved not to do so till he had tried every means to avoid it. "That doubt is easily removed, my Lord. Allow me to show you the authority given me by the Duke under his own hand, which I think even the Duke of Epernon must respect."

The Duke took the paper which he tendered him, and then saying, "I will show you how I respect it," he tore it into a thousand pieces, and cast it beneath his horse's feet, while a laugh ran through the men that attended him. "Turn your horse's head," he continued, "without more ado, or I will have your arms tied behind your back, and the horse led."

"My Lord," replied the young Count, "I must obey, for I have no means of resisting; but let me remind you, that the Duke of Epernon was always considered, even before what he is now, a gallant gentleman and a man of good feeling, who would not insult those who were too weak to oppose him, and who did their duty honourably as far as it was possible for them to do it."

"Your civility now, sir," replied the Duke, "like your rash folly a week or two ago, is too contemptible to make any change in the Duke of Epernon. That foolish party of light horse," he continued, speaking to one of his attendants, "must have suffered this malapert youth and his fair charge to have passed it. Turn the litter round there; take care that none of them escape."

"The boy has made off already," replied one of the men. "Shall I gallop after him, my Lord? He may tell the Duke of Guise."

"Let him!" answered Epernon. "Go not one of you; but bring the rest of them along hither."

Without giving any intimation of his intent, Charles of Montsoreau turned his horse suddenly back to the side of the litter, and drew the curtain back, saying to Marie de Clairvaut, who sat pale and anxious within it, "You hear what has happened; there is no power of resistance, for they are ten to one: but the boy has escaped, and will give the Duke notice of where you are. In the mean time it is one comfort, that now you are in the hands of one who is, at all events, a man of honour and a gentleman in feeling."

What he said was intended to give comfort and consolation to Marie de Clairvaut; but it reached the ear of the Duke of Epernon likewise. "I must suffer no farther conversation," he said in a gentler tone than he had before used. "You will understand, Monsieur de Logères, that I have authority for what I do; and that I arrest you out of no personal vengeance, but because the order has been already given to that effect."

"My Lord," replied the young Count, "I care very little for my own arrest, as I know that I can but be detained a short time: but I confess I am most anxious for the young lady placed under my especial charge by the Duke of Guise, as I have shown your Lordship by the paper you have torn. If she is to remain in your Lordship's charge, I shall be more satisfied; but if she is to be given up to Monsieur de Villequier, the consequences will indeed be painful to all. You are perhaps not aware, my Lord, that he sent her to a place where the plague was raging at the time, where six persons of her household died of it, and the rest fled, leaving her utterly alone."

The Duke seemed moved, and after remaining silent for a minute, he replied, "I did not know it; the man who would murder his wife, would make no great scruple of killing his cousin, I suppose. However, sir, set your mind at ease: though I cannot promise that she shall remain with the Duchess of Epernon, she shall not be given up to Villequier either by myself or by any body in whose hands I may place her. Is that assurance sufficient for you?"

"Perfectly, my Lord," replied Charles of Montsoreau. "The Duke of Epernon's promise is as good as the bond of other men."

"Well, follow me, then," replied the Duke, and, riding on alone, he left the young Count in the hands of his attendants.

CHAP. IX.

It was in one of the saloons of the old Cardinal de Bourbon, in the town of Soissons, that Henry Duke of Guise, princely in his habit, princely in his aspect, with his foot raised upon a footstool of crimson and gold, a high plumed Spanish hat upon his head, manifold parchments before him, and a pen in his hand, sat alone on a day in the month of April with his eyes fixed upon a door at the other end of the room, as if waiting for the entrance of some one.

The next moment the door was thrown wide open, and, preceded by two servants announcing him to the Duke, appeared a small and not very striking personage plainly habited in black velvet. The moment the Duke saw him, he rose, and for an instant uncovered his head, then covering himself again he advanced to meet him, and took him by the hand, saying "Monsieur de Bellievre, I am delighted to see you. The King could not have chosen any one more gratifying to myself to receive: in the first place, because I know that I shall hear nothing but truth from the lips of Monsieur de Bellievre; and, in the next place, because I am sure no one will bear more exactly to his Majesty any reply I may have to make to the message with which I understand you are charged."

"The confidence which your Highness expresses in me," replied Bellievre, as the Duke led him towards the table, and made him seat himself beside him, "does great honour to so humble an individual as myself. Nevertheless, I must deliver the King's message, my Lord, precisely as it was given to me; and should there be any thing in it disagreeable to your Highness, I trust that you will excuse the bearer, and consider the matter dispassionately."

"Proceed, proceed," replied the Duke; "as in duty bound I shall receive his Majesty's communication with all deference and humility."

"Well, then," replied Bellievre, "I am charged by his Majesty to assure your Highness that his

personal esteem and respect for you is very great; and that he has never, in any degree, given ear to the injurious reports which persons inimical to your Highness have been industrious in circulating to your disadvantage."

"Your pardon, Monsieur de Bellievre, for one moment," said the Duke, interrupting him. "To what injurious reports does his Majesty allude? I am ignorant that any one has dared to circulate injurious reports of me; and if such be the case, it is high time that I should proceed to the capital to confront and shame my accusers."

As this was not at all the point to which the King's envoy wished to bring the Duke, he looked not a little embarrassed what to reply. He answered, however, after a moment's pause, "It would, indeed, be requisite for you to do so, my Lord, if I did not bear you the King's most positive assurance that he gives no ear to such reports. But to proceed: his Majesty has bid me strongly express his full conviction of your attachment, fidelity, and affection, but has commanded me to add that, having heard it reported your intention is immediately to present yourself in Paris, he is unwillingly obliged, by state reasons of the utmost importance, to request that you would forbear the execution of that purpose."

It was not without some hesitation and apparent emotion that Bellievre spoke; but the Duke heard him with perfect calmness, though with a slight contraction of the brow.

"The report," he answered, "of my intention of visiting Paris is perfectly correct, Monsieur de Bellievre; nor can I, indeed, refrain from executing that purpose, with all due deference to his Majesty, for many reasons, amongst which those that you yourself give me of injurious rumours being rife in the capital regarding me, are not the least cogent. Thus, unless the King intends to signify by you, Monsieur de Bellievre, that he positively prohibits my coming into Paris--which, of course, he would not do--I see not how I can avoid doing simple justice to myself by returning to my own dwelling in the capital of this country."

"I grieve to say, your Highness," replied Bellievre, seeing that the worst must be told, "I grieve to say, that while the King has charged me to assure you of his regard and his confidence in you, he none the less instructed me to make the prohibition on his part absolute and distinct."

The Duke of Guise started up with his brow knit and his eyes flashing. "Is this the reward," he exclaimed, "of all the services I have rendered the state? Is this the recompense for having shed my blood so often in defence of France? to be dishonoured in the eyes of all the people, by being banished from the metropolis, to be excluded from the companionship of all my friends, to be cut off from transacting my own private affairs, to be talked of and pointed at as the exiled Duke of Guise, and to have the boys singing in the streets the woeful ditty of my sufferings and a King's ingratitude?" And as he spoke, the Duke took two or three rapid strides up and down the room.

"Indeed, indeed, your Highness," cried Bellievre, "you take it up too warmly. The King is far from ungrateful, but most thankful for your high services; but it is for the good of the state that you love, for the safety and security of the people of the capital who are in a tumultuous and highly excitable state, that he wishes you to refrain from coming----"

"That he sends me a message dishonouring to myself and to my House," replied the Duke. "That he marks me out from the rest of the nobles of the land, by a prohibition which I may venture to say is unjust and unmerited. I must take some days to think of this, Monsieur de Bellievre; nor can I in any way promise not to visit Paris. Were it but to protect, support, and guide my friends and relations, I ought to go; were it but on account of the church for which I am ready to shed my blood if it be necessary, persecuted, reviled, assailed as that holy church is; were it but for my attendants and supporters, who are attacked, abused, and ill-treated in the streets and public ways."

"As for the church, your Highness," replied Bellievre, "none is more sincerely attached to it than the King and the King's advisers. It will stand long, my Lord, depend upon it, without any further assistance than that which you have already so ably given it. Your relations, my Lord, and household," he said, "are not and cannot be ill-treated."

"How?" exclaimed the Duke. "Is not my dear sister Margaret even now, as it were, proscribed by the King and his court? Is not every thing done to drive her from Paris? Have not her servants been struck by those of Villequier in the open streets?"

"I know," replied Bellievre, "that a month or two ago Madame de Montpensier was subject to some little annoyance, but as soon as it came to the King's ears he had it instantly remedied, and only wished her to quit Paris for her own security."

"The House of Guise, sir, have always been secure in the capital of France," replied the Duke; "and I trust always will be."

"Nothing has occurred since I trust, my Lord," continued Bellievre. "The King is most anxious that you should have satisfaction in every thing, and will give you the strongest assurances that your family, your household, and your friends, shall be in every respect well treated and protected, as indeed he has always wished them to be."

The Duke threw himself down in his chair and rang the bell that stood upon the table violently.

"Ho! without there!" he exclaimed. "Bring in that page that arrived hither a night or two ago, when I was absent at Jamets."

The attendant who had appeared retired, and the Duke sat silent, gazing with a frown at the papers on the table. "May I ask your Highness," said Bellievre, not knowing what interpretation to put upon this conduct, "May I ask your Highness whether I am to conceive my audience at an end?"

"No, Monsieur de Bellievre, no," replied the Duke in a milder tone; "for *you* I have a high respect and esteem, and will listen to you upon this subject longer than I would to most men. I wish you to hear and to know how the friends of the Duke of Guise are treated, what protection and favour is shown to them at the court of France. Perhaps you will hear some things that are new to you--perhaps they may be new to the King too," he added, a slight sneer curling his haughty lip. "But be that as it may, Monsieur de Bellievre, I think I can show you good cause why the Duke of Guise should be no longer absent from Paris. Come hither, boy," he added, as the page Ignati entered the room, "Come hither, boy, and answer my questions. Thou art both witty and honest, but give me plain straightforward replies. Stand at my knee and answer, so that this gentleman may hear."

The boy advanced, and did as the Duke bade him, turning his face towards Bellievre, with his left hand to the Duke.

"You went to Paris," said Guise, "with my friend the young Count of Logères; did you not? Were you aware of the cause of his going?"

"He went, I understood your Highness," replied the boy, "to seek a young lady, a relation of your own, who had been carried to Paris by a body of the King's troops while on her way to join your Highness."

"Can you tell what was Monsieur de Logères' success?" said the Duke.

"I know he saw the King," replied the boy, "and heard that he had been promised a letter to all the governors and commanders in different places to aid him in seeking for the young Lady, and bringing her back to your Highness. I heard also that it was for this paper he waited from day to day in Paris, but that it never came."

"I beg your Highness's pardon," said Bellievre interrupting the boy, "but you will remark that this is all hearsay. He does not seem to speak at all from his own knowledge."

"That will come after," answered the Duke somewhat sharply. "Go on, Ignati. What do you know more?"

"What I have said," replied the boy, "is more than hearsay, my Lord, for while we staid in Paris the good Count bade us always be ready at a moment's notice to set out, for he could not tell when the letter from Monsieur de Villequier would arrive. It never came, however, and one night the Count having, as I understood, gained information of where Mademoiselle de Clairvaut was, set out with his man Gondrin and myself to seek her. We found that she had been brought by a body of the King's troops to a château or a palace, for it looked more like a palace than a château, called Morvillette, I believe near Chateauneuf, where the plague was then raging, when the King's soldiers left her. By the time we arrived the plague had reached the château, six or seven people were dead, and all the rest had fled, leaving the young lady with nobody in the palace, and none but one old groom in the stables."

The Duke's eye fixed sternly upon the countenance of Bellievre, and he muttered between his teeth, "This is the doing, Monsieur de Bellievre, of my excellent good friend, the King of France. Go on, boy; go on! Proceed. What happened next?"

"The lady was most joyous of her deliverance," continued the boy, "and eager to come to your Highness; and we set out the next morning before day-break, and reached Chartres, where the Count bought a litter for her greater convenience. At a short distance from Chartres, however, we were met by the Duke of Epernon and his train wolf-hunting, and the Duke immediately stopped us, and insisted upon the Count going back with him to Epernon. The Count produced the King's passports, but the Duke said that there were doubts of his being authorised by you."

"Did he not show him my own letter?" exclaimed the Duke. "Did he not show him the authority I gave him under my own hand?"

"He did, my Lord; he did," replied the boy; "but the Duke of Epernon said he would show in what respect he held your Highness's letter, and tearing it in several pieces he threw it down under his horse's feet."

Bellievre continued to look down upon the ground with a brow which certainly displayed but little satisfaction. The Duke of Guise, however, though he had been frowning the moment before, now only smiled as the boy related the incident of the letter; the smile was somewhat contemptuous, indeed; but he said merely, "Go on, boy. What happened next?"

"Nay, my Lord," replied the boy, "what happened to them I know not, for seeing that the Duke

held them prisoners, and was taking them back to Epernon, I made my escape as fast as I well could, and came hither to tell you into whose hands the young lady and Monsieur de Logères had fallen."

"You did quite right, boy," said the Duke; "and now you may retire. You hear, Monsieur de Bellievre," he continued, "with what kindness, protection, support, and generosity the King treats the friends of the Duke of Guise! First he casts my poor niece's child into the hands of Villequier, something worse than those of the hangman of Paris, and then between them they send her into the midst of the pestilence; then comes Monsieur d'Epernon to confirm all, arrests my friend bearing the King's own passports and safeguard, seizes upon my own relation and ward, and carries them both I know not whither."

"Perhaps your Highness," said Bellievre, "the Duke of Epernon might have motives that we do not know. At all events the King----"

"Fie, Monsieur de Bellievre, fie!" exclaimed the Duke vehemently. "I will tell you what! It is time the Duke of Guise were in Paris, if but to deliver the King from such Dukes of Epernon who abuse his authority, disgrace his name, absorb his favours, ruin the state, overthrow the church, and dare do acts that make men blush for shame. France will no longer suffer him, sir; France will no longer suffer him! If I free not the King from him and such as he is, the people will rise up and commit some foul attempt upon the royal authority. What," he continued, with fierce scorn, "What, though he be Baron of Caumont, Duke of Epernon, raised out of his place to sit near the princes of the blood, Governor of Metz and Normandy, of the Boulonnais, and Aunis, of Touraine, Saintonge, and Angoumois, Colonel-general of Infantry, and Governor of Anjou, a Knight of the order of the Holy Ghost! he shall find this simple steel sword of Henry of Guise sufficiently sharp to cut his parchments into pieces, and send him back a beggar to the class he sprung from."

The Duke spoke so rapidly, that to interrupt him was impossible; and so angrily, that Bellievre, overawed, remained silent for a moment or two after he had done, while the Prince bent his eyes down upon the table, and played with the golden tassels of his sword-knot, as if half ashamed of the vehemence he had displayed.

"I did not come here, your Highness," he said, "either as the envoy or the advocate of the Duke of Epernon. You must well know that there is no great love between us; and I doubt not, when your Highness comes to call him to account for his deeds, that justice will be found entirely on your side. But I came on the part of the King; and I beseech you to consider, my good Lord, what may be the consequences of pressing even any severe charges against the Duke of Epernon at this moment, when his Majesty is contending with the heretics on the one side, and is somewhat troubled by an unruly people on the other."

"Is he indeed contending with any body or any thing, Bellievre?" demanded the Duke. "Is he indeed contending against the Bearnois? Is he contending against the indolence of his own nature, or rather against the indolence into which corrupt favourites have cast him? Is he contending against the iniquities of Villequier, or the exactions of Epernon? Is he contending against any thing less contemptible than a spaniel puppy or an unteachable parrot? My love and attachment to the King and his crown, Bellievre, are greater than yours; and, as my final reply, I beg you humbly to inform his Majesty on my part, that if I do not promptly and entirely obey him in this matter of not coming to Paris, it is solely because I am compelled to do as I do, for the good of the church, for the safety of the state, for the security of my own relations and friends, and even for the benefit of his Majesty himself. This is my final reply."

"Yet one word, my Lord," replied Bellievre. "At all events, if your determination to visit the capital be taken, will you not at least, at my earnest prayer, delay your journey till I myself can return to Paris, and obtaining more ample explanations of the King's purposes, come back to you and confer with you farther on the subject."

"I see not, Monsieur de Bellievre," said the Duke of Guise, "what good could be obtained by such delay. I do not at all mean to say that you would take advantage of my confidence to prepare any evil measures against me; but others might do so: and besides, my honour calls me not to leave my friends in peril for a moment, even though I called upon my head the enmity of a whole host in stepping forward to rescue them."

"I pledge you my honour, my Lord," replied Bellievre, "that if you will consent to delay, no measures shall be taken against you; and I will do the very best I can to induce the King to make any atonement in his power to your friends. As to this young Count of Logères, I never heard of him before to-day, and know not what has been done with him at all; and in regard to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, she is doubtless in the hands of Villequier, who, I understand, claims the guardianship."

"To which he has less right," replied the Duke angrily, "than that footstool; and if he contends with me, I will spurn him as I do it;" and he suited the gesture to the word. "But still I see not," continued the Duke, "what is to be gained by this delay to either party."

"This, my good Lord," replied Bellievre. "I am well aware that his Majesty the King has sent me here without sufficient powers to make you just and definite proposals. This I believe to have been entirely from the haste in which I came away, there being no time for thought. But if you

permit me to return with assurance that you will wait but a few days, I feel convinced that I shall come back to you with offers so abundant, so satisfactory, and so well secured, that your Lordship will change your resolution."

The Duke mused for a moment or two. "Well, Monsieur de Bellievre," he said at length, "though I entertain no such hopes as you do, I must yield something to my loyalty, and to my real desire of obeying the King; although, perhaps, my duty to my country and to the church might well lead me to more prompt proceedings. I will, therefore, delay my journey for a day or two; but you must use all speed, and I must have no trifling. You know all my just grievances: those must be remedied, the church must be secured; and for the quiet and the satisfaction of the people who abhor and detest him, as well as for the relief of the nobles who have long been shut out from all favour by that unworthy minion, this John of Nogaret, this Duke of Epernon, must be banished from the court and councils of the King, and stripped of the places and dignities which he has won from the weak condescension of the Monarch. You understand me, Monsieur de Bellievre," he said in a sterner tone, seeing that Bellievre looked somewhat dismayed at the extent of his demands. "Undertake not the mission if you think that you cannot succeed in it; but let me on my way without more opposition."

"My Lord, I will do my best to succeed," replied Bellievre; "and trust that I shall do so. How many days will your Highness give me?"

"Nay, nay," replied the Duke; "that I cannot tell, Monsieur de Bellievre. Suffice it, I will delay as long as my honour permits me; and you on your part lose not an hour in making the necessary arrangements, and bringing the King's reply."

As he spoke the Duke rose to terminate the conference; and then added, "I fear, Monsieur de Bellievre, as I am expecting every moment my brother, the Cardinal de Guise, and his Eminence of Bourbon, to confer with me upon matters of importance, I cannot do the honours of the house to you as I could wish; but Pericard, my secretary and friend, will attend upon you, and insure that you have every sort of refreshment. I will send for him this moment." And so doing, he placed Bellievre in the hands of his secretary, and turned once more to other business.

The King's envoy sped back to Paris, scarcely giving himself time to take necessary refreshment; but on his arrival in the capital he first found a difficulty even in seeing the Monarch; and when he did see him, found him once more plunged in that state of luxurious and effeminate indolence from which he was only roused by occasional fits of excitement, which sometimes enabled him to resume the monarch and the man, but more frequently carried him into the wildest and most frantic excesses of debauchery.

Henry would scarcely listen to the business of Bellievre even when he granted him an audience on the following morning. He asked many a question about his cousin of Guise, about his health, about his appearance, about his dress itself; whether his shoes were pointed or square, and how far the haut-de-chausses came down above his knees. Bellievre was impatient, and pressed the King with some fire; but Henry only laughed, and tickled the ears of a monkey that sat upon the arm of his chair with a parrot's feather. The animal mouthed and chattered at the King, and strove to snatch the feather out of his hands; and Henry, stroking it down the head, called it "Mon Duc de Guise."

Bellievre bowed low, and moved towards the door. "Come back to-morrow, Bellievre; come back to-morrow," said the King; "Villequier will be here then. You see at present how importantly I am occupied with my fair cousin of Guise here;" and he pulled the monkey's whiskers as he spoke. "Villequier has told me all about it," he added. "He says the Duke will not come, and so says my mother; and if they both say the same thing who never agreed upon any point before, it must be true, Bellievre, you know."

"I trust it may, Sire," replied Bellievre dryly, and quitted the room with anger and indignation at his heart. Before he had crossed the anteroom, he heard a loud laugh ringing like that of a fool from the lips of the Monarch; and although it was doubtless occasioned by some new gambol of the monkey, it did not serve to diminish the bitter feelings which were in the diplomatist's bosom.

CHAP. X.

In a small, dark, oaken cabinet with one window high up and barred, a lamp hanging from the ceiling, a table with books and a musical instrument, several chairs, and a silver bell, Charles of Montsoreau was seated several days after the period at which we last left him. A bedroom well furnished in every respect was beyond; the least sound of the silver bell produced immediate

attendance; nothing was refused him that he demanded; nothing was wanting to his comfort except liberty and the sound of some other human being's voice. Yet, strange to say, although he knew that he was in the city of Paris, he knew nothing more of the position of the building in which he was placed. He had been brought into the capital at night, had been conducted through a number of narrow and tortuous streets, and had at length been led through a deep archway and several large courts, to the place in which he was now confined.

It may seem perhaps that such a state of imprisonment did not offer much to complain of; and yet it had bent his spirit and bowed down his heart. The want of all knowledge of what was passing around him, the absence of every one that he loved, the loss of liberty, the perfect silence, joined with anxiety for one who was dearer to him than himself, wore him day by day, and took from him the power of enjoying any of those things which were provided for his convenience or amusement.

The servant who attended upon him never opened his lips, he obeyed any orders that were given to him, he brought any thing that was demanded; but he replied to no questions, he made no observations, he afforded no information even by a look. Every bolt and bar that was on the outside of the door was invariably drawn behind him, and the high window in either room could only be so far reached even by standing on the table or one of the chairs, as to enable the young nobleman to open or shut it at pleasure, so to admit the free air from without.

Such had been the condition of Charles of Montsoreau, as we have said, for many days; but he had not yet become reconciled in any degree to his fate, though he strove, as far as possible, to while away the moments in any way that was permitted, either by books or music. But it was with impatience and disgust that he did so, and the lute was taken up and laid down, the book read and cast away, without remaining in his hands for the space of five minutes.

The sun shone bright through the high window, and traced a moving spot of golden light upon the dark oak of the opposite wainscot; the air of spring came sweet and pleasantly through, and gave him back the thoughts and dreams of liberty; a wild plant rooted in the stonework of the building without, cast its light feathery shadow on the wall where the sun shone, and the hum and roar of distant multitudes, pursuing their busy course in the thronged thoroughfares of the city, brought him his only tidings from the hurried and struggling scene of human life.

He took a pleasure in watching the leaves of the little plant as, waved about by the wind, they played against the bars of the window, and he was thus occupied on the day we have mentioned, when suddenly something crossed the light for a moment, as if some small bird had flown by; but at the same instant a roll of paper fell at his feet, and taking it up, he recognised the well-known writing of the Duke of Guise.

"You have suffered for my sake," the paper said, "and I hastened to deliver you. The day of the Epernons is over; your place of imprisonment is known. Be not dispirited, therefore, for relief is at hand."

It cannot be told how great was the relief which this note itself brought to the mind of the young Count, not alone by the promise that it held out, but by the very feeling that it gave him of not being utterly forgotten, of being not entirely alone and desolate. He read it over two or three times, and then hearing one of the bolts of the door undrawn, he concealed it hastily lest the attendant should see it.

Another bolt was immediately afterwards pulled back, and then the door was unlocked, though far more slowly than usual. It seemed to the young Count that an unaccustomed hand was busy with the fastenings, and a faint hope of speedy deliverance shot across his mind.

The next instant, however, the door was opened, and though it certainly was not the usual attendant who appeared, no face presented itself that was known to Charles of Montsoreau. The figure was that of a woman, tall, stately, and dressed in garments of deep black, fitting tightly round the shoulders and the waist, and flowing away in ample folds below. Her hair was entirely covered by black silk and lace, but her face was seen, and that face was one which instantly drew all attention to itself.

It was not indeed the beauty which attracted, though there were great remains of beauty too, but it was the face not only of an old woman, but of one who had been somewhat a spendthrift of youth's charms. There was, however, a keen fire in the eyes, a strong determination on the brow, an expansion of the nostril, which gave the idea of quick and eager feelings, and a degree of sternness about the whole line of the features, which would have made the whole countenance commanding, but harsh and severe, had it not been for a light and playful smile that gleamed across the whole, like some of the bright and sudden rays of light that from to time we see run across the bosom of deep still shady waters.

There was a degree of mockery in that smile, too; and yet it spoke affections and feelings which as strangely blended with the general character of that woman's life, as the smile itself did with the general expression of her countenance. The hands were beautiful and delicately small, and the figure good, with but few signs of age about it.

The young Count gazed upon her with some surprise as she entered, but instantly rose from

the seat in which he had been sitting while reading the Duke of Guise's note; and the lady, with a graceful inclination of the head, closed the door, advanced and seated herself, examining the young Count from head to foot with a look of calm consideration, which he very well understood implied the habitual exercise of authority and power.

After thus gazing at him for a moment or two, she said, "Monsieur le Comte de Logères, do you know me?"

"If you mean, madam," he replied, "to ask me if I recognise your person, I believe I do; but if you would ask absolutely whether I know you, I must say, no."

One of those light smiles passed quick across her countenance, and she said in a low voice, as if speaking to herself, "Who ever did know me?" She then added, "Who then do you suppose I am?"

"I conclude, madam," replied the young Count, "that I stand in the presence of her Majesty the Queen-mother."

"Such is the case," replied the Queen, "and I have come to visit you, Monsieur de Logères, with views and purposes which, were I to tell them to any person at my son's court, would hardly be believed."

The Queen paused, as if waiting for an answer; and the young Count replied, "I trust, madam, that if I am detained here by the directions, and in the power of your Majesty, that you have come to give me liberty, which would, I suppose," he added with somewhat of a smile, "be rather marvellous to the courtiers of the King."

Catharine de Medici smiled also, but at the same time shook her head. "I fear I must not give you liberty," she said, "for I have promised not: but I have come with no bad intent towards you. I knew your mother, Monsieur de Logères, and a virtuous and beautiful woman she was. God help us! it shows that I am growing old, my praising any woman for her virtue. However, she was what I have said, and as unlike myself as possible. Perhaps that was the reason that I liked her, for we like not things that are too near ourselves. However, I have come hither to see her son, and to do him a pleasure. You play upon the lute?" she continued. "Come, 'tis a long time since I have heard the lute well played. Take up the instrument, and add your voice to it."

"Alas, madam," replied the young Count, "I am but in an ill mood for music. If I sang you a melancholy lay it would find such stirring harmonies in my own heart, that I fear I should drown the song in tears; and if I sang you a gay one, it would be all discord. I would much rather open that door which you have left unlocked behind you, and go out."

The Queen did not stir in the slightest degree, but gazed upon him attentively with a look of compassion, answering, "Alas! poor bird, you would find that your cage has a double door. But come, do as I bid you; sit down there, take up the lute and sing. Let your song be neither gay nor sad! Let it be a song of love. I doubt not that such a youth as you are, will easily find a love ditty in your heart, though the present inspiration be no better than an old woman. Come, Monsieur de Logères, come: sit down and sing. I am a judge of music, I can tell you."

With a faint smile the Count did as she bade him; and taking up the lute, he ran his fingers over the chords, thought for a moment or two, and recollecting nothing better suited to the moment, he sang an Italian song of love, in which sometime before he had ventured to shadow forth to Marie de Clairvaut, when she was at Montsoreau, the first feelings of affection that were growing up in his heart. The Queen sat by in the mean time, listening attentively, with her head a little bent forward, and her hand marking the cadences on her knee.

"Beautifully sung, Monsieur de Logères," she said at length when he ended. "Beautifully sung, and as well accompanied. You do not know how much pleasure you have given.--Now, let us talk of other things. Are you sincere, man?"

"I trust so, madam," replied the Count. "I believe I have never borne any other character."

"Who taught you to play so well on the lute?" demanded the Queen abruptly.

"I have had no great instruction, madam," answered the Count somewhat surprised. "I taught myself a little in my boyhood. But afterwards my preceptor, the Abbé de Boisguerin, was my chief instructor. He had learned well in Italy."

"Did he teach you sincerity too?" demanded the Queen with a keen look; "and did he learn that in Italy?"

The Count was not a little surprised to find Catherine's questions touch so immediately upon the late discoveries he had made of the character of the Abbé de Boisguerin, and he replied with some bitterness, "He could but teach me, madam, that which he possessed himself. I trust that to my nature and my blood I owe whatever sincerity may be in me. I learned it from none but from God and my own heart."

"Then you know him," said the Queen, reaching the point at once; "that is sufficient at present

on that subject. I know him too. He came to the court of France several years ago, with letters from my fair cousin the Cardinal; but he brought with him nothing that I wanted at that time. He had a wily head, a handsome person, manifold accomplishments, great learning, and services for the highest bidder. We had too many such things at the court already, so I thought that the sooner he was out of it the better, and looked cold upon him till he went. He understood the matter well, and did not return till he brought something in his hand to barter for favour. However, Monsieur de Logères, to turn to other matters; I do believe you may be sincere after all. I shall discover in a minute, however. Will you answer me a question or two concerning the Duke of Guise?"

"It depends entirely upon what they are, madam," replied the Count at once.

"Then you will not answer me every question, even if it were to gain your liberty."

"Certainly not, madam," replied the Count.

"Then the Duke has been speaking ill of me," said Catherine at once, "otherwise you would not be so fearful."

"Not so, indeed," replied the Count, eagerly. "The Duke never, in my presence, uttered a word against your Majesty."

"Then will you tell me, as a man of honour," demanded the Queen, "exactly, word for word what you have ever heard the Duke say of me?"

Charles of Montsoreau paused and thought for a moment, and then answered, "I may promise you to do so in safety, madam, for I never heard the Duke speak of you but twice, and then it was in high praise."

"Indeed!" she replied. "But still I believe you, for Villequier has been assuring me of the contrary, and, of course, what he says must be false. He cannot help himself, poor man. Now, tell me what the Duke said, Monsieur de Logères. Perhaps I may be able to repay you some time."

"I seek for no bribe, your Majesty," replied the Count smiling; "and, indeed, the honour and the pleasure of this visit----"

"Nay, nay! You a courtier, young gentleman!" exclaimed the Queen, shaking her finger at him. "Another such word as that, and you will make me doubt the whole tale."

"The speech would not have been so courtier-like, madam, if it had been ended," replied the Count. "I was going to have said, that the honour and pleasure of this visit, after not having heard for many days, many weeks I believe, the sound of a human voice, or seen any other face but that of one attendant, is full repayment for the little that I have to tell. However, madam, to gratify you with regard to the Duke, the first time that I ever heard him mention you was in the city of Rheims, where a number of persons were collected together, and many violent opinions were expressed, with which I will not offend your ears; your past life was spoken of by some of the gentlemen present----"

"Pass over that, pass over that! I understand!" replied the Queen with a sarcastic smile; "I understand. But those things are not worth speaking of. What of the present, Monsieur de Logères? What of the present?"

"Why, some one expressed an opinion, madam," the Count continued, "that in order to retain a great share of power, you did every thing you could to keep his Majesty in the lethargic and indolent state in which I grieve to say he appears to the great mass of his subjects."

"What said the Duke?" demanded the Queen. "What said the Duke? surely he knows me better."

"Why, madam," replied the Count, "his eye brightened and his colour rose, and he replied indignantly that it could not be so. 'Oh no,' he said, 'happy had it been for France if, instead of divided power, the Queen-mother had possessed the whole power. It is by petty minds mingling their leven with their great designs that ruin has come upon the land. She has had to deal with great men, great events, and great difficulties, and she was equal to deal with, if not to bow them all down before her, had she but been permitted to deal with them unshackled.'"[4]

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Queen; "did he say so?"

"He did, madam, upon my honour," replied the Count.

"I know not whether he was right or wrong," rejoined the Queen thoughtfully; "for though perhaps, Monsieur de Logères, I possessed in some things the powers of a man--say, if you will, greater powers than most men--yet, alas! in others, I had all the weaknesses of a woman--perhaps I should say, to balance other qualities, more weaknesses than most women. But he must have said more. The answer was not pertinent to the remark, and Henry of Guise is not a man either in speech or action ever to forget his object."

"Nor did he in this instance," replied the Count; "but he said that, wearied out with seeing your best and greatest schemes frustrated by the weakness of others, you now contented yourself with warding off evils as far as possible from your son and from the state; that it was evident that such was your policy; and that, like Miron, the King's physician, unable from external circumstances to effect a cure, you treated the diseases of the times with a course of palliatives; that, as the greatest of all evils, you knew and saw the apathy of his Majesty, and did all that you could to rouse him, but that the poisonous counsels of Villequier, the soft indolence of his own nature, and the enfeebling society of Epernon and others, resisted all that you could do, and thwarted you here likewise."

"He spoke wisely, and he spoke truly," replied the Queen; "and I will tell you, Monsieur de Logères, though Henry of Guise and I can never love each other much, yet I felt sure that he knew me too well to say all those things of me that have been reported by his enemies. I am satisfied with what I have heard, Count, and shall ask no further questions. But you have given me pleasure, and I will do my best to serve you. Once more, let us speak of other things. Have you all that you desire and want here?"

"No, madam," replied the young Count. "I want many things--liberty, the familiar voices of my friends, the sight of those I love. Every thing that the body wants I have; and you or some of your attendants have supplied me with books and music; but it is in such a situation as this, your Majesty, that one learns that the heart requires food as well as the body or the mind."

"The heart!" replied Catharine de Medici thoughtfully. "I once knew what the heart was, and I have not quite forgotten it yet. Did you mark my words after you had sung, Monsieur de Logères?"

"You were pleased to praise my poor singing much more than it deserved, madam," replied the young Count.

"Something more than that, my good youth," replied the Queen. "I told you that it had given more pleasure than you knew of. I might have added, that it gave pleasure to more than you knew of, for there was another ear could hear it besides mine."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Count gazing eagerly in the Queen's face; "and pray who might that be?"

"One that loves you," replied Catharine de Medici. "One that loves you very well, Monsieur de Logères." And rising from her chair she put her hand to her brow, as if in deep thought. "Well," she said at length; "something must be risked, and I will risk something for that purpose. The time is not far distant, Monsieur de Logères--I see it clearly--when by some means you will be set at liberty; but, notwithstanding that, it may be long before you find such a thing even as an hour's happiness. You are a frank and generous man, I believe; you will not take advantage of an act of kindness to behave ungenerously. I go away from you for a moment or two, and leave that door open behind me, trusting to your honour."

She waited for no reply, but quitted the room; and Charles of Montsoreau stood gazing upon the door, doubtful of what was her meaning, and how he was to act. Some of her words might be interpreted as a hint to escape; but others had directly a contrary tendency, and a moment after he heard her unlock and pass another door, and close but not lock it behind her.

CHAP. XI.

"What is her meaning?" demanded Charles of Montsoreau, as he gazed earnestly upon the door; and as he thus thought his heart beat vehemently, for there was a hope in it which he would not suffer his reason to rest upon for a moment, so improbable did it seem, and so fearful would be disappointment. "What is her meaning?" And he still asked himself the question, as one minute flew by after another, and to his impatience it seemed long ere she returned.

But a few minutes elapsed, however, in reality, ere there were steps heard coming back, and in another minute Catharine de Medici again appeared, saying, "For one hour, remember! For one hour only!"

There was somebody behind her, and the brightest hope that Charles of Montsoreau had dared to entertain was fully realised.

The Queen had drawn Marie de Clairvaut forward; and passing out again, she closed the door,

leaving her alone with her lover. If his heart had wanted any confirmation of the deep, earnest, overpowering affection which she entertained towards him, it might have been found in the manner in which--apparently without the power even to move forward, trembling, gasping for breath--she stood before him on so suddenly seeing him again, without having been forewarned, after long and painful and anxious absence. As he had himself acknowledged, he was ignorant in the heart of woman; but love had been a mighty instructor, and he now needed no explanation of the agitation that he beheld.

Starting instantly forward, he threw his arms around her; and it was then, held to his bosom, pressed to his heart, that all Marie de Clairvaut's love and tenderness burst forth. Gentle, timid, modest in her own nature as she was, love and joy triumphed over all. The agony of mind she had been made to suffer, was greater than even he could fancy, and the relief of that moment swept away all other thoughts: the tears, the happy but agitated tears, flowed rapidly from her eyes; but her lips sought his cheek from time to time, her arms clasped tenderly round him, and as soon as she could speak, she said, "Oh Charles, Charles, do I see you again? Am I, am I held in your arms once more; the only one that I have ever loved in life, my saviour, my protector, my defender. For days, for weeks, I have not known whether you were living or dead. They had the cruelty, they had the barbarity not even to let me know whether you had or had not escaped the plague. They have kept me in utter ignorance of where you were, of all and of every thing concerning you." And again she kissed his cheek, though even while she did so, under the overpowering emotions of her heart, the blush of shame came up into her own: and then she hid her eyes upon his bosom, and wept once more in agitation but in happiness.

"As they have acted to you, dearest Marie," he replied, "as they have acted to you, so they have acted to me. The day they separated me from you at Epernon, was the last day that I have spoken with any living creature up to this morning. No answers have been returned to my questions; not a word of intelligence could I obtain concerning your fate; and oh, dear, dear Marie, you would feel, you would know how terrible has been that state to me, if you could tell how ardently, how deeply, how passionately I love you." And his lips met hers, and sealed the assurance there.

"I know it, I know it all, Charles," replied Marie. "I know it by what I have felt; I know it by what I feel myself, for I believe, I do believe, from my very heart, that if it be possible for two people to feel exactly alike, we so feel."

"But tell me, dear Marie, tell me," exclaimed her lover, "tell me where you have been. Have they treated you kindly? Does the Duke of Guise know where you are?"

"Alas, no, Charles!" replied Marie de Clairvaut; "he does not, I grieve to say. Well treated indeed I may say that I have been, for all that could contribute to my mere comfort has been done for me. Nothing that I could desire or wish for, Charles, has been ungiven, and I have ever had the society of the good sisters in the neighbouring convent. But the society that I love has of course been denied me; and no news, no tidings of any kind have reached me. I have lived in short with numbers of people surrounding me, as if I were not in the world at all, and the moment that I asked a question, a deep silence fell upon every one, and I could obtain no reply."

"This is strange indeed," said Charles, "very strange. However, we must be grateful that our treatment has been kind indeed in some respects."

"Oh, and most grateful," replied Marie de Clairvaut, "for these bright moments of happiness. Do you not think, Charles, do you not think, that perhaps the Queen may kindly grant us such interviews again?"

Who is there that does not know how lovers while away the time? Who is there that has not known how short is a lover's hour? But with Charles of Montsoreau and Marie de Clairvaut that hour seemed shorter than it otherwise would have done; for it was not alone the endearing caress, the words, the acknowledgments, the hopes of love, but they had a thousand things in the past to tell each other; they had cares and fears, and plans and purposes for the future, to communicate.

Even had not all shyness, all timidity been done away before, that was not a moment in which Marie de Clairvaut could have affected aught towards her lover; so that what between tidings of the past and thoughts of the future, and the dear dalliance of that spendthrift of invaluable moments, love, an envious clock in some church-tower hard by, had marked the arrival of the last quarter of an hour they were to remain together, ere one tenth part of what they had to think of or to say was either thought or said. The sound startled them, and it became a choice whether they should give up the brief remaining space to serious thoughts of the future, or whether they should yield it all to love. Who is it with such a choice before him that ever hesitated long?

The space allotted for their interview had drawn near its close, and the very scantiness of the period that remained was causing them to spend it in regrets that it was not longer, when suddenly the general sounds which came from the streets became louder and more loud, as if some door or gate had been opened which admitted the noise more distinctly. Both Marie de Clairvaut and her lover listened, and almost at the same instant loud cries were heard of "The Duke of Guise! The Duke of Guise! Long live the Duke of Guise! Long live the great pillar of the Catholic church! Long live the House of Lorraine!" And this was followed by the noise and

trampling of horses, as if entering into a court below.

Marie and her lover gazed in each other's faces, but she it was that first spoke the joyful hopes that were in the heart of both.

"He has come to deliver us!" she cried. "Oh Charles, he has come to deliver us! Hear how gladly the people shout his well-loved name! Surely they will not deceive him, and tell him we are not here."

"Oh no, dear Marie," replied her lover; "he has certain information, depend upon it, and will not be easily deceived. He has already discovered my abode, dear Marie; and this letter was thrown through the window this morning, though I myself know not where we are--that is to say, I am well aware that we are now in Paris, but I know not in what part of the city."

"Oh, that I discovered from one of the nuns," replied Marie. "We are at the house of the Black Penitents, in the Rue St. Denis. I remember the outside of it well; a large dark building with only two windows to the street. Do you not remember it? You must have seen it in passing."

"I am not so well acquainted with the city as you are, dear Marie," replied Charles of Montsoreau; "but, depend upon it, where they have confined me is not in the house of the Black Penitents. It would be a violation of the rules of the order which could not be."

"It communicates with their dwelling," replied Marie de Clairvaut; "of that at least I am certain; for the Queen, when she brought me hither, took me not into the open air. She led me indeed through numerous passages, one of which, some ten or twelve yards in length, was nearly dark, for it had no windows, and was only lighted by the door left open behind us. I was then placed in a little room while the Queen went on, and a short time after I heard a voice, that made my heart beat strangely, begin to sing a song that you once sung at Montsoreau; and when I was thinking of you Charles, and all that you had done for me--how you had first saved me from the reiters, and then rescued me from the deep stream, and had then come to seek me and deliver me in the midst of death and pestilence--I was thinking of all these things, when Catherine came back, and without telling me what was her intention, led me hither."

"Hark!" cried Charles of Montsoreau. "They shout again. I wonder that we have heard no farther tidings."

And they both sat and listened for some minutes, but no indication of any farther event took place, and they gradually resumed their conversation, beginning in a low tone, as if afraid of losing a sound from without. Marie de Clairvaut had already told her lover how she had remained at Epernon for a day or two under the protection of the wife of the Duke, and had been thence brought by her to Paris and placed in the convent at a late hour of the evening; but as the time wore away, and their hopes of liberation did not seem about to be realized, she recurred to the subject of her arrival, saying, "There is one thing which makes me almost fear they will deceive him, Charles. I forgot to tell you, that as we paused before this building on the night that I was brought hither, while the gates were being opened by the portress, a horseman rode up to the side of the carriage and gazed in. There were torches on the other side held by the servants round the gate, and though I could not see that horseman as well as he could see me, yet I feel almost sure that it was the face of the Abbé de Boisguerin I beheld."

"I know he was to return to Paris," said Charles of Montsoreau, "after accompanying my brother some part of the way back to the château. But fear not him, dear Marie; he has no power or influence here."

"Oh, but I fear far more wile and intrigue," cried Marie de Clairvaut, "than I do power and influence, Charles. Power is like a lion, bold and open; but when once satisfied, injures little; but art is like a serpent that stings us, without cause, when we least expect it. But hark!" she continued again. "They are once more shouting loudly."

Charles of Montsoreau listened also, and the cries, repeated again and again, of "Long live the Duke of Guise! Long live the House of Lorraine! Long live the good Queen Catherine![5] Life to the Queen! Life to the Queen!" were heard mingled with thundering huzzas and acclamations. The heart of the young Count sank, for he judged that the Duke had gone forth again amongst the people, and had either forgotten his fate altogether in more important affairs, or had been deceived by false information regarding himself and Mademoiselle de Clairvaut.

The cries, which were at first loud and distinct, gradually sunk, till first the words could no longer be distinguished; then the acclamations became more and more faint, till the whole died away into a distant murmur, rising and falling like the sound of the sea beating upon a stormy shore. The young Count gazed in the countenance of Marie de Clairvaut, and saw therein written even more despairing feelings than were in his own heart.

"Fear not, dear Marie," he said pressing her to his bosom. "Fear not; the Duke must know that I am here by this letter: nor is he one to be easily deceived. Depend upon it he will find means to deliver us ere long."

Marie de Clairvaut shook her head with a deep sigh and with her eyes filled with tears. But she had not time to reply, for steps were heard in the passage, and the moment after the door of

the room was opened.

It was no longer, however, the figure of Catherine de Medici that presented itself, but the homely person and somewhat unmeaning face of a good lady, dressed in the habit of a prioress. Behind her, again, was a lay-sister, and beside them both the attendant who was accustomed to wait upon the young Count. The good lady who first appeared looked round the scene that the opening door disclosed to her with evident marks of curiosity and surprise; and, indeed, the whole expression of her countenance left little doubt that she had never been in that place before.

After giving up a minute to her curiosity, however, she turned to Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, saying, "I have been sent by the Queen, madam, to conduct you back to your apartments."

"Let me first ask one question," replied Marie de Clairvaut. "Has not the Duke of Guise been here?"

The nun answered not a word.

"We need no assurance of it, dear Marie," said Charles of Montsoreau, hoping to drive the Prioress to some answer. "We know that he has, and must have been deceived in regard to your state and mine."

The Prioress was still silent; and Marie de Clairvaut, after waiting for a moment, added, "If he have been deceived, Charles, woe to those who have deceived him. He is not a man to pass over lightly such conduct as has been shown to me already."

"Madam," said the Prioress, "I have been sent by the Queen to show you to your apartments."

It was vain to resist or to linger. Marie de Clairvaut gave her hand to her lover, and they gazed in each other's faces for a moment with a long and anxious glance, not knowing when they might meet again. Charles of Montsoreau could not resist; and notwithstanding the presence of nun, prioress, and attendant, he drew the fair creature whose hand he held in his gently to his bosom, and pressed a parting kiss upon her lips.

Marie turned away with her eyes full of tears, and leaving her hand in his till the last moment, she slowly approached the door. She turned for one other look ere she departed, and then, dashing the tears from her eyes, passed rapidly out. The door closed behind her, and Charles of Montsoreau alone, and almost without hope, buried his face in his hands, and gave himself up to think over the sweet moments of the past.

CHAP. XII.

It was on the morning of Monday, the 9th of May, 1588, at about half past eleven o'clock, that a party, consisting of sixteen horsemen, of whom eight were gentlemen and the rest grooms, appeared at the gates of Paris. But though each of those eight persons who led the cavalcade were strong and powerful men, in the prime of life, highly educated, and generally distinguished in appearance, yet there was one on whom all eyes rested wherever he passed, and rested with that degree of wonder and admiration which might be well called forth by the union of the most perfect graces of person, with the appearance of the greatest vigour and activity, and with a dignity and beauty of expression which breathed not only from the countenance, but from the whole person, and shone out in every movement, as well as in every look.

The gates of the city were at this time open, and though a certain number of guards were hanging about the buildings on either hand, yet no questions were asked of any one who came in or went out of the city. The moment, however, that the party we have mentioned appeared, and he who was at its head paused for a moment on the inside of the gate and gazed round, as if looking for some one that he expected to see there, one of the bystanders whispered eagerly to the other, "It is the Duke! It is the Duke of Guise!"

All hats were off in a moment; all voices cried, "The Duke! The Duke!" A loud acclamation ran round the gate, and the people from the small houses in the neighbourhood poured forth at the sound, rending the air with their acclamations, and pressing forward round his horse with such eagerness that it was scarcely possible for him to pass along his way. Some kissed his hand, some threw themselves upon their knees before him, some satisfied themselves by merely touching his cloak, as if it had saintly virtue in it, and still the cry ran on of "The Duke of Guise! The Duke of Guise! Long live the Duke of Guise!" while every door-way and alley and court-yard poured forth

its multitudes, till the people seemed literally to crush each other in the streets, and all Paris echoed with the thundering acclamations.

After that momentary pause at the gates, the Duke of Guise rode on, uncovering his splendid head, and bowing lowly to the people as he went. His face had been flushed by exercise when he arrived, but now the deep excitement of such a reception had taken the colour from his cheek; he was somewhat pale, and his lip quivered with intense feeling. But there was a fire in his eye which seemed to speak that his heart was conscious of great purposes, and ready to fulfil its high emprise; and there was a degree of stern determination on that lordly brow, which spoke also the knowledge but the contempt of danger, and the resolution of meeting peril and overcoming resistance.

Thus passing on amidst the people, and bowing as he went to their repeated cheers, the Duke of Guise reached the convent of the Black Penitents, where for the time the Queen-mother had taken up her abode. The gates of the outer court into which men were suffered to enter were thrown open to admit him; and signifying to such of the crowd as were nearest to the gate that they had better not follow him into the court, the Duke of Guise rode in with his attendants, and the gates were again closed. The servants and the gentlemen who accompanied him remained beside their horses in the court, while he alone entered the parlour of the convent to speak with the Queen-mother.

She did not detain him an instant, but came in with a countenance on which much alarm was painted, either by nature or by art. The Duke at once advanced to meet her, and bending low his towering head, he kissed the hand which she held out to him.

"Alas! my Lord of Guise," she said, "I must not so far falsify the truth as to say that I am glad to see you. Glad, most glad should I have been to see you, any where but here. But, alas! I fear you have come at great peril to yourself, good cousin! You know not how angry the minds of men are; you know not how much hostility reigns against you in the breasts of many of the highest of the land; you have not bethought you, that on every step to the throne there stands an enemy----"

"Who shall fall before me, madam," replied the Duke of Guise.

"Till you have reached the throne itself, fair cousin?" said the Queen-mother.

"No, madam, no," answered the Duke of Guise eagerly. "I thought your Majesty had known me better. I have always believed that you were one of those who felt and understood that I never dreamt of wronging my master and my king, or of snatching, as you now hinted, the crown from its lawful possessor."

"I *have* felt it, and I *have* understood it, cousin of Guise," replied Catharine de Medici. "But, alas! my Lord, I know how ambition grows upon the heart. It begins with an acorn, Guise, but it ends with an oak. Those that watch it, the very soil that bears it, perceive not its increase; and yet it soon overshadows all things, and root it out who can!"

"Madam," answered the Duke of Guise, boldly, "to follow the figure that you have used, the axe soon reduces the oak; and may the axe be used on me, and ease me of earth's ambition for ever, if any such designs as have been attributed to me exist within my bosom! You see, madam, I meet you boldly, look to ultimate consequences of ambitious designs, and fear not the result. It is such accusations that I come to repel, and it is those who have propagated them, and instilled them both into the mind of his Majesty, and, as it would appear, your own, that I come to punish. Trusting that, humble though I be, your Majesty was the best friend I had at the court of France, I have ridden straight hither, without even stopping at my own abode, to beseech you to accompany me to the presence of the King."

"I do believe, cousin of Guise, that I am your best friend at the court of France," replied the Princess. "In fact, I may say, I know that none there loves you but myself. Nor must you think that I accuse you of actual ambition, or believe the rumours that have been circulated against you. I merely wish to warn you of the growth of such things in your own bosom."

"Dear madam," replied the Duke, "had I been ambitious, what might I not have become? Here am I simply the Duke of Guise; a poor officer, commanding part of the King's troops, and contributing no small part of my own to swell his forces; with scarcely a place, a post, a government, an emolument, or a revenue, except what I derive from my own estates. Am I the most ambitious man in France? Am I so ambitious as he who adds, to the government of Metz, the government of Normandy, and piles upon that Touraine, Anjou, Saintonge, the Angoumois, seizes upon the office of High-admiral, creates himself Colonel-general of the Infantry? This, lady, is the ambitious man; but of him you seem to entertain no fear."

"There are two ambitions, my Lord Duke," replied the Queen: "the ambition which grasps at power, and the ambition which snatches at wealth: the moment that ambition mingles itself with avarice, the grovelling passion, chained in its own sordid bonds, is no longer to be feared. It is where the object is power; where there is a mind to conceive the means, and a heart to dare all the risks, that there is indeed occasion for apprehension and for precaution. Still, my Lord, I believe you; still I believe that the hand of Guise will never be raised to pull down the bonnet of Valois. You may strip the minion Epernon of the golden plumes with which he has decked his

mid-air wings, for aught I care or think of; you may cast down the dark and plotting Villequier, and sweep the court of apes and parrots, fools and villains, and the whole tribe of natural and human beasts, without my saying one word to oppose you, or without my dreaming for a moment that you aim at higher things; you may even soar higher still, and like your great father become at once the guide and the defender of the state, and still I will not fear you. But Guise," she added in a softer tone, "I must and will still fear *for* you; and though I will go with you to the King if you continue to demand it, yet I tell you, and I warn you, that every step you take is perilous, and that I cannot be your safeguard nor your surety for a moment!"

"Madam, I must fulfil my fate," replied the Duke of Guise looking up. "I came here to justify myself; I came here to deliver and to support my friends; I came here to secure honour and safety to the Catholic Church; and did I know that the daggers of a hundred assassins would be in my bosom at the first step I took beyond those gates, I would go forth as resolutely as I came hither."

"Then I must send to announce your coming to the King," said the Queen. "Of course I cannot take you to the Louvre unannounced."

Thus saying she quitted the room for a moment, and the Duke remained behind with his arms crossed upon his bosom in deep thought. She returned in a moment, however, saying that she had sent one of her gentlemen upon the errand, and the next minute as the gates were opened for some one to go out, long and reiterated shouts of "A Guise! A Guise! Long live the Guise!" were heard echoing round the building. Catharine de Medici smiled and looked at the Duke. "How often have I heard," she said, "those same light Parisian tongues exclaim the name of different princes! I remember well, Guise, when first I came from my fair native land, how the glad multitude shouted on my way; how all the streets were strewed with flowers; and how, if I had believed the words I heard, I should have fancied that not a man in all the land but would have died to serve me; and yet, not long after, I have heard execrations murmured in the throats of the dull multitude while I passed by, and the name of Diana of Poitiers echoed through the streets. Then have I not heard the names of a Francis and a Henry shouted far and wide? and after Jarnac and Moncontour, the heavens were scarcely high enough to hold the sounds of his name who now sits upon the throne of France. To-day it is Guise they call upon!--Who shall it be to-morrow? And then another and another still shall come, the object of an hour's love changed into hatred in a moment."

"It is too true, madam," replied the Duke. "Popularity is the most fleeting, the most vacillating--if you will, the most contemptible--of all those means and opportunities which Heaven gives us to be made use of for great ends. But nevertheless, madam, we must so make use of them all; and as this same popularity is one of the briefest of the whole, so must we be the more ready, the more prompt, the more decided in taking advantage of the short hour of brightness. I may be wrong in thinking," he continued after the pause of a moment or two, "I may be wrong in thinking that my well-being and that of the state and church of this realm are intimately bound up together. It may be, and probably is, a delusion of human vanity. Nevertheless, such being my opinion, none can say that I am wrong in taking advantage of the moment of my popularity to do the best that I can both for the church and for the state. Such, I assure you, madam, is my object; and if I benefit myself at all in these transactions, it can be, and shall be, but collaterally; while in the mean time I incur perils which I know and yet fear not."

Thus went on the conversation between the Queen and the Duke of Guise for nearly half an hour, at the end of which time the gentleman who had been dispatched to the King returned, bearing his Majesty's reply, which was, that since his mother desired it, she might bring the Duke of Guise to his presence, and Catherine prepared immediately to set out. Her chair was brought round; and after speaking a few words with the superior of the convent, she placed herself in the vehicle, the Duke of Guise walking by her side. The gentlemen who had come with him gave their horses to the grooms, and followed on foot; and several servants and attendants ran on before to clear the way through the people.

The moment the gates were opened, a spectacle struck the eyes of the Queen and the Duke, such as no city in the world perhaps, except Paris, could produce. In the short period which had elapsed since the Duke's arrival, the news had spread from one end of the capital to the other, and the whole of its multitudes were poured out into the streets or lining the windows, or crowning the house-tops. With a rapidity scarcely to be conceived, scaffoldings had been raised in that short space of time in different parts of the streets, to enable the multitude to see the Duke better as he passed[6]; in many places, velvets and rich tapestries were hung out upon the fronts of the houses, as if some solemn procession of the church were taking place; the ladies of the higher classes at the windows, or on their scaffolds, were generally without the masks which they usually wore in the streets; and again, when the gates of the convent opened, and the Queen and the Duke issued forth, the air seemed actually rent with the acclamations of the people, and a long line of waving hats and handkerchiefs was seen all the way up the Rue St. Denis.

The same gratulations as before met the Duke on every side as he passed along; the populace seemed absolutely inclined to worship him, and many threw themselves upon their knees as he passed. He looked round upon the dense mass of people, upon the crowded houses, upon the waving hands; he heard from every tongue a welcome, at every step a gratulation, and it was impossible for the heart of man not to feel at that moment a pride and a confidence fit to bear him strongly on his perilous way.

All the way down the Rue St. Denis, and through every other street that he passed, the same scene presented itself, the same acclamations followed him, so that the shouts thundered in the ear of the King as he sat in the Louvre.

At length the Queen and those who accompanied her approached the palace; and in the open space before it, which was at that time railed off, was drawn up a long double line of guards, forming a lane through which it was necessary to pass to the gates. The well-known Crillon, celebrated for his determination and bravery, was at their head; and the Duke of Guise, obliged to pause in order to suffer the chair of the Queen-mother to pass on first, bowed to the commander, whom he knew and respected.

Crillon scarcely returned his salutation, but looked frowning along the double row of his soldiery. The people, close by the railings, watched every movement, and a murmur of something like apprehension for their favourite ran through them as they watched these signs. But not a moment's pause marked the slightest hesitation in the Duke of Guise. With his head raised and his eyes flashing, he drew forward the hilt of his unconquered sword ready for his hand, and holding the scabbard in his left, strode after the chair of the Queen till the gates of the Louvre closed upon him and his train.

A number of officers and gentlemen were waiting in the vestibule to receive the Queen-mother, who however gave her hand to the Duke of Guise to assist her from her chair. On him they gazed with eyes of wonder and of scrutiny, as if they would fain have discovered what feelings were in the heart of one so hated and dreaded by the King, at a moment when he stood with closed doors within a building filled with his enemies, and surrounded by soldiers ready to massacre him at a word. But the fire which the menacing look of Crillon had brought into the eyes of the Duke had now passed away, and all was calm dignity and easy though grave self-possession. The eye wandered not round the hall; the lip, though not compressed, was firm and motionless, except when he smiled in saluting some of those around whom he knew, or in speaking a few words to the Queen-mother, whose dress had become somewhat entangled with a mantle of sables which she had worn in the chair.

As soon as it was detached, one of the officers of the household said, bowing low, "His Majesty has commanded me, Madam, to conduct you and his Highness of Guise to the chamber of her Majesty the Queen, where he waits your coming." And he led the way up the stairs of the Louvre to the somewhat extraordinary audience chamber which the King had selected.

Henry, when the party entered, was sitting near the side of the bed, surrounded by several of his officers, one of whom, Alphonzo d'Ornano by name, whispered something over the King's shoulder with his eyes fixed upon the Duke of Guise.

The words, which were, "Do you hold him for your friend or your enemy?" were spoken in such a tone as almost to reach the Duke himself. The King did not reply, but looked up at the Duke with a frown that was quite sufficient.

"Speak but the word," said Ornano in a lower tone, "speak but the word, and his head shall be at your feet in a minute."

The King measured Ornano and the Duke of Guise with his eyes, then shook his head with somewhat of a scornful smile; and then, looking up to the Duke, who had by this time come near him, he said in a dull heavy tone, "What brings you here, my cousin?"

"My Lord," replied the Duke, "I have found it absolutely necessary to present myself before your Majesty, in order to repel numerous calumnies."

"Stay, cousin of Guise," said the King; and turning to Bellievre, who stood amongst the persons behind him, he demanded abruptly, "Did you not tell me that he would not come to Paris?"

"My Lord Duke," exclaimed Bellievre, not replying directly to the King's question, but addressing the Duke, "did not your Highness assure me that you would delay your journey till I returned?"

"Yes, Monsieur de Bellievre," replied the Duke. "But you did not return."

"But I wrote you two letters, your Highness," replied Bellievre, "reiterating his Majesty's commands for you not to come to Paris."

"Those letters," replied the Duke of Guise, with a bitter smile, "like some other letters which have been written to me upon important occasions, have, from some cause, failed to reach my hands. Nevertheless, Sire, believe me when I tell you, that my object in coming is solely to prove to your Majesty that I am not guilty either of the crimes or the designs which base and grasping men have laid to my charge. Believe me, that after my devotion to God and our holy religion, there is no one whom I am so anxious to serve zealously and devotedly as your Majesty. This you will find ever, Sire, if you will but give me the opportunity of rendering you any service."

The King was about to reply, but the Queen-mother, who had advanced and stood by his side, touched his arm saying, "You have not yet spoken to me, my son." And the King turning towards

her, she added something in a low voice. The King replied in the same tone; and the Duke of Guise, passing through the midst of the frowning faces ranged around the royal seat, approached the Queen-consort, the mild and unhappy Louisa, and addressed a few words to her of reverence and respect which were gratifying to her ear. He then turned once more to the King, who seemed to have heard what Catharine de Medici had to say, and having given his reply, sat in moody silence. The Queen-mother stood by with some degree of apprehension in her countenance, as if feeling very doubtful still how the affair would terminate. The brows of the courtiers were gloomy and undecided, and the few followers of the Duke of Guise ranged at some distance from the spot to which he had now advanced, kept their eyes fixed either on him or on those surrounding the King, as if, at the least menacing movement, they were ready to start forward in defence of their leader.

The only one that was perfectly calm was Guise himself; but he, retreading his steps till he stood opposite the King, again addressed the Monarch saying, "I hope, Sire, that you will give me a full opportunity of justifying myself."

"Your conduct, cousin of Guise," replied the King, "must best justify you for the past; and I shall judge by the event, of your intentions for the future."

"Let it be so," replied the Duke, "and such being the case, I will humbly take my leave of your Majesty, wishing you, from my heart, health and happiness."

Thus saying he once more bowed low, and retired from the presence of the King, followed by the gentlemen who had accompanied him. Not an individual of the palace stirred a step to conduct him on his way, though his rank, his services, his genius, and his vast renown, rendered the piece of neglect they showed disgraceful to themselves rather than injurious to him. He was accompanied from the gates of the Louvre, however, and followed to the Hôtel de Guise, by an infinite number of people, who ceased not for one moment to make the streets ring with their acclamations.

Nor were these by any means composed entirely of the lowest classes of the people, the least respectable, or the least well-informed. On the contrary, it must, alas! be said, that the great majority of all that was good, upright, and noble in the city hailed his coming loudly as a security and a safeguard.

A number, an immense number, of the inferior nobility of the realm were mingled with the crowd that followed him, or joined the acclaim from the windows. The robes of the law were seen continually in the dense multitude, and almost all the courts had there numbers of their principal members; while the municipal officers of the city, with the exception of two or three, were there in a mass, accompanied by a large body of the most opulent and respectable merchants.

Thus followed, the Duke of Guise proceeded to his hotel on foot as he came, speaking from time to time with those who pressed near him with that peculiar grace which won all hearts, and smiling with the far-famed smile of his race, which was said never to fall upon any man without making him feel as if he stood in the sunshine.

Already collected on the steps of the Hôtel de Guise, at the news that he was returning from the Louvre, was a group of the brightest, the bravest, the most talented, and the most beautiful of the French nobility,--Madame de Montpensier, Mademoiselle de St. Beuve, the Chevalier d'Aumale, Brissac, and a thousand others. The servants and attendants of his household in gorgeous dresses kept back the crowd with courteous words and kindly gestures; and when he reached the steps that led to the high doorway of the porter's lodge, on the right of the porte cochère, he ascended a little way amongst his gratulating friends, and then turned and bowed repeatedly to the people, pointing out here and there some of the most popular of the citizens and magistrates, and whispering a word to the nearest attendant, who instantly made his way through the crowd to the spot where the personage designated stood, and in his master's name requested that he would come in and take some refreshment.

When this was over, he again bowed and retired; and while the multitude separated, he walked on into his lordly halls with a number of persons clinging round him, whom he had not seen for months--for months which to him had been full of activity, thought, care, and peril, and to them of anxiety for the head of their race.

As he passed along, however, to a chamber where the dinner which had been prepared for him had remained untouched for many an hour, his eye fell upon a boy dressed in the habit of one of his own pages; and taking suddenly a step forward, he called the boy apart into a window, demanding eagerly, "Well, have you found your master?"

"I have, your Highness," replied the boy, "and have found means to give him the letter?"

"What!" exclaimed the Duke, "outwitted Villequier, and Pisani, and all! The wit of a page against that of a politician for a thousand crowns!"

"I dressed myself as a girl, your Highness," replied the boy, "and got into the convent, and then through a gate into what is called the rector's court, where Doctor Botholph and the Curé live, and where men are admitted, and women not shut out when they like to go in; and I got talking to the old verger of the church by the side, and he called me a pretty little fool, and said

he dared to say I would soon be among the penitents within there; and with that I got him to tell me every thing, and the whole story of the young Count being brought there at night, and shut up in what are called the rector's apartments."

As he spoke, one or two of the higher class of those whom the Duke had selected from the crowd below, and who felt themselves privileged to present themselves in his private apartments, entered the hall, and instantly caught his eye.

"I cannot speak with you more at present, Ignati," he said, "nor, perhaps, during the whole day, for there is business of life and death before me; but come to me while I am rising to-morrow, and only tell me in the mean time where our poor Logères is, for I know not what convent you mean."

"He is in the rector's court," replied the boy, "close by the convent of the Black Penitents, in the Rue St. Denis."

"By my faith!" exclaimed the Duke in no slight surprise, "I have been there this very day myself, and there the Queen-mother has made her abode for the last ten days. She must be deceiving me; and yet, perhaps, the mighty matters that occupied her mind when I saw her might have made her forget all other things. However, Logères shall not be long so fettered. Come to me to-morrow, Ignati; come to me to-morrow, as I am rising; and in the mean time, if you can find some means of giving the Count intimation that he is not forgotten, it were all the better."

"I will try, my Lord," replied the boy. And the Duke hurried on to welcome his new guests, making them sit down at table with him, and covering them with every sort of honour and distinction.

CHAP. XIII.

In our dealings with each other there is nothing which we so much miscalculate as the ever varying value of time, and indeed it is but too natural to look upon it as it seems to us, and not as it seems to others. The slow idler on whose head it hangs heavy, holds the man of business by the button, and remorselessly robs him on the king's highway of a thing ten times more valuable than the purse that would hang him if he took it. The man of action and of business whose days seem but moments, forgets in his dealing with the long expecting applicant, and the weary petitioner, that to them each moment is far longer than his day.

The hours, not one minute of which were unfilled to the Duke of Guise, passed slowly over the head of Charles of Montsoreau, and it seemed as if the brief gleam of happiness which had come across his path had but tended to make the long solitary moments seem longer and more dreary; in fact, to give full and painful effect to solitude and want of liberty, and yet he would not have lost that gleam for all the world.

He thought of it, he dwelt upon it, he called to mind each and every particular; and, though it was crossed, as the memory of all such brief meetings are, with the recollection of a thousand things which he could have wished to have said, but which he had forgotten, and also by many a speculation of a painful kind concerning the visit of the Duke of Guise to the very place in which he was confined, without the slightest effort being made for his liberation, yet it was a consolation and a happiness and a joy to him--one of those blessings which have been stamped by the past with the irrevocable seal of enjoyment, which are our own, the unalienable jewels of our fate, held for ever in the treasury of memory.

Nothing occurred through the rest of the day to call his attention, or to rouse his feelings. He heard the distant murmur, and the shouts of the people from time to time; but the gates were now shut, and the sounds dull, and all passed on evenly till darkness shut up the world. In the mean time he knew--as if to make his state of imprisonment and inactivity more intolerable--that busy actions were taking place without, that his own fate was deciding by the hands of others, that his happiness and that of Marie de Clairvaut formed but a small matter in the great bulk of political affairs which were then being weighed between the two angry parties in the capital, and might be tossed into this scale or that, as accident, or convenience, or policy might direct.

Though he retired to rest as usual, he slept not, and ever and anon when a sort of half slumber fell upon his eyes he started up, thinking he heard some sound, a distant shout of the people, the tolling of a bell, or the roll of some far off drum. Nothing however occurred, and the night passed over as the day.

In the grey of the morning, however, just when the slow creaking of a gate, or the noise of footsteps here and there breaking the previous stillness, told that the world was beginning to awake, a few sweet notes suddenly met his ear like those of a musical instrument, and in a moment after he heard the same air which the boy Ignati had played with such exquisite skill just before he freed him from his Italian masters.

"A blessing be upon that boy," he cried, as he instantly recognised not only the sounds but the touch. "He has come to tell me that I am not forgotten."

Suddenly, however, before the air was half concluded, the music stopped, and voices were heard speaking, but not so loud that the words could be distinguished. It seemed to the young Count, and seemed truly, that some one had sent the boy away; but though he heard no more, those very sounds had given him hope and comfort.

Driven away by the old verger, who had now discovered the trick which had been put upon him the day before, the boy returned with all speed to the Hôtel de Guise, and, according to the Duke's order, presented himself in his chamber at the hour of his rising. But the Duke was already surrounded with people, all eager to speak with him on different affairs, and his brow was evidently dark and clouded by some news that he had just heard.

"Send round," he was saying as the boy entered, "Send round speedily to all the inns, and let those who are known for their fidelity be informed that the doors of this hotel will never be shut against any of those who have come to Paris for my service, or for that of the church, as long as there is a chamber vacant within. And you, my good Lords," he continued, turning to some of the gentlemen who surrounded him, "I must call upon your hospitality, also, to provide lodging for these poor friends of ours, whom this new and iniquitous proceeding of the court is likely to drive from Paris. But stay, Bussi," he continued, and his eye fell upon the page as he spoke; "you say you saw the Prévôt des Marchands but a minute ago in the Rue d'Anvoye seeking out the lodgers in the inns, and ordering them to quit Paris immediately. Hasten down after him quickly, and tell him from Henry of Guise that there is a very dangerous prisoner and a zealous servant of the church lodged in the Rue St. Denis; that he had better drive him forth also; and that, if he wants direction to the place where he sojourns, one of my pages shall lead him thither. You may add, moreover, that if he do not drive him forth, I will bring him forth before the world be a day older."

The Duke of Guise then took the pen from the ink which was standing before him, and, though not yet half-dressed, wrote hastily the few following words to the Queen-mother:--

"MADAM,

"I am informed, on authority which I cannot doubt, that my friend, the young Count de Logères, is at present in your hands, kept under restraint in the Rue St. Denis, after having been arrested in the execution of business with which I charged him, while bearing a passport from the King. I beseech you to set him immediately at liberty, and also at once to order that my niece and ward, Mademoiselle de Clairvaut, be brought to the Hôtel de Guise without an hour's delay. Let me protest to your Majesty that you have not a more faithful and devoted servant than

"HENRY OF GUISE."

"I will not send this by you, Ignati," said the Duke; "they would laugh at a boy. Here, Mestroit, bear this to the Queen-mother. Say I cast myself at her feet; and bring me back an answer without delay.--Why, how now, St. Paul!" he continued, turning to a gentleman who had just entered. "Your brow is as dark as a thunder-cloud. What has happened now? Shall we be obliged to make our hotel our fortress, and defend it to the last, like gallant men?"

"Not so, my Lord," replied the Count of St. Paul; "not near so bad as that: but still these are times that make men look thoughtful; and, depend upon it, the King, aided by his minions and the Politics[7], is seeking to inclose your Highness, as it were in a net."

"We will break through, St. Paul! We will break through!" replied the Duke with a smile. "But what are your tidings?"

"Why, that orders have been sent to the Swiss to come up from Corbeil, as well as those from Meulan and Château Thierry; also the companies of French guards from every quarter in the neighbourhood are called for, and I myself saw come in, by the Faubourg St. Germain, a body of two hundred horse, which, upon inquiry, I found to be a new levy from some place in the South, led by a young Marquis of Montsoreau, whose name I never heard of before."

"Whenever you hear it again, St. Paul," replied the Duke sternly, "couple with it the word 'Traitor!' and you will do him justice. But what force is it said they are bringing into Paris? What stay you for, Mestroit?" he continued, seeing that the gentleman to whom he had given the letter had not taken his departure. "What stay you for? I would have had you there now. Go with all

speed! There are horses enough saddled in the court. I would give a thousand crowns that letter should be in the Queen's hand before this youth's coming is known to her. It may save us much trouble hereafter. Fail not to bring me an answer quick. Now, St. Paul, how many men say you on your best judgment are they bringing into Paris?"

"Why, your Highness," replied the Count, "some say ten thousand; but, to judge more moderately from what I hear, the moment your Highness's arrival in Paris was known, orders were sent for the march of full seven thousand men."

"We must be very formidable creatures, Brissac," cried the Duke, "that my coming with seven of you should need seven thousand men to meet us. On my soul, they will make me think myself a giant. I always thought I was a tall man--some six foot three, I believe--but, by Heavens! I must be a Gargantua, indeed, to need seven thousand men to hold me. Seven thousand men!" he added thoughtfully: "he has not got them, St. Paul. There are not five thousand within fifty miles of Paris, unless Epernon and Villequier have contrived to raise more of such Montsoreaus against us. However, we must have eyes in all quarters. Send out parties to watch the coming of the troops and give us their numbers. Let some one speak to the inferior officers of the French guards, and remind them that the Duke of Guise and the Holy League are only striving for the maintenance of the true faith, and for the overthrow of those minions who have swallowed up all the honours and favours of the crown. It were well also, Brissac, that a good watch was kept upon the proceedings in the city. I can trust, methinks, to The Sixteen to do all that is necessary in their different quarters, and to make full reports of all that takes place; but still a military eye were as well here and there, from time to time, Brissac, and I will trust that to you."

The rest of the morning passed in the same incessant activity with which it had begun; tidings were constantly brought in from all parts of the town and the country round concerning every movement on the part of the court; and the hotel of the Duc de Guise was literally besieged by his followers and partisans. Train after train of noblemen and officers, of lawyers and citizens, followed each other during the whole day, each bringing him information, or claiming audience on some account. Nor were the clergy less numerous; for scarce a parish in the capital but sent forth, in the course of that day, its train of priests and monks to congratulate him on his arrival, or to beseech him to hold up the tottering church of France with a strong hand.

At the same time, the order which had been given by the King in the morning, for every stranger not domiciled in Paris to quit it within six hours, and the proceedings of the Prévôt des Marchands to execute that order had--by driving out of the inns and taverns the multitudes of the Duke's partisans who had followed him in scattered bodies into Paris--now filled the Hôtel de Guise with all those of the higher classes who were thus expelled. The houses of other members of the faction received the rest. But the stables of the hotel were all filled to the doors; the great court itself could scarcely be crossed, on account of the number of horses; and more than once the street became impassable from the multitude of carriages, chairs, horses, and attendants, who were waiting while their masters conferred with the Duke.

It was near mid-day when the gentleman who had been dispatched to Catharine de Medici again presented himself; and the Duke demanded, somewhat impatiently, what had detained him so long.

"It was the Queen-mother, your Highness," replied Mestroit. "More than an hour passed before I could obtain an audience; and when I was admitted to present your Highness's letter, I found Monsieur de Villequier with her."

"Did she show the letter to that son of Satan?" demanded the Duke.

"No, sir," replied the other; "on the contrary, she seemed not to wish that he should see it, for she kept it tight in her hand after she had read it, and told me to wait a moment, that she would give me an answer directly."

"I would sooner unriddle the enigma of the sphynx," said the Duke, "than I would say from what motive any one of that woman's acts proceed; and yet she has a great mind, and a heart not altogether so vicious as it seems. What happened then, Mestroit?"

"Why, my Lord, Villequier seemed anxious to know what the letter contained, and I saw his head a little raised, and his eyes turned quietly towards it while she was reading, as I have seen a cat regard a mouse-hole towards which she was stealing upon tiptoes; and he lingered long, and seem inclined to stay. The Queen, however, begged him not to forget the orders she had given, but to execute them instantly; and then he went away. When he was gone, the Queen again read your Highness's letter, and replied at first, 'The Duke asks what is not in my power. Tell my noble cousin of Guise that he has been misinformed; that I hold none of his friends in my power--' Then, after a moment, she bade me wait, and she would see what persuasion would do?"

"She must not think to deceive me!" replied the Duke of Guise. "But what more?"

"She went away," replied the gentleman, "and was absent for full two hours, leaving me there alone, with nothing to amuse me but the pages and serving women that came and looked at me from time to time as at a tiger in a cage. At length she came back, and bade me tell your Highness these exact words: 'My cousin has been misinformed. I have none of his people in my

hands, or in my power. The Count of Logères, however, shall be set free before eight and forty hours are over. He may be set free to-morrow; but by leaving him for a few hours more where he is, I trust to accomplish for the Duke that which he demands concerning his ward, although I have no power whatever in the matter."

"There is nothing upon earth," said the Duke thoughtfully, "so convenient as to have the reality without the name of power. We have the pleasure without the reproach! Catharine de Medici has not the power!--Who then has?--I may have the power also, it is true, to right myself and those who attach themselves to me; and in this instance I will use it. But still it were better to wait the time she states; for I know her fair Majesty well, and she never yields any thing without a delay, to make what she grants seem more important:--and yet, the day after to-morrow--the day after to-morrow--who shall say what may be, ere the day after to-morrow comes? This head may be lowly in the dust ere then."

"Or circled with the crown of France," said the Count de St. Paul.

"God forbid!" exclaimed the Duke earnestly. If I thought that it would ever produce a scheme to wrest the sceptre from the line that rightfully holds it, I would bear it to-morrow to the foot of the throne, myself, as my own accuser. No, no! bad kings may die or be deposed: but there is still some one on whose brow the crown descends by right. And let him have it.

"The Cardinal of Bourbon, your Highness," said an attendant entering, "has just arrived from Soissons. His Eminence is upon the stairs coming up."

A smile played over the lips of most of the persons present at such an announcement at that moment, for every one well knew that it was to the old Cardinal de Bourbon that the party of the League looked, as the successor to the crown on the death of Henry III., to the exclusion of the direct line of Navarre, held to be incapable of succeeding on account of religion. The Duke, however, advanced immediately with open arms to meet the Cardinal, and many hours were passed in long conferences between them and the principal officers and supporters of the League.

At the end of that time, however, towards seven o'clock, a message was brought into the room where they were in consultation, from Monsieur de Sainctyon, a well-known adherent of the League, begging earnestly to speak with the Duke upon matters of deep importance. On the Duke going out, he found the worthy Leaguer in a state of great excitement and agitation.

"My Lord," he said, as soon as Guise appeared in the room where he had been left alone, "I fear that they are busily labouring, at the palace, for the destruction of your Highness and of the Holy League."

"How so, Monsieur de Sainctyon?" demanded the Duke, who entertained doubts, it seems, of the Leaguer's sincerity, which were never wholly removed. "Some of my friends have just returned from the palace, who tell me that all is as still and quite as the inside of a vault."

"They told your Highness also, I hope," said the Leaguer, "that they had trebled the guard, both Swiss and French."

"Yes, I was informed of that," replied the Duke. "But that shows fear, not daring, Monsieur de Sainctyon."

"Perhaps so, my Lord," replied Sainctyon, who was one of the échevins, or sheriffs of the town; "but perhaps not. However, what I have now to tell, shows more daring than fear. We were summoned this afternoon at five o'clock to the Hôtel de Ville, where we found not only Pereuse, the Prévôt, and Le Comte, who is worse than a Politic, and half a Huguenot, but the Marquis d'O----"

"Who is worse," said the Duke of Guise, "than minion, or Politic, or Huguenot, or reiter, equally foul in his debaucheries and his peculations; equally impudent in his vices and his follies; fit son-in-law of Villequier; well-chosen master of the wardrobe to the King of France! Who was there besides, Monsieur de Sainctyon? Some expedient infamy was of course to be committed, otherwise d'O---- would not have been there."

"There were a number of captains and colonels of the different quarters," replied Sainctyon, well pleased to see that the Duke now felt the importance of his intelligence, "and the Prévôt and Le Comte began to speak what seemed to me at first simple nonsense, in a confused way, saying, that it was necessary to keep guard in a very different manner in Paris from that which we were accustomed to use, for that your coming had excited the minds of the people, and that there was hourly danger of a revolt, and that it would be better for all the captains to meet with their companies together in some particular place, in order to see to the matter. But I replied, that nothing could be more dangerous than that which was proposed, for that the companies of armed citizens would be much better as usual, each in its separate quarter, taking care of that quarter, rather than meeting altogether in one large body of armed men, which was likely to cause a tumult immediately. A number of the other colonels cried out the same thing; but then Monsieur d'O---- cut us all short, saying, 'Give me none of your reasons, gentlemen. What the Prévôt has stated to you is the will of the King, and he *must* be obeyed. The place of your meeting is the Cemetery of the Innocents, and there you are all expected to be with your companies at nine

o'clock this evening.' Now, my Lord, I have come to your Highness, by the authority of all the other colonels in whom we can trust, for counsel and direction in this business, assuring you that we have heard it is the intention of the Court to pick out from amongst us thus assembled six or seven of your most zealous friends and supporters, and execute them early to-morrow in the Place de Grève."

The Duke paused and thought for a moment ere he replied; but he then said, "I thank you most sincerely, Monsieur de Sainctyon, for the intelligence you have brought me. You are mistaken, however, with regard to what are the intentions of the Court, as you will see in one moment. The large body of men in arms which you will have with you when all assembled together, trebles the number of any force in Paris, so that the least attempt to do you wrong at that moment would be a signal for the overthrow of the monarchy. On the contrary, Monsieur de Sainctyon, I believe the thus calling you together in one place has solely for its object to remove you from the quarters where your presence would be useful in opposition to the iniquitous proceedings of your enemies. To arrest somebody--perhaps myself--is doubtless the object of these persons; and if you would follow my advice, the course you pursue would be this,--to meet as you have been ordered by the King, having first communicated all the facts to the persons under your command whom you can trust. Some one will come to bring you farther orders, depend upon it; find out what those orders are, and let them instantly be communicated to me; but on no account or consideration suffer yourselves to be kept together in one place. On the contrary, as soon as you have discovered as far as possible what the designs of your enemies are, lead your companies to their different quarters, or wherever you may think best to station them. If you want any farther assistance, send hither; and I will dispatch experienced officers to take counsel with you as to what is to be done. I hope your opinion coincides with mine, Monsieur de Sainctyon."

"Your words always carry conviction with them, my Lord," replied the sheriff; "and I will instantly proceed to obey you."

Thus saying he took his leave, and quitted the Duke, hastening with the rest of the officers of the city to arm himself cap-a-pie, and present himself with the burgher guard in the Cemetery of the Innocents at the appointed hour. When that hour arrived, every thing through the rest of the city was dark and silent, and but little light shone from the dim lanterns round the Cemetery upon the dark masses of armed men that now surrounded it. The officers commanding them looked in each other's faces, as if expecting that some one amongst them had orders in regard to what they were farther to do, but for several minutes no one announced himself as empowered to direct them, and they had even proposed to separate, when the sheriff Le Comte arrived on horseback at great haste from the side of the Louvre. Having called the colonels of the quarters together he said, "The King, having been informed that this night an enterprise is to be undertaken against his authority by his enemies, trusts entirely to his citizens of Paris for the defence of the capital, and consequently commands you, in order to have a strong point of resistance, to occupy this Cemetery, of which I have here the keys, till to-morrow morning. All the gates will be shut except one wicket, and in a very short time the Marquis de Beauvais Nangis, an experienced officer, will be sent down by the King to command you."[8]

A murmur ran through the officers and through the men, who, as Le Comte spoke loud, heard every word that passed; but an old captain of one of the quarters burst forth, a moment after, exclaiming, "What, shut myself up there, as if in a prison? They must think me mad! Not I, indeed, for any of them! I have nothing to do with you, Monsieur le Comte, nor with any of you, except with the inhabitants of my own quarter, and there I shall go directly. Those may go and shut themselves up with you that like. Come, my men; march! Who gave Beauvais Nangis a right to command me, I should like to know? Not the citizens of Paris, I'm sure: so those may obey him that like him." And putting himself at the head of his men, he marched out, followed by almost all the other companies except one or two, who suffered themselves to be persuaded to enter into the Cemetery, where they were locked up by Le Compte, to await whatever fate might befall them.

In the mean time the other officers of the burgher guard held a consultation together, and determined, instead of proceeding immediately to their different quarters to occupy the principal points of the city, where they fancied that attempts might be made upon the life or liberty of the chiefs of the League. The avenues to the Hôtel de Guise were strongly guarded, the Rue St. Denis was patrolled by a large party, two companies occupied the Rue St. Honoré, and the utility of these precautions was strongly demonstrated ere they had been long taken.

Before midnight the sound of horses was heard by the two companies in the Rue St. Honoré, and in a moment after appeared the Marquis d'O----, with as many horse arquebusiers as could be spared from the palace. The citizens stood to their arms and barred the way, and d'O----, never very famous for his courage, demanded, in evident trepidation and surprise, what they did there, when they had been ordered to be in the Cemetery of the Innocents?

"We came here to do our duty to our fellow-citizens," replied the same old captain who had spoken before, "and to guard our houses and our property, for which purpose we are enrolled."

"Well, well, you are right," replied the Marquis, evidently confounded and undecided; and turning his horse's rein he rode back by the same way he came, showing evidently that he had been bound upon some attempt which had been frustrated.

About the same time the party in the Rue St. Denis had been drawn towards the further end by the noise of horses and the light of torches; and on advancing they found a number of men on horseback, and a vacant carriage, with two lights before it, just halting at the Convent of the Black Penitents. The good citizens, however, were in an active and interfering mood, and they determined to inquire into an occurrence which otherwise would have passed over without the slightest notice. The horsemen, however, did not wait for many questions; but, evidently as much surprised and embarrassed as the Marquis d'O----, turned their horses' heads, and made the best of their way out of the street.

FOOTNOTES

Footnote 1: All these charges were but too true.

Footnote 2: One or two of these houses with barriers were still existing in Paris not many years ago.

Footnote 3: The word Monseigneur, my Lord, which in the days of Louis XIV. had become restricted to a very few high dignitaries, or only given to other noblemen by their own servants and tenantry, was in the reign of Henry III. commonly used to all high noblemen, and we find constantly titles addressed *A mon tres illustre et tres honoré Seigneur le Marquis*; or, *A l'illustre Seigneur, Monseigneur le Comte de* ----.

Footnote 4: Such was undoubtedly the expressed opinion of the Duke of Guise.

Footnote 5: The progress of the Duke of Guise and the Queen-mother, from the convent of the Penitents to the Louvre, was in triumph. "Il y en avoit," says Auvigny, "qui se mettoient à genoux devant lui, d'autres lui baisoient les mains; quelques uns se trouvèrent trop heureux de pouvoir en passant toucher son habit," A farther account of this famous event is given a few pages farther on.

Footnote 6: This fact is recorded in every account of the proceedings of that day.

Footnote 7: That party was so called which affected to hold the balance between the Court and the League, without giving countenance to the Huguenots.

Footnote 8: This most absurd and impudent proposal would scarcely be credited, were it not to be found in the *Histoire très veritable, &c.*, written by Sainctyon himself, and published by Michel Jouin in the very year 1588.

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